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PhD Programs and contacts
The Newsletter and the performance of the PhD School UNISS

By Professor Antonello Cannas (Director of the PhD School UNISS)

With this first issue, the Newsletter of the UNISS PhD School is born. It is one of the actions that the School and the PhD Programs of the University of Sassari have performed to make our activities known and, in particular, those of our PhD students, thus promoting their skills and research. The Newsletter is addressed to all the components of our University and other universities, but also to the outside world, i.e. citizens, public bodies and the entire world of production and training.

We believe and hope that this initiative can make known what we do, why we do it, with what results, and what are our hopes and ambitions. We also hope to receive suggestions from all our readers, not only on the quality of the Newsletter, but, above all, on the activities of the School and of all its PhD Programs.

The Newsletter, like all other activities of our PhD School, is the result of a collective effort, in particular of Dr. Riccardo Zallu and Dr. Margherita Scanu, of all the PhD Programs, especially their committed and enthusiastic Coordinators, Prof. Michele Comenale Pinto, Prof. Stefano Enzo, Prof. Ignazio Floris, Prof. Vincenzo Pascucci, Prof. Leonardo Sechi, Prof. Fiorenzo Toso, Prof. Fiammetta Berlinguer, Prof. Dimitri Paolini, Prof. Maria Grazia Melis, and Prof. Margherita Maloi, and of the representatives of the PhD students, Dr. Arianna Dettori, Dr. Pedro Pablo Fiorini and Dr. Luigi Vaira. A great contribution, with their legacy of activities and experiences, was also made by those who have recently completed the mandates of Coordinator, namely Prof. Andrea Piana, Prof. Raimondo Zucca and Prof. Massimo Onofri, and former representatives of PhD students, Dr. Maria Cristina Idini and Dr. Cristiano Depalmas. In addition, many offices of our University, which we thank for their continuous and effective collaboration, have contributed to this work.

Below you will find a brief summary of the activities of the PhD School, which was founded in April 2018 and is therefore close to complete its first three years of life.

Structure of the PhD School

The PhD School of the University of Sassari was established with the aim of promoting, organizing and managing service and support activities related to the PhD Programs of the University. The School includes all the ten PhD Programs of the University (this year the PhD course in Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods has been added), whose faculty includes 264 Italian University professors and researchers, 14 researchers from external Italian research institutions and 54 foreign professors and researchers.

In total, there are 235 PhD students enrolled in the 34th, 35th and 36th cycles, of whom 56 (23% of the total) are foreigners and 60% are women. In addition, there are 36 PhD students of the 33rd cycle who have not yet obtained their degree, having requested the COVID pandemic extension, and will complete their studies by this summer, and another 19 who have just obtained it.

The PhD School is supported by the Higher Education Office (Anna Paola Vargiu, Head of the Office; Riccardo Zallu, Administrative Referent of the PhD School; Margherita Scanu, Secretariat and Communication of the School), as well as by the staff of several central and departmental offices of the University. The objectives of the PhD School are to offer to PhD students, PhDs and faculty a centralized administrative service; to organize common teaching and training activities, shared by all PhD Programs, and collaborate with the specific teaching and training activities of each PhD course; to encourage interaction between different disciplinary areas, cultural exchanges and the creation of an open, stimulating and creative study and work environment; to promote international exchanges and the entry of foreign students; to promote interactions and exchanges with the production system and to help the PhDs in the job market.

Applications and results of the selections for the 36th cycle

The assignments of the PhD positions for the 36th cycle are almost closed (the international selections of 3 Marie Curie fellowships will be completed in few days).

There were 83 PhD positions in the call, all with scholarship (71 in 2019). Of these, 41 were funded by University funds and 37 by external funds (research or external funds, agreements with institutions or companies). The places without scholarship were eliminated (there were 11 in 2019), as they penalized the indexes that determine funding from MUR.
The final allocations came to **88 places**, as after the call of last July we won six PON and FSC fellowships.

Applications received sharply increased from last year (from 260 to 461; +85%), as better explained in another article in this Newsletter. Certainly, the strong increase in applications allowed us to choose among more qualified candidates than in the past.

Among the winner candidates, the proportion of those with UNISS degrees (46.6%), non-UNISS Italian degrees (29%; 10 Italian regions) and foreign degrees (21%; 7 different countries) remained stable compared to last year, but with high differences among the PhD Programs. It should be noted that the increase in PhD students who have an access degree from universities other than ours (Italian and foreign) determines significant cultural benefits to the entire University and favors us in the indexes with which the MUR evaluates and finances the PhD Programs (postgraduate fund) and the universities (FFO).

### PhD Students with access degree gained in Italy

The proportion of those with UNISS degrees (46.6%), non-UNISS Italian degrees (29%; 10 Italian regions) and foreign degrees (21%; 7 different countries) remained stable compared to last year, but with high differences among the PhD Programs. It should be noted that the increase in PhD students who have an access degree from universities other than ours (Italian and foreign) determines significant cultural benefits to the entire University and favors us in the indexes with which the MUR evaluates and finances the PhD Programs (postgraduate fund) and the universities (FFO).

### PhD Students with foreign access degree

55 foreign PhD students, from 15 countries (23% of the total number of PhD students of UNISS; they were 18% in 2018) Of these, 50% utilizes foreign fellowships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>CYCLE</th>
<th>PHD PROGRAMS</th>
<th>TOTAL POSITIONS IN THE CALL</th>
<th>of which without fellowship</th>
<th>of which with fellowship</th>
<th>POSITIONS ACTUALLY ASSIGNED*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* some fellowships (PON, INPS, FSC) are normally awarded to us after the closing of the call and not all positions have participants or winners

### Teaching and training activities

As documented on the UNISS PhD School page [https://www.uniss.it/didattica/offerta-formativa/formazione-post-laurea/dottorati-diresearch](https://www.uniss.it/didattica/offerta-formativa/formazione-post-laurea/dottorati-diresearch), in recent years the educational activity delivered by the PhD School and Programs was very intense (in the academic year 2018-19 there were 28 interdisciplinary educational activities, organized by the School and over 200 activities organized by the PhD Programs), although in the academic year 2019-20 this number decreased due to pandemic-related restrictions.

This year we have started many teaching and training activities again and new activities as well. In particular, I would like to point out the activities in collaboration with the University Language Center (CLA), with language courses in English and Italian at different levels, as better described in another article of this Newsletter.

Particular emphasis has also been given to the development of computer, communication and coaching skills, in addition to those more specific to each research area.
Intermediate and advanced Excel courses (with VBA programming), System Dynamics courses and numerous Statistics Courses, taught by the various PhD Programs using specific statistical packages have been planned and, in part, have already been taught.

There will also be numerous meetings with experts from the production system (entrepreneurs, managers, PhDs employed in strategic roles in companies and public bodies) and the research system.

Normally, these activities are communicated to all PhD students via email (the rule is that every PhD student can attend any of the courses offered by the School) and are also recorded on the PhD web page. Many training activities have been and will be conducted in collaboration with the offices of the University, especially those of the Research, Internationalization, Technology Transfer and Third Mission Area, with the Prevention and Protection Service, with the Library System and with the Communication Office.

About 23% of the PhD positions at our University were activated together with private companies, with which the research is also conducted, as better described in another section of the Newsletter.

Networking and Alumni Relations

In order to increase the interactions with other national and international PhD schools and the production system and to disseminate the activities of our PhD students, the School has organized and participated in numerous events dedicated to PhD students.

- **PhD Scrolls and Abstracts Volume Presentation Ceremony for AA 2017-2018, Aula Magna Ateneo, February 2019**
- **PhD Scrolls and Abstracts Volume Presentation Ceremony for AA 2018-2019, Degrees in Piazza, June 2019**
- **Research Exchange forDoc, the first national recruiting event dedicated to PhDs and PhD candidates, Verona, 1-2 October 2018**
- Participation in the Day organized by the University of Turin entitled The potential of the PhD outside the Academy. Preparing for the postPhD path, career transition: advice and testimonies from different perspectives, Turin, 18 December 2018
- **Research Exchange forDoc, recruiting event dedicated to PhDs and PhD candidates, Verona, 1-2 October 2019**
- Participation in a **Day of presentation of the results of the first ANVUR survey on the PhD students and PhDs careers, Rome, 17 October 2018**
- Participation in a **Day of presentation of the results of the ANVUR survey on PhD students and PhDs careers, Rome, 3 March 2019**
- **Event of the UNISS PhD School "PhDs and private companies", Aula Magna Ateneo, 5 February 2020**
- Participation in the “Doctorate Lab” that the International Education Center (IEC - [http://iec.gov.ge/en/](http://iec.gov.ge/en/)) of Georgia organized, in agreement with the Italian Embassy in Georgia in Tbilisi from 20 to 24 January 2020, to introduce Georgian students to the PhD programs offered by 7 different Italian universities

**2019 UNISS School membership in the European University Association Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE).**

EUA-CDE events we attended:

- **2019 EUA-CDE Annual Meeting and National Day on the PhD, University of Brescia, June 2019**
- **2020 EUA-CDE Annual Meeting, University of Tbilisi, Georgia, January 2020**
- **2021 EUA-CDE Annual Online Meeting, January 2021**

The UNISS PhD School was selected, along with 14 other European universities, to participate in the 2019 EUA-CDE Thematic Peer Group “Career Development And Tracking In PhD Education”, which met 4 times (Geneva, March 2019; Brescia, June 2019; Warsaw, October 2019; Tbilisi, January 2020) and produced the document Tracking the careers of doctorate holders [https://eua-cde.org/downloads/publications/eua-cde%20tpg_web.pdf](https://eua-cde.org/downloads/publications/eua-cde%20tpg_web.pdf)

In order to establish a continuous relationship with PhDs and maintain their connection with the University, the School is organizing an Alumni service, by updating the email and phone contacts of the PhDs themselves, who have been receiving news on events and calls of interest to them. In 2020, the PhD School has signed up with Alma Laurea ([https://www.almalaurea.it/](https://www.almalaurea.it/)), to receive services related to satisfaction surveys of PhDs and their work positioning.
This February, the School joined the DocEnhance CAREER TRACKING SURVEY, organized by the European Science Foundation (https://www.esf.org/), which will assess, on behalf of several European universities, the job placement of their PhDs who received their degrees as of 2016.

Ministry of University and Research (MUR) Postgraduate funds for the financing of PhD scholarships

At the end of October 2020, the 2020 MUR Postgraduate funding, which we normally use to fund MUR PhD fellowships, was announced. The total funds funded this year by the MUR are the same as last year (they generally increased in the last 5 years). Our University did very well: our index, on which our funding depends, increased by 11.6% (according to the index variation, we were tenth out of 60 universities, of which 40 had index and funding reductions). However, due to the effect of the safeguard clauses (a maximum of 5% +/- difference from one year to the next in the total funding for each university, applied to avoid excessive fluctuations in funding between years), this year our funding has only increased by +1.2%. Obviously, there were years in which this clause benefited us, but without safeguard clauses our funds from 2015 to today would have increased by 73%, whereas those that MUR allocated to the national Postgraduate fund increased by 33.5%. In fact, because of the safeguard clause, our total funds have increased only by 29% in 6 years (we have done particularly well in years like this one, in which unfortunately the MUR has not increased overall resources).

PhD School indexes used for the determination of national fund for Universities (FFO) 2020

Another important result was achieved on the indexes that are used to for the determination of the University's FFO 2020 (published on 8 September 2020). The weight of the University on the so-called Responsible Autonomy funding section improved from 0.94 to 1.11. Of the 10 Athenaum indicators related to the Responsible Autonomy, the 2 indicators related to PhD programs (B.a and D.b, i.e. PhD students enrolled with a scholarship with respect to the Athenaum's faculty and PhDs with at least three months spent abroad during their studies) are those that have increased greatly. In addition, our indexes have also contributed to the improvement of the Research Quality Index from the FFO Premium Portion and from the FFO portion called Youth and International Mobility Fund. It is important to note that the FFO funds do not contribute to enrich the University's fund for PhD scholarships, which depends only on the Postgraduate fund previously mentioned. This means that our PhD Programs have contributed significantly to the overall funding of the University of Sassari.

Final considerations

Overall, in a very competitive context, at national and international level, the PhD School and the PhD Programs of UNISS have shown to be able to compete in the performance indexes, in the ability to attract candidates from the rest of Italy and from all over the world, and in the quality of educational activities offered to PhD students. Obviously, this is the result of the work of all components of the PhD School and Programs, first of all of their Coordinators, as well as of the present and past governance of the University and of many staff members distributed in the various central and peripheral offices of the University (in addition to the Higher Education Office, which manages directly and with great commitment the doctorates). All of them have contributed with their work and their ideas to our progress, for the benefit of our PhD students and the University as a whole.
Greetings to PhD students from the new Vice-Rector, Professor Andrea Piana

By Professor Andrea Piana (Vice-Rector, University of Sassari)

In my first greeting to our PhD students, in my capacity as Deputy Pro-Rector, already Coordinator of the PhD Course in Biomedical Sciences for more than two terms, I would like to present to you, together with my best wishes for a profitable and stimulating start or continuation of their training, some considerations that, beyond the institutional role I hold, I feel personally.

I would like to emphasise with satisfaction that, in this historic and crucial moment of pandemic, the didactic activity of the Doctorate Courses has not stopped, but rather has reinvented itself and, with numerous webinars, has continued to be widely attended, both by the internal component of the University and by the general public outside the university, confirming the widespread interest in the initiatives also through the broader sphere of public engagement. All of this demonstrates the excellent insight into the issues involved in the proposals submitted and the great professionalism in the management of the activities.

Likewise, despite the pandemic period, the absolutely positive response in quantitative and qualitative terms obtained with the high number of applications for admission to the Doctorate Courses at the University of Sassari by both our graduates and graduates from other Universities, including international ones, confirming the great attractiveness of the Doctorates of our University.

Moving away from the current perspective, however, I would like to emphasise, as I have also stated several times in other contexts, my strong belief in the strategic importance of the Research Doctorate, which represents a pivot for the development of the country, for its cultural, scientific and human growth.

This is not only from the most immediate and intuitive point of view of a very high level teaching tool, also aimed at the generational change of future university teachers, but also as a fundamental means of responding to the needs of the territory.

In fact, I am firmly convinced that a virtuous relationship must be established between the academic and industrial systems, aimed at training highly qualified figures who can meet the needs of companies and fully satisfy the expectations of the world of work, thus strengthening the competitiveness of the regional and national production system.

This is an ambitious objective, but one that can be achieved by means of the Doctoral School of our University, which, in addition to its institutional teaching activities in the various types of doctorate, provides cross-curricular training on innovative topics, thus becoming a national model for the transfer and exploitation of technologies and skills, in the most academic sense of the term.

It is precisely from this perspective that the following could be of particular interest:

- the idea of encouraging the activation of Industrial Doctorate Courses, through the allocation of award resources for specific training projects in collaboration with companies;

- the creation of a Register of Research Doctors to be proposed to interested companies and bodies, to facilitate their entry into the world of work.

However, a highly significant higher education such as the PhD can certainly not disregard a look always oriented to the European project, beyond the regional and national borders and in this perspective will encourage the international aspect of the PhD, encouraging the issuance of multiple and joint degrees, the provision of scholarships for foreign students, the obligation of a minimum period of residence abroad for all doctoral students, initiatives already undertaken by the PhD School.

Finally, I am proud to announce that our University will soon join the CRUI project for the creation of highly specialised and exclusive National Doctorates of Excellence on the themes of artificial intelligence and sustainable resources, with the possibility for the teaching staff to participate in both Colleges.
The Prorector for Higher Education, Professor Paola Pittaluga, speaks on the importance of the work of the PhD School

By Professor Paola Pittaluga (Prorector of Education and Higher Education, University of Sassari)

The aptitude for research and critical thinking is increasingly rare, weakened and inhibited by the influence that “liquid modernity”, continuous change, “scheduled and planned obsolescence” have on the current mode of learning, which tends to favour the ability to “learn to unlearn” rather than the ability to “learn to learn”.

This leads to the difficulty of relating different themes and aspects, produces a lack of autonomy and critical capacity, the inability to build a cumulative knowledge to be reused in other contexts and reconstruct the learning process, the constant rejection of rules.

This is where it becomes important to activate a critical path that allows to reuse your own cultural and experiential background in a completely different way, thus building new knowledge and new learning processes when the context of action changes.

In fact, knowledge is also produced through situated actions and in specific and concrete contexts, spatially, temporally and relationally, and learning is also influenced by the breadth of the environment in which this occurs, including even the most disparate and unthinkable places.

The PhD School was born with this spirit: to increase the breadth of learning environments in an interdisciplinary way, so as to encourage the relational and cooperative dimension of the construction of knowledge, to avoid the disarticulation of knowledge, its parcelling out into information that is no longer interrelated.

For the School, it is not enough to prepare doctoral students for research confined within disjointed and automated fields of knowledge, closed entropic systems; it is equally important to stimulate their cognitive openness, critical capacity and curiosity.

The XXXVI Cycle has started: analysis of the applications received and presentation of the new PhD students

By Riccardo Nicolò Zallu (Administrative manager of the PhD School UNISS)

The year 2020 will remain sadly etched in the memory of all of us. A year that started badly with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued in the worst possible way, with all the tragic consequences of the pandemic.

It was a year which, however, also reserved some flashes of light. These include the flattering results of the UNISS PhD School, concerning the very high number of participants in the competition for admission to the XXXVI cycle of the PhD Programs.

Only three years after its birth, in fact, the PhD School will already be able to put its record year on the notice board, in terms of number of applications received, the highest ever, for UNISS, since the reform of the Italian Doctorate Degrees in 2013.

In fact, the number of applications received, compared to the previous year, rose from 260 to 460, marking an 85% increase, with a strong increase both in the number of candidates with a UNISS entrance qualification (+ 57%) and, to an even greater extent, in the number of candidates with a non-UNISS Italian entrance qualification (+132%, from 17 different Italian regions) and foreign entrance qualifications (+72%, from 29 different countries).

Analysing the details of a result that was positive for all the Courses, we find dizzying numbers (if we look back to the past) with Courses that have doubled, compared to 2019, the number of applications (such as Life Sciences and Biotechnologies or
Chemical Sciences and Technologies) or even more than tripled, as in the case of the Course in Veterinary Sciences which, in just one year, went from the last place in the ranking (in terms of applications received) to the second place on the podium, just a breath away from the top step.

Moreover, the PhD Course in Veterinary Sciences, in addition to the social advertisements of the PhD School, developed and advertised with the socials an interesting live initiative (exclusively online) during which not only did it directly present the Course, its Department of reference and the various areas of research that the new cycle would embrace, but it also interacted directly with the participants of the event, with Prof. Berlinguer, (Course Coordinator) ready to answer the various questions of those interested.

A strategy which, judging by the number of participants to the event and by the application received, was certainly a winning one.

Also in terms of offer, 2020 was a record year, with 10 Doctoral Courses accredited by the MUR and activated (also in this case it is the highest number since the doctorate reform of the year 2013). This year, in fact, saw the appearance on the scene of the Doctoral Course in Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods, strongly supported by its Coordinator Prof. Dimitri Paolini and by the members of its Academic Board, all belonging to the UNISS Department of Excellence in Economic and Business Sciences.

Positive data came also from the new PhD students enrolled, who had a variegated composition and origin (Figures 1 to 3), confirming the trend already seen in the past years. Indeed, 53% of our new PhD students got an entrance degree from other Italian universities (30% of the total) and from foreign universities (24% of the total).

This evidences how the University of Sassari, located in a splendid Region but with well-known geographical and economic limits imposed by its insularity, maintains and, indeed, increasingly strengthens its desire to be open to the world, giving anyone, without preclusion, the opportunity to come and carry high-quality research in one of the most beautiful natural settings in the world.

Finally, a last data, concerning the pink quotas: the PhD School does not need to impose any rule to respect them. In fact, women represent 66.7% of new PhD students, bringing the percentage of women out of the total number of PhD students from 53% in 2019 to 60% this year (Figure 4), a percentage markedly higher than the national average of 51.7% (Source: ANVUR’s “Biennial Report on the State of the University System and Research 2018”).
The PhD School's Council has two new representatives of the PhD students: meet Arianna Dettori and Pedro P. Fiorini

By Margherita Scanu (Secretariat and communication of the PhD School UNISS)

We interviewed the new PhD student representatives on the PhD School Council, elected last autumn. They are Arianna Dettori, PhD student in Biomedical Sciences, representative of PhD students in the Scientific Area, and Pedro Pablo Fiorini, PhD student in Legal Sciences and representative of PhD students in the Humanities Area.

Arianna Dettori, PhD student in Biomedical Sciences, is the new representative of the PhD students of the Scientific Area on the Board of the University PhD School. Arianna is an open and curious person. She loves to study and dedicates herself to nurturing her curiosity through study, participation and willingness to listen.

Her university career began with a three-year degree in Nursing in 2016. “But I didn’t stop: in 2017 I decided to continue with the Master’s degree in Nursing and Obstetrics”, says Dr. Dettori. “I like studying, it’s a passion and it was a natural decision for me. During my thesis, which I did at the Institute of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, I became passionate about research, thanks also to Prof. Satgii, who teaches Medical Statistics. At that point, applying for a doctorate was automatic. I love doing research and teaching”.

Arianna Dettori is in the second year of her PhD in Biomedical Sciences, curriculum in Public Health, and this year she has been recognized among the deserving students of her course: a confirmation of how much her passionate study, “at the maximum of my possibilities”, has paid off. “The environment is competitive and always giving your best is necessary to keep up”, she explains. “Here, every day you do something different, you meet and clash with things that are not in your field and everyone follows everything. Therefore, being open is necessary”. Difficulties can be transformed into opportunities for growth, and that is what Arianna Dettori is doing: “The environment is very stimulating, every day you see many different things, you meet different minds and this variety offers tools to improve. For me, every day is almost a launch into the void: research is like this, you have to try to take the best from what you see, from who you meet every day. And if something seems insurmountable, I still put myself on the line. I try and, even if it’s scary, I don’t back out!”

Dr. Dettori’s research project focuses on the potential of a vaginal self-releasing device to increase patient compliance in screening for Papilloma Virus. “Currently, patients are expected to have a pap smear test every 3 years to increase their chances of finding any early-stage lesions and making an early diagnosis, but there are several reasons why many do not adhere to screening”, explains Dettori. “This device, which consists of a small swab, is easy to be used by the patient and should significantly increase patient’s response. Among the causes that keep women away from screening are lack of time, lack of knowledge, miscommunication or non-receipt of the letter with the appointment, religious reasons or discomfort from past experiences. With this device, they will be able to take a sample of vaginal cells by themselves and send it to get the results. “For now, all studies are in favour of this new instrument, which is proving to be comparable to the traditional method of cytological screening”, says Arianna Dettori. This simple and cost-effective method, coupled with the right health education to bring women closer to the problems arising from HPV, would be very important to increase early diagnosis.

Alongside her passion for study and research, Arianna Dettori has a deep and lively interest in the dynamics of the university world and the student community. “I applied as a representative of PhD students because, in my opinion, it is a great way to get closer to the PhD School and its internal dynamics”, says Dettori. “I would like to keep myself informed at all times. Unfortunately, I haven’t met many fellow PhD students yet, but this role will certainly help me to make more contacts. Another reason for making this choice is that I love to get involved in new challenges and to test myself. Therefore, this new responsibility is a commitment and an honor for me.”
Arianna Dettori was also student representative during the Master's degree course: "I realised how important the role of the representative can be by maintaining a good liaison between the university and the students. I understood that students often feel isolated due to lack of information. It is very important for me that the student feels at the centre of his or her own path. That's why, as a doctoral student representative, I want to be also a sort of 'front office' for others, in order to better coordinate us. The reason is that everyone must always be informed and aware of the dynamics and activities of the university. I would like to be the one to count on and to act as an intermediary, also when there are problems. I take this new experience as an opportunity to grow, to do something and to understand. I would like everyone to be aware of the opportunities we have", she explains.

"I hope to be up to this task", concludes Arianna Dettori. "I would like to be able to help solve problems, at least I will try to do it. At the PhD School I found so many people who are helpful, kind, ready, caring and working well. It is a fertile ground to grow, to do, to make oneself available".

**Pedro Pablo Fiorini.** PhD student in Legal Sciences, is the new representative of the PhD students in the Humanistic Area on the Board of the University PhD School.

He graduated in Law in Sassari in 2019 and immediately decided to participate in the selection for the PhD in Legal Sciences: "I made this decision while doing research and working on my thesis", says Pedro Pablo Fiorini. "I felt very comfortable among the books. The experience was really positive, and I realized that I wanted it to become my path".

The subject of his thesis concerned Roman Law, in particular the protection of public property. As soon as he finished work on his thesis, that same year he applied for his doctorate, proposing a research project on the protection of the submerged cultural heritage: "It concerns all those archaeological, cultural and historical assets that are found, for example, on the seabed and whose protection and enhancement must be ensured through appropriate legal instruments", explains Fiorini. However, things did not turn out as he expected: the PhD competition went well, he turned out to be "suitable" but he did not manage to get the grant.

Despite that, it seems that opportunities come to those who know how to take advantage of them: Fiorini's score enabled him to win a PON grant (a grant for innovative projects set up with ministerial resources, which is awarded to a research project presented by the University). The research project he is working on concerns the contracts for yachting and marinas: "The project was different from the one I presented, but it was very interesting and I was very happy to accept it", says Dr Fiorini.

"The project aims at identifying the problems related to the operation of contracts in the pleasure boating sector, and then trying to provide legal solutions able to meet the market needs. It is an innovative and interesting research, which, through the opportunities offered by the Doctorate, could allow me to interact directly with companies operating in the sector. In fact, the project also includes traveling: six months of field research activities in the marina of Porto Rotondo to verify the effectiveness of the contracts between pleasure boating professionals, and a trip to Bilbao in order to gather the necessary material to study the current discipline in Spain and compare it with the Italian one. "The aim is to work side by side with professionals in the sector and see how things work in practice. This is planned for next year and I hope it will be possible to do so. As far as going abroad is concerned, everything is still to be decided. Unfortunately the health emergency is changing all plans," says Pedro Pablo Fiorini.

Pedro Pablo Fiorini’s passion for his research is also reflected in his commitment to his PhD colleagues. He decided to stand as candidate in the representative elections once he was immersed in the new reality of the PhD: "The PhD is a world apart, you take a highly individual and specialist path", explains Fiorini, "when you attend university as undergraduate all the colleagues on the degree course follow almost the same path and study programs, and there are many common spaces and opportunities to meet and interact with others. Differently, doctoral students follow a completely personal path and the only opportunity for collaboration is that offered by some teaching activities, currently carried out online. Unfortunately, one does not feel part of a community as during the university undergraduate course".
What made Pedro Pablo Fiorini decide to represent the doctoral students was his will to try to create a community, to act as a collector and give voice to the figure of the PhD student: “I feel that outside of our very narrow circle, there is a certain lack of interest in the doctoral students. In fact, we are ambivalent figures, our role in the university is not well understood externally, we are perceived as students, as researchers in training and, at the same time, as workers”, says Fiorini, “I think it is necessary to make ourselves heard, and my role will be precisely this: to convey instances that often do not reach those who have to make decisions, to listen to the critical issues we have, even with all our differences”.

One aspect that he would like to do something about concerns the common spaces for PhD students, which are very few, sometimes uncomfortable and, therefore, not used a lot. Aware of how important it is to meet and interact with each other in order to grow, Pedro Pablo Fiorini emphasizes the need to solve this problem: “In order to enhance the PhD training, it is not enough to do one’s own work, and above all it is not enough to do it alone. The objective of the doctorate is not only to write a thesis: what differentiates this path from others is that you want and must do something special, you should go beyond purely academic activity to have something else to say in the world of work. Without common spaces in which to work, it is difficult to feel part of something bigger, something worth more than simply acquiring CFRs”.

In this difficult moment in history of mankind, combining training needs with health protection needs is complicated, which is why alternative solutions must be found, also using technology: “The idea of the PhD School Newsletter is appreciable, it will help everyone, including PhD students from different areas, to know what others do and how they work, and to know what is done in the other courses and all other opportunities offered by the School”, concludes

The Academic Senate has a new doctoral student representative: M.D. Luigi Vaira, PhD student in Neuroscience

By Margherita Scanu (Secretariat and Communication of the PhD School UNISS)

In November, voting took place for the first time in remote online mode for the election of the representatives of students, postgraduates and PhD students in the various academic bodies of the University of Sassari for the two-year period 2020/2022. Following the voting, Dr. Luigi Vaira, a first-year PhD student in Neuroscience, was elected as the PhD students’ representative in the Academic Senate.

Luigi Vaira, from Sassari, started his studies in Medicine in Sassari in 2005 and graduated in 2011. He decided to specialize in maxillofacial surgery at the University of Naples Federico II: “I was lucky enough to do large part of my specialization here in Sassari, working in the ward”, says Dr. Vaira, “The fact that I was the only resident at that time was an occasion to do a lot. I would like to emphasize that I was trained with great generosity by my colleagues in the department, with whom I was in constant contact during the years of my specialization while I was doing my residency.

After completing his specialisation, Vaira engaged first in external consultancies, then he obtained a fellowship until being hired at the AOU in 2018. Finally, since last November, he has been doing his PhD in Biomedical Sciences, in the Neuroscience curriculum.

“The decision to do the doctorate was not planned. It came as the natural continuation of a research pathway that lasted two years during my internship before specializing”, explains Luigi Vaira.

It all started from a common need, for which Dr Vaira studied a solution which was initially used to make his work more organized and which he then wanted to share with the scientific community.

The reasoning starts from what always happens when you have to face a surgical intervention: you have to choose among several surgical techniques to intervene to solve a problem, and it is necessary to find objective evaluation systems of the techniques, based on the results that each one allows us to obtain, and to order them so that they are immediately available for consultation.
For example: in order to intervene in the reconstruction of the tongue, it is necessary to identify systems to assess the recovery of sensitivity, mobility, phonation, and swallowing. Therefore, objective data on each of these expected results should be collected and put together in a protocol, in order to put them in order and make them an objective means of evaluating the technique according to the success of the patient’s recovery.

“There is a high demand for such a large amount of data, because when you choose a technique, you do it based on data that supports it and that is usually scattered. After collecting the data, I decided that I could publish it because it could be useful to colleagues. Therefore, I sorted them out, organized them and published them at the end of my specialization”, says Vaira. “I was practically forced to publish, because the specialization school in Naples imposed an obligation to publish. I realized how important it was, for one's own professional growth and for the structure in which one works, to continue to study and publish regularly. When I returned to Sassari, I found a serene working environment, also thanks to my department head and my colleagues allies, who motivates me and give me the right satisfaction when I achieve results. It is a great fortune to work in such an environment. Publishing also benefits the department, and I have been able to publish about 10 articles a year”.

Dr. Vaira is currently working on olfactory and taste disorders in Covid-positive patients: the team from Sassari published the world's second report linking these frequent symptoms to coronavirus infection in recent months. The first published short communication quickly became the most cited article in the world. The first study in the world to make an objective assessment of covid patients is being carried out in Sassari: 30 articles were published on the subject in a year.

“We are now writing a work about the therapy, in collaboration with other European research centers, and we are studying the long-term and permanent complications on the sense of smell caused by covid infection”, Dr Vaira announces. “Doctoral work has many advantages because it opens the door to many collaborations, in my case in the field of neuroscience: we are studying sensitivity recovery through an objective evaluation system, with instrumental tests, that does not require a response from the patient. The PhD offers enormous opportunities for growth, because when you're doing research you're not alone, you come into contact with people who have always been doing research and this allows you to grow exponentially. This is helping me to put my research methods in order and to optimize them: in just a few months I have realized that PhD students have the possibility to speed up their work in different ways. The exchange with other PhD students and with researchers, not necessarily in your field, offers help, ideas and possibilities that you might not have otherwise”.

His experience as a scholar and researcher is now also at the service of other doctoral students, due to his new role as representative in the Academic Senate: “In the past I was a student representative in the CDA and I believe that this experience will be useful for doing an effective job when presenting instances. Being familiar with the environment in which one must operate is extremely useful for effectively drawing attention to the problems of students and doctoral students and obtaining concrete answers. This is why I made myself available to my colleagues in this new role”, explains Vaira. “I already have several ideas to work on in the medium and long term: I think that the main working place for doctorates should be in the university. Therefore, the university must look into ways of keeping the people it has invested in during the three years of the doctorate here. In my opinion, it is almost a defeat to lose researchers by not giving them the opportunity to continue their valuable work here. What can be done? We need to centralize activities, by creating a source of access to other research funds, with a strong office at the service of the researchers that works to resolve issues related to bureaucracy, to find funding, to address and resolve problems with technical committees, to ensure access to databases for trials and so on. In short, trying to eliminate everything that can take time and attention from research work. The new rector has an exciting and ambitious research project, and we must be ready when the funds arrive, in order to recruit and keep talent within the university. The ideal would be to identify the most promising doctoral students, or rather, to identify the brightest minds early on at university, to give value to research, and to the investment made in researchers,” continues Luigi Vaira. “In this context, it is also important to make students and doctoral candidates understand that publication is not an impossible objective, but rather that it
is feasible and useful for building a career. In the short term, we should identify critical issues of researchers and start to solve them one by one. I hope to be able to do this in my role as representative”.

Dr. Vaira is available to act as a catalyst to propose changes, to help doctoral students build the criteria on the basis of which their doctoral research thesis is assessed and accepted. He invites colleagues to contact him by e-mail luigi.vaira@gmail.com or by phone 3401846168.

The impact of Covid-19 epidemic in Sardinia

By Professors Giovanni Sotgiu and Andrea Piana (Department of Medical, Surgical and Experimental Sciences and PhD course in Biomedical Sciences, University of Sassari)

The Covid-19 epidemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 has so far presented a different temporal among regions. In particular, the region of Sardinia has reported a significant increase in positive cases since March 2020, with an upward trend in the first part of April 2020, followed by a reduction following the application of the EU and individual measures recommended by the Italian Government. The geographical location in southern Italy and the fact that it is an island have played an epidemiologically relevant role in limiting the circulation of the virus, reducing the number of positive individuals coming from the Italian areas affected earlier and with a higher incidence of the virus. This containment was reinforced by the almost total closure of airports, which are normally active throughout the year but more limited in autumn and winter. Among provinces, only the province of Sassari showed a very high incidence of the virus because of a nosocomial cluster and the viral spread in elderly care homes in Sassari, the capital of the province.

The regional decrease in the incidence of SARS-CoV-2 positive subjects in May, June and July was associated to some outbreaks rapidly controlled by the territorial services through contact tracing activities.

However, the increase in the flow of tourists and transport, starting from the end of July, has probably favoured the arrival of a large number of positive contagious people: autochthonous groups who had visited countries with a high incidence of infection (e.g. Spain, Greece, and Croatia) and non-residents coming from geographical areas with high viral circulation and who reached Sardinia for touristic and recreational reasons. This led to the community favoured by the lack of individual and community compliance with control and prevention measures (lack of or inappropriate use of the surgical mask, hand washing, social distance of at least one metre, ventilation of confined spaces).

During the end of August, an increase in cases of positivity was reported, associated, in the following month of September, with an increase in cases of illness and, therefore, of hospitalizations in ordinary, sub-intensive, and intensive care. During October and November there was an increase in the number of positive cases (up to more than 500 cases per day), a difficulty in the resilience of the regional health service both in hospitals and in the territory (contact tracing), and an increase in mortality rate.

The interventions of regional politicians to limit the arrival of infectious subjects by means of certification of virological negativity were suspended by the regional administrative judicial authority at the request of the Italian Government both in June and September. The reduced circulation of positive individuals coming from high incidence areas towards a low incidence context could represent an important public health intervention. However, the loss of the sense of risk awareness in the population also due to questionable political and technical statements at national level on the end of the epidemic evolution, the absence of community control measures, and the non-respect of individual rules favoured the circulation of the virus, with a substantial increase in community transmission when work and school activities resumed in mid-September, as happened in other Italian regions and countries (e.g. USA, Spain, France, and UK). In particular, the failure to comply with the rules for infection control in local transport and recreational and social gathering activities (e.g. bars and clubs) favoured the ubiquitous spread of the virus even in small urban centres.
The demographic aspects related to the infection and the disease in Sardinia are not different from those described in other regions. The most unfavourable prognostic evolution has been identified in subjects over 65 and/or with at least a comorbidity. The median age of positive cases has increased gradually: from around 30 years of age in July-August to around 50 years of age in November.

The substantial difference in the regional epidemic evolution before and after summer is represented by the concentration of positive cases in the province of Sassari at the beginning of the epidemic wave in March and by the ubiquitous spread of positive cases in the island from September to November 2020.

After an increase in positive cases and illness during the Christmas period, there has been a gradual decline in the number of positive individuals. However, the epidemiological scenario could be influenced by the spread of highly contagious viral variants, which are responsible for an increase in incidence in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Brazil.

Community vaccination strategies could significantly change the occurrence of infection and disease if implemented quickly, starting with immunisation of the most vulnerable individuals.

The fruitful cooperation between the PhD school and University Language Center

By Magda Sanna (Head of the University Language Centre)

Since the beginning of 2019 the Language Centre of the University of Sassari (CLAI) and the PhD School of the University of Sassari have signed an agreement for the planning of English and Italian language courses for foreigners for PhD students enrolled in the various courses of study of the university departments.

The PhD School has taken over all the financial burdens related to the organisation of the courses.

Since the first year, students have shown great interest and participation, attending the lessons assiduously and actively, according to the language level obtained in the entrance test.

The PhD students who reached 70% of attendance took a final exam, which included the 4 language skills necessary to know a modern language (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

The results were positive and satisfactory, both for English language courses and for Italian for foreigners. The recognition of training credits was also provided for.

Given the pandemic situation related to Covid-19, for the academic year 2020/21 the courses were organised full-time online.

In English language courses there was a considerable increase in enrolments, in Italian for foreigners, with the interruption of travel from/to abroad, unfortunately, there was a decrease.

It is hoped that the fruitful cooperation between the Language Centre and the PhD School will continue in the coming years with the implementation of new language courses.
Professor Dimitri Paolini presents the new international PhD program in Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods

By Professor Dimitri Paolini (EMQM Program Coordinator, University of Sassari)

The PhD in EMQM (Economics, Management, and Quantitative Methods) is a new course of the PhD School of the University of Sassari. This new path integrates competences in the fields of economics, management and quantitative methods and aims to provide scholars with a solid methodological and interdisciplinary background, able to master analytical and computational tools and to develop theoretical and/or empirical analysis, thus being able to make complex economic and business decisions.

The PhD in EMQM has characteristics that make it competitive in the national and international university system, as follows:

- it is international, being entirely in English. Moreover, the board of professors is mainly composed of researchers and professors of DiSea (Department of Economic and Business Sciences - Department of Excellence 2018-2023) of the University of Sassari, enriched by the presence of six qualified foreign professors (from France, United Kingdom, Romania, Spain and Switzerland).

- it is a double degree. A collaboration agreement has been signed with GREThA (Groupe de Recherche en Economie Théorique et Appliquée) of the University of Bordeaux for the award of the double degree. Doctoral students who meet certain requirements will then be awarded two titles at the end of their training, the Italian doctoral title (from the University of Sassari) and the French doctoral title (from the University of Bordeaux).

- it is close to businesses and the territory. The doctorate has an important collaboration with Banco di Sardegna and Sardaleasing (BPER Group), which have funded two doctoral grants. This agreement goes in the direction advocated by the PhD School of the University of Sassari, i.e. towards a collaboration between the PhD in EMQM, engaged in research, and the main economic and industrial players at the service of the territory.

In the first year of the PhD, students must attend three compulsory courses taught in English. The first in economics (Econometrics), the second in business (Financial management and qualitative research) and the third in quantitative methods (An introduction to causal inference).

At the first call, the PhD in EMQM received 46 applications from candidates from various national and international institutions: 11 with a Master's degree from the University of Sassari, 22 from other Italian universities and 13 from foreign universities. The winners were 7 candidates of which 2 with a Master's degree from the University of Sassari, 2 from the University of Turin, 1 from the Politechnic University of Marche, 1 from the Luiss University of Rome and one Brazilian student with a Master's degree from the University of Liverpool (UK).
Meet Professor Maria Grazia Melis, the new Coordinator of the PhD Program in Archaeology, History and Human Sciences

By Margherita Scanu (Secretariat and communication of the PhD School UNISS)

Let’s get to know Professor Maria Grazia Melis, the new Coordinator of the Doctorate Course in Archaeology, History and Human Sciences, by looking back at her university career as a researcher and lecturer.

Can you tell us how your university career began?

After graduating in Classical Literature from the University of Cagliari, I got a specialization in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Archaeology and a PhD in Archaeology (Prehistory) from the University of Rome “La Sapienza”. I am an associate professor in the scientific-disciplinary field of Prehistory and Protohistory (L-Ant/01), with qualification for Full Professor, at the Department of History, Human Sciences and Education.

My courses concern prehistoric and protohistoric archaeology, with particular reference to European and Mediterranean cultural phenomena. I teach Paleethnology to Bachelor’s students in Science of Cultural Heritage, and Prehistory and Technology of Ceramic Production to Master’s students in Archaeology, Prehistory and Protohistory at the School of Specialization in Archaeological Heritage.

I am a member of national and international scientific societies and of the Scientific Commission “Neolithic Civilizations of the Mediterranean and Europe” of the UISPP (Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques).

My main commitment in the management area of the University of Sassari concerned internationalization and international mobility programs, in particular Erasmus, Ulysses and other specific projects, such as the Commo project, supported by the UNIMED network. I worked in this area for 12 years, as delegate of the Department for international mobility and as member of the Erasmus Committee of the University.

Your work in the field is fascinating and full of experience, also on an international level. You devote a lot of attention to the dissemination of research results, also through a digital platform open to all, and you are interested in the application of modern technologies to the work of the archaeologist. Can you tell us in more detail how your work is carried out?

My research activity is focused on issues related to prehistory and protohistory in Europe and in the Mediterranean, with a specific interest in the archaeology of island environments and Sardinia. I have also applied innovative interdisciplinary methodologies in the field of raw material transformation and archaeological documentation.

A large part of the scientific, educational and public archaeology initiatives of the Laboratory of Prehistory and Experimental Archaeology [www.lapars.it], which I have founded and directed since 2010, is dedicated to the first area, within which I have stipulated collaboration agreements with Italian and foreign research institutes. In parallel with the research activity, a scientific publishing activity has been started, with the creation of the open access digital series “Quaderni del LaPArS”. This series, of which the first three issues are published and the fourth is soon be published, has hosted the research results of the group related to the Laboratory and the proceedings of an international workshop. In all my activities, I have paid particular attention, in collaboration with international members, to the scientific growth of PhD students, who had the opportunity to use the Laboratory space and equipment, to be involved in national and international research projects and to publish the results with international teams.

In the field of the application of new technologies for cultural heritage, in 2010 I had fun with some engineer friends by starting the experimentation of the use of drones in archaeology. The first encouraging results led me to engage in the field of technology
Transfer, by participating in the Start Cup Sardegna 2010, winning the second prize and founding a company s.r.l., which was a spin-off of the University of Sassari.

The profession of archaeologist has led me to carry out field surveys and archaeological excavations in various locations in Sardinia, peninsular Italy and abroad (Corsica, Tunisia, Cyprus). I currently conduct field research in a necropolis in domus de janas and in a natural cave in the Usini area, in collaboration with the Municipality and under a ministerial concession for archaeological excavations.

Beyond my scientific and didactic commitments, I believe that the transmission of knowledge is a duty of every researcher and this conviction has led me to cultivate an interest in dialogue with the general public, scientific divulgation and enhancement of cultural heritage, through public engagement initiatives: experimental archaeology laboratories, “LaPArS seminars” and periodic events, including “A day as an archaeologist”.

The position of coordinator of the PhD course in Archaeology, History and Human Sciences is another piece in the rich mosaic of your work as a scientist and lecturer. Can you tell us how you see this new commitment and what are your objectives?

I have enthusiastically undertaken the task of coordinating the PhD course, primarily because I believe that PhD students and PhDs are a vital resource for the future of scientific research. In addition, I think that the doctorate represents a strategic component for the achievement of the objectives of excellence that the university institution aims at, in order to maintain the role of liaison with the world of work and, as expressed in the Udine G7 University Manifesto (2017), the role of “key player and partner” in the promotion of social mobility, economic development and the strengthening of global citizenship dynamics.

However, because of the limited resources allocated to doctoral grants, the number of students who get access to our PhD is certainly lower than the number of deserving candidates. Such a difficulty can and must be overcome through a collegial commitment, to which we are all called, including professors, coordinators, and institutions, and also by encouraging dialogue with the territory. Besides this objective, in my three years of coordination I believe it would be important to foster the scientific dialogue between doctoral students and professors. The latter should regard not only members of our PhD and other PhD courses, but also the university community in a broader sense, including both our University and other universities. This type of exchange promotes valuable initiatives for collaboration and co-tutorship. I believe that it would be necessary to encourage the international training of our PhD students and, with the involvement of professors and tutors, to encourage cooperation with foreign research institutions through the stipulation of conventions, which promote the exchange of PhD students, scientific dialogue and methodological comparisons, with the medium- and long-term objective of creating the basis for the launch of an international...
The PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences has a new Coordinator, Professor Margherita Maioli

We would like to find out more about Professor Margherita Maioli, Associate Professor in Applied Biology at the Department of Biomedical Sciences and new Coordinator of the PhD course in Biomedical Sciences.

Let’s start from the beginning: How did your university career begin, and how did it evolve?

I graduated in Biological Sciences in Sassari, and, driven by my passion for molecular biology, I took up a scholarship at the Laboratory of Molecular Pathology, International Centre of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), in Padriciano, Trieste. After a period spent at the National Research Council (CNR), I started a PhD in biochemistry at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Sassari.

During my PhD I had the opportunity to start several international collaborations, in particular with the NIH in Baltimore, and with companies such as Ely Lilly (from which I received a research grant) and Sintofarm (which resulted in an international patent).

In 2005, I became researcher in the Department of Biomedical Sciences of the University of Sassari. My training also includes the School of Specialization in Food Science that I attended at the University of Cagliari.

Since 2012, I have been the scientific coordinator of the Department of Regenerative Medicine IRF (Istituto Rinaldi Fontani, in Florence: Clinical Institute for Research and Training in Neuro-Psycho-Physical Advanced Rehabilitation and Regenerative Medicine) and IRF-Shangai. Thanks to numerous international collaborations I am Visiting Professor at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Experimental and Clinical Traumatology in the AUVA research center, Austrian Cluster for Tissue Regeneration, in Vienna; at the Second Faculty of Medicine, Charles University, in Prague, and recently also at Fundação Universidade Federal do Amapá (UNIFAP, Federal University of Amapá Foundation) in Brazil.

Since 2016, I have held the position of Associate Professor in Applied Biology at the Department of Biomedical Sciences, here in Sassari. Since the same year, I have been Co-founder and Scientific Director of the “Center for developmental biology and reprogramming-CEDEBIOR”. The centre was created with the aim of fostering interaction between researchers with expertise in different disciplines, in order to enable studies in the field of cell biology, in particular through innovative approaches such as physical energies and epigenetics.

It has been a rich and stimulating journey, which has led you to meet and interact with researchers from all over the world. Can you explain in simple words what your research consists of?

My research activities, carried out in the context of national and international projects and numerous collaborations with private foundations and companies, focus on stem cell biology for regenerative medicine.

Stem cells, as I like to call them, are baby cells that have not yet decided what they will do when they grow up. They are powerful cells that can evolve to different fates, in the embryo they give rise to the different types of cells that make up tissues and organs, and in the adult individual they are responsible for replacing aged or damaged cellular elements, repairing damage. One of the challenges for those working in this field is to understand how to persuade these powerful cells to undertake their destiny, making themselves useful for the well-being of the body.

In this context, we have used various strategies, both chemical and physical, such as electromagnetic fields and radiofrequency waves, to commit the stem cells towards a particular type of cell, such as cardiac cells, bone cells or skin cells. For example, we have used substances of natural origin containing molecules that can implement the regenerative capability of stem cells. Such molecules can also be integrated into innovative systems that would ensure their controlled release (nanofibers) and on which we are working as part of the ‘Nanoprogress Cluster’ in several European projects, to develop products that can be used in the field of skin regeneration and ageing.
Your words reveal a great passion for this research, a job that is not only a great professional commitment but something that you are enthusiastic about. Outside the laboratory, your commitment to the PhD program: How do you intend to approach this new task?

I have been a member of the teaching board of the PhD course in Biomedical Sciences since 2011, and since the academic year 2014/2015, following accreditation by MIUR, I have been the Head of the Medical Genetics curriculum. Since then, I have tutored several PhD students whom I have had the pleasure to follow during their training. This has always included a period spent at some research center abroad, always as part of international research projects. I regularly carry out teaching activities within the framework of the PhD and have worked actively in recent years by concluding an agreement with the CNR and last year an agreement with the University of Prague that allowed us to transform the PhD course in Biomedical Sciences into an International PhD.

I am very happy with the task that my colleagues have entrusted me with and I think I will continue along the path already taken by Prof. Piana. In particular, I will try to conclude an agreement with the ATS and the AOU of Sassari, which will allow staff who are already structured to undertake PhD training.

However, I think it will be important to succeed in attracting PhD students from other Italian cities or other countries. In this context, last year the Medical Genetics curriculum reserved a place for a foreign or Italian graduate from abroad. We evaluated several candidates from various countries, and currently a girl from Brazil is doing her PhD at our University. In my opinion, this will allow the entire course to grow.

It will also be important to continue to collaborate with various research centers in Italy and abroad, in order to offer the possibility to our PhD students to implement their training, but also with Companies, which are important partners of industrial doctorates. In fact, from 2017 to 2020, I was in charge of an innovative Doctorate with an Industrial characterization, funded by ANVUR within the PON RI 2014/2020 call for proposals. Through this training course, PhD students have the opportunity to follow a complete path from the creation and development of a new product to its introduction on the market, so we are talking about practical applications, which will help them to face the world of work in the future.

Recruiting PhD students at the time of Covid: the communication strategy of the PhD Program in Veterinary Sciences

By Professor Antonio Varcasia

Communication through social media has become a characteristic of our times and those who have had the opportunity to work in this field have experienced its importance. Almost all millennials, people under 30, are at least on one social platform and receiving and disseminating information through social networks has become a habit. The idea that social networks are only “a place” where to share photos or videos with others is misleading, because the mechanism of social networks is much more organized and powerful than that. In fact, social networks heavily influence political, economic, social and even cultural communication.

Over the last few years, the web and social networks have reached everywhere, thus overcoming the power of the press and TV. This phenomenon was exacerbated during the Covid19 emergency and lockdown, further amplifying online communication, which also became the only link with students. Among social networks, Facebook and Instagram are among the most used by young graduates or professionals in the early years of their careers. In the light of the above, the PhD course in Veterinary Science decided to use a
strategy that would bring the world of research closer to young people, by searching for them online, with the aim of reaching a wide but selected and receptive audience.

For this reason, a live event was planned and took place on TEAMS and, above all, in LIVE streaming on Facebook, on the Department of Veterinary Medicine channel with the following program:

18.00 - Why would you do a PhD? - (5 min) - motivations and job opportunities - presentation of the PhD Course - Prof. Fiammetta Berlinguer, PhD Coordinator in Veterinary Science
18.05 - The PhD School of UNISS - (2 min) - Prof. Antonello Cannas, Director of the PhD School
18.08 - Submission of the call and practical advice for the application and competition - (5 min) - Prof. Fiammetta Berlinguer
18.15 - Presentation of the open positions and scholarships - (10 min in total - 1 minute per position) - Each tutor explained the objectives, how to pursue them, and possible collaborations
18.25 - PhD stories - Dr.ssa Valentina Secchi - (2 min) - PhD student
18.27 - PhD stories - Dr. Antonio Spezzigu - PhD in Veterinary Science, UNISS
18.30 - Question time - Live questions and answers - participants from Facebook and Teams (people could write messages in the live chat).

The event was advertised on Facebook and Instagram by targeting posts on Italian and foreign graduates with a Master’s degree and interest in medical, veterinary and biotechnological disciplines.

The advertising of the event
https://www.facebook.com/events/1601438850015782
Live recording of the event:
https://www.facebook.com/vetsassari/videos/325012791837572

For the videos related to the different PhD positions, the methodology was to ask the tutors to make an abstract including the rationale, the objectives and the methodologies of the project. Subsequently, the tutors received from the PhD coordinator the guidelines for making a video (maximum 1 min) with a smartphone in the most natural way possible, based on the above mentioned abstract.

The Live event was quite successful and was also one of the first to be broadcast not on a streaming platform but on a social network. This radically changed the approach, from “inviting into a virtual room”, to literally going to the home of whoever had the characteristics of a potential candidate for a PhD position. Obviously, although the fact that a message arrives is no guarantee of being read, seen or listened to, the message was presented in the most natural way to a person of the target age.

The promotion of the course did not end in that event and continued through the work of the delegate of the Communication Commission of the Department. In fact, after a short editing, the videos were used to promote the individual PhD positions on Facebook, Instagram and through a playlist specially created on Youtube. All the videos of the positions, as well as the tutorials and videos of the testimonials, were timed in the period between the live event and the deadline of the call #Uniss, targeting the positions again, in some cases by geographical area (Lebanon, Tunisia).

Thanks to the promotion of the course, the number of applications submitted to the call for applications for PhD positions in the Course in Veterinary Science (XXXVI cycle) was 55, of which 22% submitted by candidates from other Italian Universities and 25% by candidates from foreign Universities. The call of the previous call (XXV cycle) had received a total of 16 applications, of which 12.5% submitted by candidates from other Italian Universities and 37.5% by candidates from foreign Universities. Therefore, there is no doubt that the promotion done for the XXXVI cycle had a positive effect on the attractiveness of the Course.
How the world of work changes: the impact of Covid 19 and the skills of the future

By Lucia Salto (Project Coordinator, Career Development, Facilitator for PhDs, International Networking Development, Event Management, University of Turin)

In his comprehensive article, Massimo Follis has focused on the scenario that will emerge with the introduction of smart working, which has become established in recent months due to force majeure caused by the pandemic. In fact, the pandemic has accelerated processes of change that have already begun and what schools, universities, institutions and companies are doing today with smart working would probably have been tackled in five years or more. We have entered a new phase in the world of work, characterised by a gradual change in working methods and a revision of the organisational models themselves, which will result in a radical innovation of existing professional profiles and the development of new ones.

Much has been said in these months about the positive aspects of smart working, well summarized in the article cited, in terms of better organization of life and reconciliation with work time (see work-life balance), eco-sustainability, due to the reduction of travel by means of transport, the push to self-learning given the need for digital skills at all levels, increased productivity and reduced costs for the employer. Smart working has also made it clear that in some cases the workforce within an organisation is plethoric, and more generally that the role played by middle management will inevitably be reduced by an autonomous and digital way of working. There has also been discussion about some limits of remote work that can lead to isolation and stress from isolation of those who carry it out, reducing human contact, eliminating those spaces of interaction that were part of our everyday life. In any case, the experience of smart working has left its mark and, apart from the situation that is still an emergency following the second wave of Covid 19, it is clear that there will be no turning back.

This article focuses on a theme intertwined with the problems of smart working: the transformations taking place in the world of work and some professions in a scenario increasingly dominated by Artificial Intelligence (AI). The information and examples that I will use below are the result of the post-doctoral training initiatives that I have organised in recent years for PhD students at the University of Turin and of the collaboration that followed with the Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro APL Study Centre with regard to guidance, the impact of AI on professions and labour market analysis. The comparisons with head hunters and HR managers of Italian and foreign companies, who attended our events with APL, were also useful to obtain further information on what skills are currently most in demand by institutions and companies.

The need for new skills, such as digital competences, and soft skills appear to be indispensable conditions to respond to the needs of a labour market that is constantly evolving and subject to more and more rapid changes in terms of technology and beyond, as has become evident in recent months. It has been seen that even during the months of lockdown it has been possible to continue to work - remotely - for some professionals.

But the “forced” digitalization has above all shown how new professional profiles are now needed and, more generally, an update is indispensable if not, in some cases, a real digital alphabetization for all and at all levels. Hence the need for actions by PA and Upskilling companies to develop additional skills to make staff more effective and qualified; and for Reskilling, intended as the development of significantly different skills, capable of enabling a worker to play a different role. In the new scenario that is emerging, management will also be gradually rethought in order to create the conditions for a way of working autonomously where entrepreneurial thinking can be encouraged to help staff to act with initiative and creativity.

The introduction of digital platforms, the automation of processes and AI will make some skills obsolete.

A further demonstration of what is happening to the labour market and of the changes taking place, is the emergence of the so-called Quitting Economy, in other words, of the highly qualified workers, who prefer not to engage with a single company (even in the absence of constraints on the volumes of their activity), but to work on projects proposed by different companies: self-employed workers without employees. This way of organising the economy and work, which could become prevalent in the future, is not only perfectly congruent with smart working, but finds in the freedom to organise work and its timing one of its constitutive levers. All innovative sectors - such as software production companies, IT consulting and related activities
information activities and other IT services - see these professionals as an important resource: their experience and knowledge accumulated working in different realities contribute to business development and change management. The same analyses carried out by the APL Study Centre show a decrease in the number of middle managers in the last ten years of 10,886 and an increase in freelance professionals of 20,801.

On the side of the professions, which APL in a recent job divides into white jobs, green jobs, blue jobs, it is clear that many will be affected by this change, as is already happening for the health care professions. The digital transformation made possible by “shared data”, “artificial intelligence” and “open and secure platforms” will determine much of this change. Telemedicine (e-health) is considered a social and cultural revolution that also makes it possible to facilitate remote communication between doctor and patient and to facilitate the provision of health services, from diagnosis to therapy. It will thus be possible for a doctor to make a diagnosis on a patient who is not physically in the same place as the doctor, through the remote transmission of data produced by diagnostic tools. Many professions linked to the health sector (Digital Europe 2020 Strategy) will slowly be dematerialised and will be able to be carried out remotely: the electronic medical record, the dematerialised medical prescription, the sending of pre-filled 730 medical expenses, etc., etc., are now unstoppable processes. The WHO itself has recommended that all countries in the world implement the use of digital health technology in order to improve people's health and strengthen essential services. However, it is unrealistic to talk about digital health if doctors and health professionals do not have a renewed set of skills and this requires a review of study pathways. The scenario is therefore evolving and there are many challenges ahead.

The transformation of professions will affect all sectors, including public administration, which is a strategic and complex aspect of this change. In fact, PA have already started a process of dematerialisation of services, using ICT tools for automated information processing. At the same time, we are witnessing significant investments in the digitalization of their procedures, i.e. for the creation, validation, management and preservation of documents created directly digitally. This will facilitate access to documentation, making it easier and more immediate, and will make it possible to overcome traditional paper document management processes, which are often expensive and have a strong environmental impact, and above all characterized by lack of transparency, sharing and archiving constraints and high search times, as well as the ease of errors, loss, etc.. On the other hand, the digitalization and automation of processes and the increasingly widespread use of platforms to collect, manage, share and store information will inevitably change the way of working in PA, favouring remote working. Never as in times of pandemic restrictions have platforms become indispensable for organizing online events, etc.. We are therefore facing a great opportunity for change that will not leave many things untouched, as can be seen, but which requires digital literacy and the consequent continuous training to be able to adapt to a changed world of...

In an increasingly technological and robotic world, where knowledge and skills quickly become obsolete and with the risk of new pandemics, it may be appropriate to ask ourselves what competences will help us to survive alongside indispensable digital skills. Soft skills such as flexibility, the ability to adapt quickly to new scenarios, the ability to embrace change, the propensity for continuous learning, curiosity, resilience, the ability to solve complex problems, to work independently, to manage projects and people, to work in teams, emotional intelligence, to manage stress, critical thinking, will certainly be decisive. It is no coincidence that soft skills are also defined as human skills and power skills and can be transferred from one context to another and can also be used remotely where autonomous work prevails even more. In the past it was also possible not to have this background of “human” and technical skills because everything was slower, there was less competition and the market was simpler. In such a complex and constantly evolving labour market, companies are increasingly focused on the relational skills that make workers more competitive. Not surprisingly, Tom Peters, world management guru, writes “Soft skills will be 10X more important in a virtual/work-at-home world. Team dynamics, individual growth, team creativity will dominate effectiveness”.

Centro Studi Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro; /APL: the Study Centre has carried out in-depth research and analysis on the topic of Artificial Intelligence, how the professions are changing and what the professions and skills of the future will be.
PhDs and private companies: our partners

By Professor Antonello Cannas (Director of the PhD School UNISS)

All over the world, the PhD program is the training cycle at the highest level of university, thus the PhD degree is the highest academic degree. It is intended not only to produce young researchers, but also to train young research professionals for companies and innovators of the production system.

In the most advanced nations, including Italy, 60-80% of PhDs are employed outside of the University research system. They work in private companies, develop innovative companies and start-ups, act as freelancers and as specialized, high-level consultants, and deal with industrial research, technology transfer and innovation at various levels.

For these reasons, the School and the PhD Programs of UNISS have always privileged the relationship with the productive system, establishing collaboration agreements with private companies, from small local companies to large multinationals, in order to conduct research of their own interest or of general interest. Currently, we have 55 active doctoral positions (23% of the total positions at UNISS) developed in collaboration with private companies. This collaboration has been very fruitful both for the companies and the University and we hope to further develop it.

Link to an information sheet and the list of our partner private companies

PHD PROGRAMS AND CONTACTS

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES - SCIENZE AGRARIE
Coordinator: Prof. Ignazio Floris ifloris@uniss.it

ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY AND HUMAN SCIENCES - ARCHEOLOGIA, STORIA E SCIENZE DELL’UOMO
Coordinator: Prof.ssa Maria Grazia Melis mgmelis@uniss.it

ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENT - ARCHITETTURA E AMBIENTE
Coordinator: Prof. Vincenzo Pascucci pascucci@uniss.it

SCIENZE BIOMEDICHE - BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES
Coordinator: Prof.ssa Margherita Maioli mmaiol@uniss.it

CHEMICAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY - SCIENZE E TECNOLOGIE CHIMICHE
in collaborazione con l’Università di Cagliari - in collaboration with the University of Cagliari
Coordinators: Prof.ssa Carla Cannas ccannas@unica.it Prof. Stefano Enzo enzo@uniss.it

CULTURES, LITERATURES, TOURISM AND TERRITORY - CULTURE, LETTERATURE, TURISMO E TERRITORIO
Coordinator: Prof. Fiorenzo Toso ftosoi@uniss.it

ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS
Coordinator: Prof. Dimitri Paolini daolfini@uniss.it

JURIDICAL SCIENCES - SCIENZE GIURIDICHE
Coordinator: Prof. Michele Maria Comenale Pinto dottoratoso@uniss.it

LIFE SCIENCES AND BIOTECHNOLOGIES - SCIENZE DELLA VITA E BIOTECNOLOGIE
Coordinator: Prof. Leonardo A. Sechi sechila@uniss.it

VETERINARY SCIENCES - SCIENZE VETERINARIE
Coordinator: Prof. Fiammetta Berlinguer berling@uniss.it

STAFF OF THE PHD SCHOOL UNISS

Professor Antonello Cannas (Director of PhD School)- canvass@uniss.it
Anna Paola Vargiu (Head of the Office for Higher Educatation apvargiu@uniss.it
Riccardo Zallu (Administrative manager of the PhD School) - rzallu@uniss.it
Margherita Scanu (Secretariat and communication of the PhD School) - mscanu1@uniss.it

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