

“Spread eastwards along the old sea.” The accomplishment of an idea: the AE-Barcelona Knowledge Hub*

Ricard Guerrero,¹ Andreu Mas-Colell²

¹Academic director, AE-BKH, Barcelona. ²University Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona



Trencadís (“broken tiles”) by Antoni Gaudí

Summary. The Academia Europaea was founded in 1988 as an international non-governmental, not-for-profit association. Currently, it has over 4000 elected members from the whole European continent. Among its goals is to provide a pan-European multidisciplinary dimension spanning beyond the borders of the different nations and recognizing the excellence of learned societies and organizations. The Academy has four regional hubs in Wroclaw, Barcelona, Bergen and Cardiff. The Barcelona Knowledge Hub (AE-BKH) was set up in 2013 as the Academia Europaea’s hub for the Mediterranean and Southern European region. It was born under the auspices of three Catalan institutions, the Government of Catalonia, the Barcelona City Council and the Foundation La Caixa. The Institute for Catalan Studies provided its facilities for the location of the headquarters of the AE-BKH. Since its creation, the AE-BKH has developed every year many activities, being the most important the Women’s Week (in March) and the recovery of the Middle Ages’ *Disputatio of Barcelona* (in November). In addition, other activities have been developed related to significant issues that society faces, always with a multidisciplinary perspective, and covering both sciences and humanities. [Contrib Sci 12(2):79-82 (2016)]

Keywords: Barcelona Knowledge Hub · Academia Europaea’s hubs · *Disputatio of Barcelona*

Correspondence:
Andreu Mas-Colell
andreu.mas-colell@upf.edu

The Academia Europaea: promoting learning, education and research

The Academia Europaea (AE) [<http://www.ae-info.org/>], founded in 1988, is a pan-European, non-governmental, not-

for-profit association of individual scientists and scholars who are elected by nomination and recognised by their peers as experts and leaders in their fields. The AE is independent of national governments. Its main goal is to support the culture of European research through dialogue and collaboration.

* “*Estesa per llevant al llarg de la vella mar.*” From the poem *M’han demanat que parli de la meva Europa* (“I have been asked to talk of my Europe”) by Salvador Espriu, 1959.

The AE has over 4000 elected members from 37 European countries, plus Turkey and Israel, including a substantial number of recipients of prestigious awards, medals and prizes. Fifty-four members are Nobel Prize winners and 13 of them are Fields Medal recipients. The AE publishes *European Review*, a peer-reviewed academic journal covering contemporary issues in Europe, including those related to economics, history, social science and other general sciences.

In its mission statement, the AE is committed to identifying topics of trans-European importance to science and scholarship, and to proposing appropriate action to ensure that these topics are adequately addressed. It promotes a wider appreciation of the value of European scholarship and of research and encourages interdisciplinary and international scholarship in all areas of learning of relevance to Europe. In addition, where appropriate to its expertise, it provides independent and impartial advice to European institutions, governments and international agencies concerning matters affecting science, scholarship and academic life in Europe.

The organisation of the Academia Europaea

The AE is run by a Board of Trustees, which acts as the executive management board. Currently, the President of the AE is Sierd Cloetingh (Professor of Tectonics, Vrije University, Amsterdam). Anne Buttmer (Emeritus Professor of Geography at University College Dublin) is Vice-President, and Roger Elliot (Professor of Theoretical Physics, University of Oxford) is the Honorary Treasurer. The Executive Secretary to the Board is David Coates. The remainder of the Board is composed of members of the AE elected by the AE Council. The Council comprises members of the Board of Trustees, the chairs of the academic sections (Statutory Council members) and a number of independent members (up to five) elected individually at the Annual General Meeting.

The scholarly interests of the AE are managed through a Section structure. On election, all members are assigned to a Section. Currently, there are twenty-two academic Sections. The AE has its headquarters in London, and it also has four regional hubs: the hub for central and Eastern Europe, located in Wroclaw and started in 2012; the hub for Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, located in Barcelona and started in 2013; the hub for the Northern European region, located in Bergen and started in 2015; and the hub for the United Kingdom and Central Europe, located in Cardiff and started in 2016.

Nations, countries, need experts to provide advice and

guidance to solve problems of many different issues—scientific, technological, economic, social—throughout its wide range of fields and topics areas. These experts can be local and national, but the formula that provides an assembly of people who share knowledge and experience, and with a view both basic and applied that crosses disciplinary and cultural boundaries, is the best capable of responding to issues of national and international scope. The members of the AE represent an effective means to provide a rigorous and independent perspective, which is something that governments in any country will indeed appreciate.

Another important aspect of the AE is its absolute independence, which is the key to the impartiality of the observations of its members whenever their opinions are requested—or voluntarily provided by themselves—about European science and knowledge.

The Barcelona Knowledge Hub

The Barcelona Knowledge Hub (AE-BKH) is the office of the Academia Europaea for the Mediterranean and Southern European region. Its main focus is the promotion of activities of interest for the members of the Academy and for the scientific community in general, with special emphasis on multidisciplinary scientific activities that include the perspective of the natural, biomedical and social sciences and the humanities. According with the general goals of the AE, the Barcelona hub organizes itself to contribute to the promotion and consolidation of a European area in which innovation, research, education achieve the best results that surely will contribute to the wellness of people.

The AE-BKH office is located in the building of the Institute for Catalan Studies (IEC). The IEC is an academic, scientific and cultural corporation whose purpose is scientific research and its dissemination, principally that involving all elements of Catalan culture. It was founded in 1907 and has been a member of the Union Académique Internationale (UAI) since 1922, and of ALLEA since 2014.

The creation of the Barcelona hub was a long matured idea in order to take a further step in the consolidation and recognition of Barcelona as a city with a long history in the scientific, technological and social development. Barcelona is fitted with the institutions and the physical and human resources to promote the advancement of knowledge in all fields by understanding the benefits it poses to society.

The idea and progression of this project was discussed with different persons from the Academy and various institutions.



From a copy shown at the Institute for Catalan Studies, Barcelona

Catalan Atlas of the Mediterranean, by Abraham Cresques. Abraham Cresques (1325–1387) was a 14th-century Jewish cartographer from the city of Palma Majorca. (The Balearic Islands were in that time part of the Crown of Aragon.) In collaboration with his son, Jehuda, Abraham Cresques is credited with the authorship of the celebrated *Atlas*, made circa 1375. The original of the *Atlas* is in the National Library of France, in Paris. Since 2014, a copy facsimile, on parchment and illustrated by hand, is exposed at the Sala Puig i Cadafalch of the Institute for Catalan Studies, in Barcelona, where the AE-BKH is located.

The final decision, that had to be approved by the Academia Europaea, was taken after the visit of its representatives, Lars Walloe (President), Roger Elliot (Treasurer) and David Coates (Executive Secretary), invited by the three institutions that would become partners: the Government of Catalonia, the Barcelona City Council and the Foundation La Caixa. The visit, which followed a ceremonial agenda, was crucial to determine the suitability of Barcelona as the new headquarters hub.

The Barcelona Knowledge Hub was established in 2013 through a joint agreement between the Academia Europaea and the three aforementioned partners in Catalonia, it being set up as the Academia Europaea's office for the Mediterranean and Southern Europe region. The AE-BKH focuses on the promotion of activities of interest for the members of Academy and the scientific community in general, with special emphasis on multidisciplinary scientific activities that include the perspectives of the natural, biomedical and social sciences and the humanities.

The AE-BKH has an International Advisory Committee (IAC) that meets annually. Currently the IAC is formed by Enric Banda, Pedro García-Barreno, M. Dolores Garcia Ramon, Ramon Gomis, Sergiu Hart, Yvon Le Maho, Geneveva

Martí, Marc Mayer Olivé, Maria Paradiso, Regina Revilla, and Rosalia Vargas. We will never forget an initial member of the IAC, Prof. Jose Mariano Gago (1948–1915). Gago, former Minister of Science and Technology (1995–2002) and Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education (2005–2011) of Portugal, played a crucial role in the design of plans for the development of science, technology and innovation, not only in his country but throughout Europe. He did it by designing and promoting several organisms that have played major roles in the structure and organization of science in the European Union during the last thirty years, particularly in the creation and initial impulse of the Academia Europaea, the European Science Foundation and the European Research Council.

About the *Disputatio of Barcelona*

In the scholastic system of education of the Middle Ages, the *Disputationes* were formal ordered debates designed to uncover and establish truths in theology and in sciences. Fixed rules governed the process: they demanded dependence on traditional written authorities and the thorough understand-



MBerlenga

The Academia Europaea-Barcelona Knowledge Hub is located in the building of the Institute for Catalan Studies, in Barcelona.

ing of each argument on each side. The famous *Disputatio of Barcelona*, called in the summer of 1263 by King James I of Aragon and Catalonia, was the most important and well-known of the inter-faith *Disputationes* that took place between Christian and Jewish theologians in the late Middle Ages. In the *Disputatio of Barcelona* the *disputantes* were Friar Paulus Christianus, a Dominican (and a former rabbi converted from Judaism to Christianity) and rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (also known as Nahmanides), the most important scholar of Judaism at his time, from the Girona's community. The discussion focused on theological questions with the presence of the king and his court, and of the most significant men of Barcelona, then a prosperous and influent city.

Since its creation, the AE-BKH has developed four *Disputationes*, in 2013 (coinciding with the commemoration of the 750th anniversary of the medieval *Disputatio of Barcelona*), in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The success achieved in those editions is the best cultural manifestation of AE-BKH and consequently continuing them has been considered most suitable.

About the Young Academy of Europe

Institutions devoted to all fields of knowledge are committed to defending the planet. Leaders must continually remind of it both to governments and the citizenship. The younger generations have much to do about it. The combination of the experi-

ence of senior researchers and the real possibilities of younger generations are the guarantee for the future. The Young Academy of Europe (YAE) was created to respond to this need. It was born as a pan-European initiative of outstanding young scientists to create a platform for networking, scientific exchange and science policy. The AE and the YAE signed an agreement in December 2012, establishing that "both organizations shall actively explore the potential for, and development of, a wide range of initiatives and activities, that would provide for a mutual benefit to both organizations and to the wider scholars' community across Europe." The AE-BKH is responsible for giving the necessary administrative support to the YAE and collaborating in the YAE's Interviews Project.

Several major issues affect the activity and objectives of the AE-BKH, the main being (a) attention to global social problems (displacement by conflict, migration, poverty, scientific development), (b) promotion of the women in all aspects of BKH organization, activities and development in all activities and in the area of influence of the hub, (c) interdisciplinarity in the treatment of the discussed topics, (d) collaboration with the related entities both national and international, and (e) involvement in the expansion and dissemination of the Young Academy of Europe.

To conclude, the Barcelona Knowledge Hub has tried to make a significant contribution to the aims and activities of the whole Academia Europaea, especially those related with Southern Europe and the Mediterranean. ■

About the images on the first page of the articles in this issue. Articles of this thematic issue of CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE, devoted to the activities of the Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the Academia Europaea (AE-BKH), show in their first page a reproduction of a *trencadis*, a type of mosaic used in Catalan Modernism, made from broken pieces of ceramics, like tiles and dinnerware. Those nine "broken tiles," designed by the architect from Reus Antoni Gaudí, show multiple angles and views, reflecting the ever-changing reality around us. The AE-BKH believes that those images, created more than a century ago, represent appropriately the multiple aspects of the present academic world, both in science and humanities, which constitute one of the main objectives of the activities of the Barcelona hub. See also the article "Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926): The Manuscript of Reus," by R. Gomis and K. Katte, on pages 145-149 of this issue. This issue can be downloaded in ISSUU format and individual articles can be found at the journals' repository of the Institute for Catalan Studies [www.cat-science.cat; <http://revistes.iec.cat/contributions>].