

The Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the *Academia Europaea*

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Summary. The Barcelona Knowledge Hub, a hub of the *Academia Europaea*, was set up in Barcelona in 2012 as the office for the Southern European region and the Mediterranean. The *Academia Europaea* is a pan-European, nongovernmental, not-for-profit association of over 3000 individual scientists and scholars who are recognised as experts and leaders in their own fields. It is committed to identifying topics of trans-European importance to science and scholarship, and provides, where appropriate, its expertise and its independent and impartial advice to European institutions, governments and international agencies concerning matters affecting science, scholarship and academic life in Europe. The Barcelona Knowledge Hub organises multidisciplinary activities that consider the perspective of the social sciences and the humanities, with scholarly aims as well as the goal of promoting the dissemination of science. [Contrib Sci 10:17-22 (2014)]

The *Academia Europaea*, promoting learning, education and research

The *Academia Europaea* (AE) [<http://www.ae-info.org/>], founded in 1988, is a pan-European, nongovernmental, 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 and government-controlled sources of finance. Its main object is to support the culture of European research through dialogue and collaboration.

The AE has over 3000 elected members from 37 European countries, including a substantial number of recipients of pres-

tigious awards, medals and prizes. Fifty-four members are Nobel Prize winners and 13 are Fields Medal recipients. The AE publishes *European Review*, a peer-reviewed academic journal covering contemporary issues in Europe, including those of 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

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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 Buttner (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 Secretary to the Board is Dr. David Coates. The remainder of the Board is composed of members of the AE elected by the AE Council, which comprises members of the Board of Trustees, the chairs of 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 academic sections: History and Archaeology; Classics & Oriental Studies; Linguistic Studies; Literary & Theatrical Studies; Musicology & History of Art and Architecture; Philosophy, Theology & Religious Studies; Behavioural Sciences; Social Sciences; Law; Economics, Business and Management Sciences; Mathematics; Informatics; Physics and Engineering Sciences; Chemical Sciences; Earth and Cosmic Sciences; Biochemistry and Molecular Biology; Cell Biology; Physiology and Medicine; Organismal and Evolutionary Biology and Applied and Translational Biology.

The AE has its headquarters in London but it also has three regional hubs: the hub for central and Eastern Europe, located in Wroclaw; the hub for the northern European region, located in Bergen and the hub for southern Europe and the Mediterranean, located in Barcelona.

Barcelona Knowledge Hub: the Southern European and Mediterranean Office

In 2012, a hub of the AE was established in Barcelona, as the office for the southern European region and the Mediterranean. Known as the Barcelona Knowledge Hub (BKH) (Fig. 1) [<http://barcelona.acadeuro.org/>], it focuses on the promotion of activities that are of interest to members of the *Academia* and endorses its mission.



Fig. 1. Logo of the Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the *Academia Europaea*.

Barcelona perfectly suits the foundational mission of the AE. It has a strong academic and scientific environment, with important centres for biomedicine and photonics. In addition, the city is one of the main Euro-Mediterranean centres and the capital of the Union for the Mediterranean. Thus, the BKH contributes towards the consolidation of the city's international position.

This explains the decision by the Catalan Government (Ministry of Economy and Knowledge), the Barcelona City Council and the "la Caixa" Foundation to join efforts to launch an AE hub in Barcelona. The BKH is housed on the premises of the Institute for Catalan Studies (IEC).

The BKH has been operational since January 2013. Its foundational agreements were signed by the AE and the three partners in December 2012. One of its main objectives is to organise multidisciplinary activities that include the perspective of the social sciences and the humanities in the Southern European region, with scholarly aims and for the dissemination of science.

Disputatio of Barcelona 1263-2013. The BKH's inaugural event was celebrated in November 28, 2013, as a commemoration of the 750th anniversary of the famous *Disputatio of Barcelona* of 1263, by holding its own, present-day *Disputatio* (Fig. 2). The first *Disputatio of Barcelona* was held in 1263 before King James I of Aragon; it was one of the inter-faith debates that took place between Christian and Jewish theologians. On that occasion, the debaters were Pau Cristia, a convert from Judaism and a Dominican friar, and Rabbi



Fig. 2. Panoramic view of the *Disputatio of Barcelona 2013*, held in the *Saló de Cent* of the Barcelona City Hall. (See also the illustration of the cover of this issue of the journal.)

Moses ben Nahman (also known as Nahmanides; his Catalan name was Bonastruc ça Porta), a Catalan Sephardic rabbi, physician, philosopher, kabbalist and biblical commentator. In the scholastic system of education of the Middle Ages, the *Disputationes* offered a formalised method of debate designed to uncover and establish truths in theology and the sciences. Fixed rules governed the process: they demanded dependence on traditional written authorities and a thorough understanding of the argument made by each side.

The Barcelona Knowledge Hub *Disputatio of Barcelona 2013*, with the title “Social and State-of-the-Art Medicine,” took place on November 28th in the historical *Saló de Cent* of the Barcelona City Hall, in the presence of two hundred members of the local scientific, intellectual community. The event was hosted by Xavier Trias, Barcelona’s Mayor, who was joined at the presidential table by Lars Walloe and Anne Buttner, President and Vice-President of the AE, respectively, Andreu Mas-Colell (Minister of Economy and Knowledge of the Catalan Government) and the academic director of the BKH, Genoveva Martí. Two speakers with expertise in different areas were invited to share their views on the access to medical resources and their distribution (Fig. 3).

In keeping with the BKH’s intent to approach issues from a multidisciplinary perspective, the invited *disputantes* were Mara Dierssen, a neuroscientist, group leader of Cellular and Systems Neurobiology of the Systems Biology Programme at the Centre for Genomic Regulation in Barcelona, and president of the Spanish Society for Neuroscience, and Thomas Pogge, a philosopher, current president of the Health Impact Fund, Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs at Yale University, director of the Global Justice Program and Board Member of Academics Stand Against Poverty.

The 2013 Barcelona *Disputatio* was very different from

the *Disputatio* of 1263. In the latter, following the debate of the two wise men of opposite religious convictions, one of them was declared the winner. In the modern *Disputatio*, the debaters were a wise woman and a wise man who, instead of engaging in an intellectual confrontation, tried to illuminate different aspects of an important issue—given that the pursuit of truth, tolerance, and collaboration are often more conducive to progress.

The success of the event inspired the advisory board of the BKH to continue holding *Disputationes* as the main annual event of the BKH. The 2014 *Disputatio* will be organised in conjunction with the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility. It will be held in November 2014, on the premises of the Hospital de Sant Pau of Barcelona, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1997.

The 26th Annual Conference of the *Academia Europaea*. With the motto “Young Europe: realities, dilemmas and opportunities for the new generation,” the purpose of the conference was to identify the social, medical and environmental challenges that will become prominent in the forthcoming decades and that must be tackled by the next generation. These challenges do not belong to a single, well circumscribed discipline: medical issues have human, social and technological aspects; matters of sustainability have medical and social impacts and social questions are inextricably connected to health and environmental concerns. Because these problems are multi-faceted, their solutions accordingly require cross-cutting thinking and interdisciplinary expertise.

The conference, held between July 16 and July 18, 2014, had three main blocks, each revolving around medical, social and environmental issues. The keynote speakers were Nubia Muñoz (Medical), Saskia Sassen (Social), and Gordon McBean (Environment), and they were joined by seventeen other



Fig. 3. Genoveva Martí (Academic Director of the Barcelona Knowledge Hub), Lars Walløe (President of the *Academia Europaea*), Xavier Trias (Mayor of Barcelona), Mara Dierssen and Thomas Pogge (*disputantes*), Anne Buttner (Vice-President of the *Academia Europaea*) and Andreu Mas-Colell (Minister of Economy and Knowledge of the Government of Catalonia), at the *Disputatio of Barcelona 2013*.

speakers of international stature, members and non-members of the AE. Kurt Mehlhorn, who was awarded the Erasmus Medal during the conference, delivered an address to the *Academia* General Assembly entitled *Algorithms and Programs*. Also, five parallel scientific workshops were organised by several of the *Academia* Sections. The one on Crystallography was attended by Dan Shechtman, 2011 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry. Furthermore, at every annual conference, up to ten outstanding young scientists and scholars from the host country are recognised as Burgen Scholars, an award named after the *Academia*'s founding president.

Young Academy of Europe Annual Meeting. Another mission of the BKH is to provide support to the activities of the Young Academy of Europe (YAE), affiliated with the AE. The YAE is a pan-European and independent initiative of top young scientists and scholars that reflects their interest in creating a platform for networking, scientific exchange and science policy. On 15 July 2014, the BKH coordinated the third Annual Meeting of the YAE, organised in conjunction with the AE's Annual Conference.

During the meeting, views on the current realities and opportunities for scientists in Europe were discussed from a

younger perspective in several talks by YAE members. The scientific sessions consisted of stimulating discussion surrounding eight short presentations linking the three YAE domains of physics and engineering, the life sciences and the social sciences and the humanities. Researchers exchanged views and presented their recent work. They addressed various societal challenges in the areas of health, responses to the economic crisis and arising climate-change parameters. Thus, YAE members presented novel insights into light-activated hearing devices, the formation of citizens' collectives and the accumulation of methane in lakes. Simone Turchetti (University of Manchester) delivered a lecture entitled "Deeply concerned with the environment? Revisiting the history of environmental science and politics" and Nataša Pržulj (Imperial College London) talked about the hidden language of complex networks.

A plenary debate was also held, in which scientists from many European countries evaluated the role of young academies in Europe. The audience agreed with the concerns of the young scientists, that it remains a challenge to shape a coherent science policy for Europe, to secure the sustainable support needed to achieve a scientific impact and to formulate a perspective for the next generation of scientific leaders.

International Women's Day. In March 2014, the BKH and the IEC celebrated International Women's Day [1] with a lecture entitled "Arab Spring or Long Desolate Arab Winter?", by Nadia El-Awady, Egyptian physician and science journalist, and followed by a colloquium. Nadia El-Awady is a freelance journalist and novice adventurer currently dividing her time between Egypt and the UK. The major part of her career has focused on science journalism. She has a B.Sc. in medicine from Cairo University and an MA in journalism and mass communication from the American University in Cairo. When on December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, publicly set himself on fire in protest against the municipality's confiscation of his vendor's cart, from which he sold fruits and vegetables, a series of events were initiated that within a short time led to revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya and the ouster of their long-standing rulers. El-Awady, former president of the World Federation of Science Journalists, stood on the frontlines of the Egyptian Revolution from January 25 to February 11, 2011. Three years later, during International Women's Day at the IEC, she reflected on the situation in Egypt and its effect on her, her family and those around her.

"Neuroscience and...". The BKH together with the IEC, the Centre for Genomic Regulation and the Institute of Culture of Barcelona sponsored a cycle of four lectures with the title "Neuroscience and..." The cycle was held in the IEC, from March to July, 2014.

In the first debate, "Neuroscience and Economics", which took place on March 13, participants discussed how the brain works when we evaluate decisions, when we categorise risks and rewards and when we interact with other economic agents. An understanding of these aspects provides insight into an understanding of economics on a global scale, given that the financial-decision making process of humans is based not on logic but instead is strongly influenced by emotions and intuition. The economists Antonio Cabrales (University College London) and Rosemarie Nagel (ICREA-UPF) and the biologist Arcadi Navarro (ICREA-UPF) opened the session with a short presentation, followed by an exchange with the audience.

"Neuroscience and Education" was the title of the second lecture, held on May 15. The speakers were Ismael Palacín, director of the Jaume Bofill Foundation; David Bueno, of the Department of Genetics at the University of Barcelona; and Ignacio Morgado, of the Institute of Neurosciences of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. On June 26, the talk was dedicated to "Neuroscience and Politics". On 3 July, the cycle was closed with the final lecture, "Neuroscience and the Law".

About the author

Genoveva Martí graduated from the University of Barcelona and obtained her PhD from Stanford University. She is Research Professor of ICREA (Catalan Institute for Research and Advanced Studies) at the Department of Logic, History and Philosophy of Science of the University of Barcelona, and has been Reader at the London School of Economics. She has taught also at the University of Washington, Seattle and the University of California, Riverside. Since 2009 she is a member of the Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies Section of the AE. She is a member of the LOGOS research group. Her research interests include the theory of reference, the semantics of singular and general terms, and the role of experimental data in semantics. She was awarded the Narcís Monturiol Medal by the Government of Catalonia in 2012.



Workshop on "Funding Policies and Research Values: Strategies & Needs; Risks & Prospects", in Trieste.

In collaboration with the University of Trieste and with the support of the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences), the BKH was the co-organiser, on May 12, 2014, of a one-day workshop entitled "Funding Policies and Research Values: Strategies & Needs; Risks & Prospects."

Part of the "Cultures in dialogue" project of the AE, the workshop aimed to determine which strategies should be adopted to secure the future of the Humanities. Naomi Segal

(Birbeck University of London) focussed on strategies for supporting literary studies within the framework of European research policy, proposing to redefine them in terms of cultural literacy.

The risks and prospects of Humanities research were also addressed. Carolyn Gianturco (University of Pisa) examined the risks of linear financial cuts in state research funding for the sector of musical studies. Maurizio Brunori (University of Rome) explored the prospects for success of humanistic studies that can be gained by partnerships and the “network” academic model, centred on the Mediterranean region, in which dialogue among different cultural heritages is fostered.

Finally, the workshop highlighted the need for new life for research in the Humanities, through a funding policy that recognises the differences between this field and the empirical and exact sciences.

Since 2012, the BKH has been building bridges to connect both Mediterranean shores, with the aim of contributing to the creation of a Mediterranean space of scientific collaboration. The creation of the BKH is the starting point to encourage achievement of the highest possible standards in scholarship, research and education and to promote a better public understanding of the benefits of knowledge and learning, and of scientific and scholarly issues that affect society, its quality of life and its standards of living. 

Competing interests. None declared.

Reference

1. Puche C (2013) The Institute for Catalan Studies and the International Women's Day, 2006–2013. *Contrib Sci* 9:107-108

Resum. La Barcelona Knowledge Hub, subseu de l'*Academia Europaea*, es va inaugurar a Barcelona el 2012 com a oficina per a la regió del sud d'Europa i la Mediterrània. L'*Academia Europaea* és una associació no governamental, paneuropea i sense ànim de lucre de més de 3000 científics i estudiosos reconeguts com a experts en el seu camp. Els objectius de l'*Academia Europaea* són identificar temes científics d'importància transeuropea i oferir, si escau, assessorament independent i imparcial a les institucions europees, governs i organismes internacionals en relació amb els assumptes que afecten la ciència i la vida acadèmica a Europa. Al sud d'Europa, la Barcelona Knowledge Hub organitza activitats multidisciplinàries des de la perspectiva de les ciències socials i les humanitats amb l'objectiu de promoure la difusió de la ciència i l'acadèmia.

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