



my story of mobility

How to create your own board game

1 Why should I play?

After finishing my PhD in Portugal, I continued working in the University of Coimbra for another year and half, on an EU H2020 project with a postdoctoral research grant. The prospects to continue there offered limited stability, as at the end of the project we would have to look for another project for me to work on (and get funding from), and most likely it would be another short- to medium-term solution. I decided to apply for the MSCA, on one hand because I could design and shape my own research project, rather than matching the needs of single projects as they came along, and on the other to boost my career, skills and connections, opening new (and more stable) opportunities in the future.

3 Ready, set... go!

For over 3-months we worked together on the proposal, which was submitted in Sept. 2019. Two months before the publication results, our collaboration had an unexpected outcome: a position in my field was available at Eurac, and the good experience on the proposal preparation would turn out to be decisive – I was moving to Italy. In Feb. 2020, I started working at Eurac, one day before we got the actual results of our proposal: unfortunately it didn't get funded. We decided to give it another try – and I was given all the time and resources needed to improve the application. This time we made it!

2 Before starting: game setup

The first step was to find a host institution and people with the knowledge, experience, resources and interest to work on the project with me. I found Eurac Research, who offered the possibility of coming to Italy for a "Marie Curie week", which turned out to be, essentially, an intensive week of preparation, exchange and brainstorming on the MSCA fellowship, application process and research proposal. This to me seemed like a great indicator of Eurac's interest but also of the good support, resources, and atmosphere I would have during the fellowship.

4 Landing on my feet

I think my experience was unique, as by the time I started my fellowship (two months ago), I was already integrated in Eurac and in Italy. The transition was smooth, I had exceptional working conditions which allowed me to pursue my own research interests and I had all the resources available to prepare my new project. Another important indicator of the working conditions I was given here, was how the dramatic turn of events sparked by the Covid-19 crisis was handled. I arrived in Italy just three weeks before the crisis, and I had all the support to continue working and integrate in the team while, at the same time, I was given the flexibility to manage all the implications of the crisis in my personal life, in particular regarding my connection to Portugal – as I was essentially "caught" in the middle of moving and settling in Italy.

6 It's no use going back to yesterday*

My fellowship just started and I believe am still walking into a whole new world of opportunities – it's difficult to foresee what I will do after the fellowship in detail. Nonetheless, I would like to stay at Eurac after, as I think I will still have a room to learn and contribute here, after ARTEMIS. At some point, later on, I would like to move back to Portugal; but I certainly want to keep a strong connection and collaboration with Eurac, and to continue strengthening these new networks I am now building in Italy and across Europe. Professionally, the most important aspects for me to decide where to go are the opportunities and conditions I am given to pursue research within my interests and skills, and ultimately to apply my expertise and work on valuable and concrete contributions to society.

5 Building bridges

For me, the opportunity provided by the MSCA and other mobility programs is to expand our horizon, knowledge and networks; and the best way to benefit from such opportunity is to build on the experience and connections we already have. Despite the challenges we face as researchers in Portugal, the quality of research is high and the atmosphere among researchers is very supportive, so I had all the interest of strengthening my connections, expand and bridge the "old" and "new" networks, I was establishing in Italy. As such, my project builds on my experience and connections with Portuguese researchers (e.g., my secondment supervisor is a Portuguese researcher in Sweden, with whom I collaborated when I was in the University of Coimbra). We selected two case studies in my MSCA project, ARTEMIS, in Portugal and in Italy, which will help bringing together knowledge and people, strengthening networks and paving the way to future collaborations.

Fostering accessibility

In sustainable urban and regional development, a critical issue is to change the mindset from aiming at mobility to aim for accessibility - and I think this applies in research. There are no rigid conditions or frameworks that will fit everyone's needs, and we need to give the opportunity for people to work, move and connect within a flexible, fair, and creative framework. We should motivate and boost the incredible potential of researchers by promoting an open mindset and knowledge exchange, supporting and enabling those who need, and recognizing and awarding positive results and achievements. We are privileged to live and work in a multicultural, open and rich environment, with unique opportunities to connect, travel and collaborate – we should make the most of it, *leaving no one behind.***

References to *Alice in Wonderland and to **UN on the SDGs.