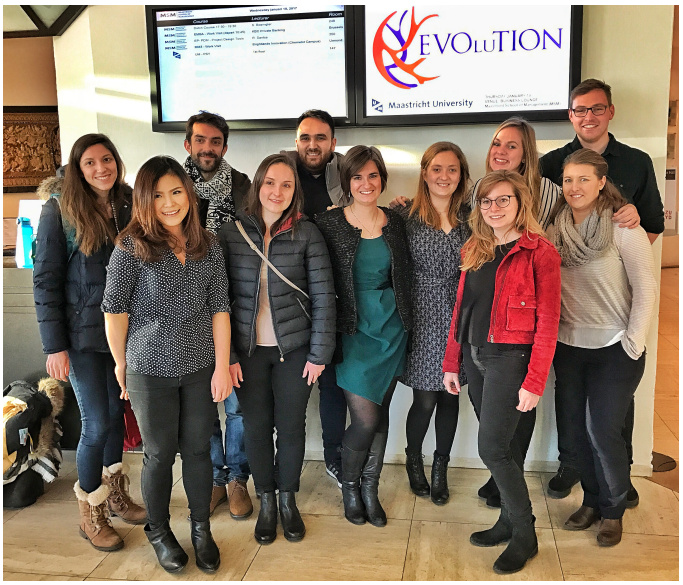
Starting our PhD Journey with EVOluTION: The Maastricht Workshop

By Silvia Oggero and Laura Menke



EVOluTION ESRs from left: Angelina Pavlic, Ploingarm Petsophonsakul, Ernesto Ruivo, Chiara Moretti, Antonino Cacace, Silvia Oggero, Monika Maciuszek, Sanne Maas, Laura Menke, Rebecca Sienel and Jan Nagenborg.

After spending 3 wonderful days in Maastricht attending our first EVOluTION workshop titled "Dietary Impact on Health", we think that a recap is necessary. First, we would like to thank the organisers for this wonderful experience, which helped us to not only grow from a scientific point of view, but also for the possibility to (FINALLY) meet the members of our new EVOluTION 'family'. A big thank you goes especially to Chris, Leon, Annabelle and Mauro for the arrangement of this workshop.

Naturally, all of us were nervous, but also enthusiastic about this first meeting. Even more exciting was to discover that all 11 of us (chosen from over **500** applicants and from different backgrounds) are so similar in our passion for science with a clear, shared goal to make this project a success via hard work, dedication and most importantly by collaboration with each other. Now, we really understand what this Network is all about and what it will mean for us during next 3 years.

Silvia giving her TEDx talk

One of the main goals of this collective programme is stated as to generate "new scientific leaders with a broad set of skills in *science, health promotion and diseases prevention*", which nowadays does not only refer to "bench-related work" anymore. We will have to face a lot of different aspects of complex projects that also comprehends management and entrepreneurial skills, which are becoming more and more substantial for researchers at the start of their early career.

To know that we will tackle this task together makes us very excited to see what the future will bring (and a little bit relieved that we are not alone in this).

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According to this approach, as our first mission during this workshop, we had the chance to give a talk during the second day. We will all agree that at the start it seemed that there was nothing innovative about this, maybe stimulating, but nothing different from what we all did 100 times during our Masters programmes at University. However (PLOT TWIST), we were asked to provide a TEDx version of our research project instead. For researchers that are used to presenting their data in the most logical and scientific way, this has been very challenging. You need to think outside of the box and write an understandable story of your project without falling back into the old pattern of being 'too scientific' (aka boring!). In addition to standing in the spotlight, talking into a microphone and a cameraman filming the whole speech in front of a very well-respected audience, this can get quite stressful.

What helped us to achieve this goal? Certainly the fact that we were speaking about our passion and our future! Who doesn't enjoy talking about something they are really dedicated to? These "easy format" talks helped us to understand and get to know each other better in a sort of informal way. A special thank you goes to our TEDx tutor Jean-Paul Toonen from T36 Media who encouraged us to look behind the wall of scientific facts and showed us that our individual personalities are part of what make us the researchers that we are.

On our last day, we had the chance to listen to some interesting talks that helped us to gain some first insights into the system of intellectual properties, entrepreneurship and how to setup a new pharmacological business. After this exciting weekend, we left Maastricht very enthusiastic and we are looking forward to our next meeting in Dublin in May (including many more scientific presentations on the progress of our Individual Research Projects).

To keep each other updated and to share our knowledge, we created a facebook page (@evolutionpioneeringnetwork) and we would be more than happy if you could "spread the word "and add friends and colleagues, who would be interested in staying informed about this Network. As discussed, each of us will post a recent, interesting paper over the next 11 months and we are very excited to start the Journal Club in April.

Thank you,

Silvia & Laura

Enjoying drinks after the workshop!

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