



Awardees of the Mentoring and PhD Thesis Prizes 2022 have been announced

The FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence (FKNE) awards have been presented at the FENS Forum 2022 meeting in Paris, on the 9th of July.

Professor Vanja Ković (University of Belgrade, Serbia) has been awarded the FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence Mentoring Prize for her outstanding contributions in motivating, supporting, and facilitating the academic and professional development of young neuroscientists. FENS-Kavli Scholars recognise the essential role of mentoring in facilitating the career and the scientific progress of young scientists, and founded this prize to recognise and promote outstanding mentors working in the field of neuroscience.

After obtaining her PhD at the University of Oxford, Prof. Ković could choose to remain in Oxford or to work at the University of Bangor. Instead, she decided to go back to her home country to start a new lab at the University of Belgrade. This decision had an enormous impact on the development of the neuroscience curriculum in Serbia. Despite having limited resources, Prof. Ković was successful in introducing new research technologies and methodologies at the university, and in stimulating local students to gain contemporary knowledge in the field of neuroscience through the organization of workshops, journal clubs, hackatons and lectures.

Prof. Ković was nominated by numerous current and former mentees not only for supporting them in the development of their scientific skills, but also for actively seeking opportunities for them. She encourages them to make bold career decisions, while also taking into consideration personal circumstances and mental health. Crucially, she simulates her students to go beyond their own comfort zone when starting new research lines, giving through her own work concrete examples that “if the idea is worthwhile, it will find its way, just like water.” Her warm personality and professionalism towards students, and her enthusiasm and determination to reach goals despite challenging circumstances, are inspiring. The impact of her mentoring is demonstrated, among other, by the fact that several of her former mentees are now working at leading universities in Europe and USA.

In sum, Prof. Ković serves as an incredible role model with regard to leadership, intellectual curiosity and moral integrity. Her guidance made a pivotal difference to numerous students in the field of neuroscience. We admire the continuous efforts of Prof. Ković to shape generations of young neuroscientists who work under her guidance and look forward to following their achievements in the years to come.

Dr. Célia Lacaux has been awarded the FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence PhD Thesis Prize. Dr. Lacaux conducted her PhD project in the lab of Dr. Delphine Oudiette at the Sorbonne University Paris, France.

During her Ph.D., Célia chose to examine the impact of the sleep onset period on creativity. This period was overlooked by researchers for decades, and the role of sleep in creativity hasn't been strongly established. Célia's first breakthrough was to uncover that patients with narcolepsy, who constantly oscillate between wakefulness and sleep, have an increased creative potential. These findings suggest that 'hybrid' states (at the border between wakefulness and sleep) offer a neurophysiological substrate for creativity. Célia then tested healthy subjects, and managed to elegantly confirm the link between this border state and creativity. Overall, her results show that critical cognitive processes occur during sleep onset. Célia's findings are major and innovative. In the future, neuroscientists could target this period, to elucidate the mechanisms underlying creativity. Célia's work has been published in influential scientific journals, and received considerable national and international media coverage. The selection committee was delighted to select Dr. Lacaux as the winner out of 64 applicants, many of which were also outstanding.

The prizes, which consist of a special plaque and €2,000 Euros each, have been awarded at the FENS Forum 2022 on the 9th July.

Contact:

FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence (FKNE)

excellence_network@fens.org

<http://www.fenskavlinetwork.org/>