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Meet the researcher Interview with Balázs Vince Nagy, researcher and representative of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference (HRC) in Brazil

Balázs, you are representing the Hungarian Rectors Conference in Brazil. Could you tell us a little bit more about the HRC's objectives and activities?

Sure, with great pleasure! The HRC is the entity embodying all of Hungary's 66 Higher Education Institutions. Its main objectives are to represent the HEIs and to protect their interests on both national and international levels. Besides expressing this mutual position in relevant issues internally (for the member HEIs) and externally (towards political bodies and civil society) the HRC takes part in several actions in international academic cooperation such as the Science without Borders programme (SwB) with Brazil.

Could you give us a short overview of the existing Brazil-Hungary research cooperation?

With a few sporadic contacts, mainly at research level and with a few institutional agreements, Hungary used to be a distant country from Brazil in both geographic and academic terms. However, recent activities, such as the above mentioned SwB have provided a giant step towards Hungarian – Brazilian academic cooperation. When they became acquainted with the dedication and hard work of Brazilian fellowship holders in Hungary, our HEIs' interest in collaborating with Brazilian counterparts was significantly increased. In the last three years, several university delegations have visited Brazilian HEIs, establishing partnerships and starting or reinforcing joint academic and research projects. For us at the HRC, these are important results yielded by our recent Brazil related activities, in which we received a lot of support from the colleagues at the Hungarian Embassy in Brazil and at the Hungarian Consulate in São Paulo as well.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities for increased cooperation between both countries?

Hungary has always been a country that relied on its scientific achievements and Brazil has been rising on these strength too. Besides, in our world today, one can hardly exist without working together with international partners. Both Brazil and Hungary are seeking such joint efforts and therefore we have a great chance to find significant synergies with each other. The main areas where this can be fruitful is definitely innovation and we can add value where both countries can express their strong and well prepared minds.

**Do you have any figures regarding Brazilian researchers in Hungary and Hungarian ones in Brazil?**

It depends on who we call Hungarian researchers, as there are a large number of academics that are Hungarian born or of Hungarian descent in Brazil. Only the University of São Paulo has more than ten professors of Hungarian origin, and most of them are engaging in research collaborations with Hungary. One of them, the Hungarian born Brazilian nuclear physicist, Prof. Dr. Alinka Lépiné-Szily was elected as a member of the Hungarian Academy of Science last year.

Of course we have exchanges involving researchers of both countries. These are recent and are funded by either Brazil or the EU through different programmes. On the other hand, the intention is to increase these numbers. The over 2000 Brazilian students in Hungary have demonstrated the extent to which Brazilian students are interested in research, raising great interest within the Hungarian HEIs and motivating Hungarian researchers to look southward. Brazilian academics have also become aware of opportunities with Hungary. A good example for this is my home department at the BME, which just employed a Brazilian lecturer this year.

In your opinion, what could be done to further enhance the mobility of international researchers between Europe and Brazil?

Since we are not neighbour countries, the ever increasing online collaboration is one way to start or at least make each other interested. At the same time, for long term and efficient joint projects the visit of researchers in each other's countries is inevitable. Besides the Brazilian and EU initiatives, the Hungarian government is offering a special scholarship for Brazilian students and scholars which will hopefully be launched early next year. Such a dedicated opportunity shall increase academic and research relations.

You are a researcher yourself and hold a Chair at USP (correct me if I am wrong). What is your project about?

Actually, I am employed by the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. At USP I did my post-doc and currently I work as a visiting professor giving classes in Photometry and Colorimetry and contributing to other subjects such as Sensory Psychology and several engineering student projects.

I dedicate most of my time to my research. The principal project I am working on is to analyse the effect of illumination on human visual perception, which, in the era of colour LED lighting, brings about a lot of challenges. Beside this, I collaborate in many vision and perception related projects both in human and animal research. For example projects on the psychophysical evaluation of perception, the retinal and cortical electrophysiology, looking at the neural signals of our visual system, and the non-visual effects of light such as pupil reflexes and circadian rhythm, which gives us insight into what time of the day it is, or whether it is good or not to have bluish illumination in our ambient light.

The Laboratory of Vision at the Institute of Psychology, led by Prof. Dr. Dora Fix Ventura, has a real interdisciplinary team, where I have the opportunity to contribute in several aspects and learn a lot at the same time. Meanwhile I did not lose contact with light measurement, my original profession and I work regularly with colleagues at the Photometry Lab of IEE-USP.

**In your opinion, what makes Brazil attractive for European researchers?**

Brazil has been demonstrating a huge potential for research. The support given by agencies like CNPq, CAPES and the FAPs provide a crucial motivation for researchers to enrol in projects. The dedication of the individual researchers is also amazing and the vision that international collaboration is the best path for results is key and well known. Beside these research related issues, the Brazilian way of welcoming and treating visitors is very helpful for someone visiting from as far away as Europe.

Did you face any specific difficulties to come to Brazil?

Nothing major, besides the few administrative issues to get and regularly extend my visa. I would comment more on the ease of getting acquainted with everyday life and work. It is really easy, without any problems and offers a lot of opportunities.

What motivates you as a researcher?

I want to get know everything! OK, this is impossible, but at least I want to get close to it. It is really nice to have a look into such complicated processes as our neural system and human perception. There is still a lot to find out and it never gets boring.