

## **I-Lab-U: Speed dating between scientists and the public**

A team of young scientists from our Department led by dr. Athina Vidaki won € 10,000 for their science communication and public engagement project, and to organize five speed dating sessions between scientists and the general public.

The 10,000 euros are a donation by the Batavian Society of Experimental Philosophy in the Netherlands (*in dutch*: het Bataafsch Genootschap der Proefondervindelijke Wijsbegeerte), which last year launched their 250th Jubilee anniversary competition to experimentally improve the connection between scientists and the general public. Dr. Athina Vidaki and her team conceived the best idea according to the society and won the competition with their project called 'I-Lab-U: Speed date a scientist'. The prize was recently awarded by the Mayor of Rotterdam in the presence of her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix.



### **Communication gap**

As a result of the rise of fake news and the often-occurring overselling of scientific discoveries, there is a connection gap between science and society. “The society’s trust in science has declined”, says initiator dr. Athina Vidaki, who works as a postdoctoral fellow at our Department. “Public lecture series by scientists already exist: TedX, Rotterdam Science café; however, scientists rarely get the opportunity to engage in one-to-one conversations with the public. This is how we came up with the idea of speed dating. We want to show that scientists are ‘normal’ people, that they are approachable and able to communicate science in layman terms.”

### **The I-Lab-U idea**

The goal of the I-Lab-U project is two-fold: make the public more familiar with current science and provide young scientists with a platform to engage with “ordinary” people to communicate their science and research. Naturally, the outcomes of the speed dating sessions will be assessed in a scientifically valid manner. “We will organize a total of five sessions, one each month, the first half of 2020”, dr. Vidaki explains. Scientists from the EUR, TU Delft and the Erasmus MC can participate.

### **Empirical evidence**

There will be two speed dating sessions per event that will include twenty scientists and forty interested participants from the general public. Questionnaires will be filled out before, during and after each session. Public members will answer questions like - did they understand the content of the conversation? did they receive answers to their questions? The scientists, in turn, who will also attend a

peer discussion, will answer - how did it go? What can be improved? What was challenging? "What we hypothesize is that as a consequence of both experience and peer feedback the communication skills of the scientists during the second session will be better, which will be noticeable by the public.

### **Going digital**

Data collection will occur on our digital platform entirely, which makes the whole project particularly complex. "Everything needs to be digital: everyone involved will register via our website, which will be designed as such to –securely- collect our research data. The I-Lab-U website is planned to go online in late September."

### **Batavian Society**

The goal of the jubilating Batavian Society is to contribute to the development of natural science and technology to benefit the society. Traditionally, the Batavian Society has a close connection to Erasmus MC, with many medical doctors among the 400 members.

For more information, or if you would like to participate, please email us on: [ilabu@erasmusmc.nl](mailto:ilabu@erasmusmc.nl).