

NEWLY ELECTED AND YOUNG – THE FIRST MEMBERS OF THE SWISS YOUNG ACADEMY

How freely will the total of 29 elected “high performers” be able to develop in the Young Academy? What role will their culture of meeting people play in this? Collective intelligence must not be ignored in any case. To what extent does the Young Academy provide a framework for steering academic ideas in unusual, new directions? Silvie Cuperus and Anna-Katharina Ehlert in original sound. This is what the two Advisory Board members of the Swiss Young Academy have to say about the election of the young researchers.

Interview by Franca Siegfried

29 young researchers have been elected members of the Swiss Young Academy! An informal interview with Silvie Cuperus and Anna-Katharina Ehlert from the Young Academy's Advisory Board.

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: Have you read the media release, Silvie? The 29 members of the Young Academy, whom we proposed as Advisory Board members, have been definitively elected by the Board of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences.

Silvie Cuperus: What a variety of personalities have come together in the “First Class” of the Young Academy! My greatest wish is that these 29 people will work well together. With their contribution, they can exert a positive influence on scientific culture and place their fields of research in a wider context. They will certainly also reflect more deeply on their social significance as scientists.

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: We have some great candidates with different backgrounds, from diverse language regions. A good mix, I would say. I'm curious to see what dynamic will develop in the group. They are not individual personalities who are stepping into a new environment either. No, they're all new, fresh and will shape the Young Academy.

Silvie Cuperus: We helped to establish the Swiss Young Academy and can now observe its further development.

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: In an MIT study conducted in 2010, it was proven for the first time that collective intelligence does exist. However, it doesn't depend on the average intelligence of the group, nor even on its brightest members – as one would expect. Nor does it depend on hierarchies. The most important thing for collective intelligence is people who feel at ease in the group and so are free to express all their thoughts and ideas. A meeting culture

is needed that allows people to feel emotionally at ease in a group.

Silvie Cuperus: For this, a stable, secure framework is needed. However, no competitive situation must develop within the group. One can, of course, ask oneself critically whether this is possible in the case of the Swiss Young Academy: for the election, we deliberately proposed talented, young and motivated candidates who have an excellent track record...

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: “High performers”!

Silvie Cuperus: Will these “high performers” be able to develop freely without switching on their performance drive? In other words, be able to get away from the “input factor” and the “publish or perish” idea.

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: There are sure to be both “introverts” and “extroverts” among the “high performers”. What's important to us is that the candidates are willing to work inter- and transdisciplinarily. In addition, they must be able to adopt different perspectives and, of course, be team players and capable of dialogue. This is difficult or virtually impossible to read in a CV. What is important for collective intelligence is how “introverts” are treated in the open dialogue within the group. This depends solely on whether group members have sufficient “social skills” for a mature, open meeting culture.

Silvie Cuperus: Unfortunately, cultivating an open meeting culture is restricted in Corona virus times. The virtual setting becomes a social experiment: will it work as well as a personal meeting? For example, if we could sit down together at a table and share a meal?

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: The 29 first have to meet in a virtual space and form their initial “bonds”.

Silvie Cuperus: The young researchers are sure to be well-versed “digital natives”.

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: But the current pandemic situation can also offer opportunities. For example, I hope that acceptance of science in society will increase. We can see that: we need a set of experts who will work together to find solutions – this is the only way to combat such a virus. Politicians devise possible solutions, among other things, with the help of scientific input and then decide what needs to be done. Better acceptance of the sciences as part of society could increase willingness to further the Swiss Young Academy and create a long-term financial basis for it.

Silvie Cuperus: In this sense, do you think that the Swiss Young Academy is also perceived at the political level? As a network, and after a certain time also as an institution that helps to solve problems and assists politicians with advice?

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: Exactly! That would be the best thing that could happen.

Silvie Cuperus: We just have to hope that no competitive situation develops when it comes to deciding on the topics. The group has to find a consensus for sustainable contributions. It’ll be exciting to see how the focus will turn to topics that have never been covered before in the established Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences.

Anna-Katharina Ehlert: Fresh topics, new solutions that nobody’s thought of yet. So that takes us back to the meeting culture, which is important for steering thinking in completely new directions. And to do so, we need a stable, secure framework, which at the same time is a place where almost anything is possible - the Swiss Young Academy.

Science with editorial experience

Anna-Katharina Ehlert studied food sciences at ETH Zurich, after which she completed further studies in microbiology and a second course of studies at ETH. She gained journalistic experience in radio and television - at SRF - as well as in the Tamedia print media. She gained insights into research promotion and science policy as an assistant to the director of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Today she is a member of the board of reach - research and technology in Switzerland. Anna-Katharina Ehlert works as a scientist in a biotech company in Schlieren and in an editorial capacity as an application specialist.



Science with research management

Dr. Silvie Cuperus currently heads Communication & Events for Life Science Zurich (LSZ). The joint platform of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich promotes top-level research, international education and economic innovation in the life sciences. Her area of responsibility also includes informing the public at large about science. Cuperus studied food chemistry at ETH Zurich and wrote a dissertation on food technology at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences. She deepened her knowledge of research management at the University of Bern by gaining the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Research Management (2015 - 2017).

