

PRESS RELEASE

SISSA opens the academic year and kicks off the National Conference in Science Communication

On 17 November, SISSA celebrates the start of the academic year with a Lectio Magistralis by computational scientist Vittoria Colizza. The Lectio will be followed by a conversation between Minister of University and Research Maria Cristina Messa and President of the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS) Silvio Brusaferrò. An introductory speech will be delivered by SISSA Director Andrea Romanino, thus inaugurating his term of office. The event also kicks off the new National Conference in Science Communication



Trieste, 17 November 2021

A conversation involving the Minister of University and Research, Maria Cristina Messa (live online) and the President of the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS), Silvio Brusaferrò, and a Lectio Magistralis entitled Data Fighting Pandemics by scientist Vittoria Colizza, head of research at INSERM (French National Institute of Health and Medical Research). These are the events marking the opening of the new academic year at SISSA - Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Studi Avanzati in Trieste. The



events will be held on 17 November starting from 11.00 am in the SISSA Auditorium at the Miramare Campus. The new Director of the School, Andrea Romanino, will give the opening address.

Opening of the Trieste School's academic year also coincides with the inauguration of the National Conference in Science Communication to be held from 17 to 20 November at SISSA.

On the front line, tackling the emergency: Vittoria Colizza's speech

"The main difference from last winter is that the high vaccination coverage is now a weapon to widen the gap between the increase rate of new cases and that of hospitalisations. In other words, a weapon to protect the population. The increase in the number of cases we are witnessing signals the start of a new wave, which we expected as winter is known to facilitate transmission, due to weather conditions and changes in behaviour (for example we spend more time indoors, often with closed windows). At the moment, countries such as France and Italy are benefiting from the measures put in place over the summer, such as the green pass and the compulsory use of masks indoors. For this reason, the increase observed in recent weeks is still less significant than in other European countries with similar vaccination coverage. The health impact of the winter wave will depend on maintaining or strengthening these measures – including stressing the importance of mask use and indoor ventilation – on increasing vaccination coverage to reach the remaining millions of unvaccinated people, and on booster doses. However, it will be necessary to continue monitoring the possible appearance of further variants.

This is how Vittoria Colizza, who obtained her PhD in physics at SISSA in 2004 and was awarded the Knighthood of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic by President Mattarella, will introduce her speech at the Opening Ceremony. Colizza, a computational epidemiologist and now head of INSERM's EPIcx laboratory, studies epidemics using mathematical models and works as President Macron's pandemic advisor. Today back at SISSA, the launching pad in her scientific career, Colizza talks about the scientific and historical background of the subject of her studies, of the limitations and strengths of analysis models, with a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic. "Data have been used to deal with pandemics for a long time. They are used to describe the behaviour of individuals and their interactions, through which transmission occurs. They are then associated with models describing the progression of infection over time, which help us answer the question: what strategy should I use to tackle the emergency?".

Right since the first cases appeared in China, Coletti's team has been at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic, supporting the French government in strategic decisions to deal with the Coronavirus emergency. "The models were ready before Covid arrived, and are the result of 20 years of computational epidemiology studies on pandemic emergencies. Having a framework already at our disposal was crucial when

the first wave began or even earlier, in January 2020, when we used what little data we had from China to estimate the risks of exporting the virus to Europe and therefore alert the authorities. Because these risks were high. At the same time, models naturally evolve in a specific way for each epidemic, because the context and risk factors vary from time to time. This was also the case with Covid, and throughout its different phases (appearance of variants, beginning of vaccination campaigns, etc.)."

On a day in which thoughts on science go hand in hand with those on communication, Coletti – who has been a guest at TV talk shows and frequently interviewed by Italian newspapers about the pandemic over the past two years – also comments on her experience and the relationship between scientists and the media. These are her words: "I was not fully prepared for this experience. The difficulty always lies in trying to simplify the message without making it trivial and, at the same time, being transparent about uncertainty. It is important to make it clear that this kind of knowledge is not dogmatic and evolves over time, which is part of the very nature of science. I believe that this element is one we must insist on in our communication, and clearly improve in all aspects, starting with a cultural and pedagogical approach".

The National Conference in Science Communication, from 17 to 20 November at SISSA

17 November will also mark the beginning of the new National Conference in Science Communication organised by SISSA's Interdisciplinary Laboratory. Until 20 November, the four-day event will be rich in appointments. Eight years after the last edition, organisation of the 2021 Conference was driven by the need to rebuild a structured meeting space on urgent and important issues. Beyond Covid, the challenges facing us individually and collectively on artificial intelligence, climate change, new space exploration, personalised medicine, etc. are not merely scientific, political and health challenges, but also communicative ones. The Conference aims to be a national point of reference for improving the quality of relations between science and society in the face of these crucial transitions in today's world.

Highlights of the conference include:

Wednesday 17 November at 15:15 - Aula Magna of the SISSA Campus in Miramare: "Fare il pane senza farina - il data journalism fra mancanze e carenze" ("Making bread without flour - data journalism between failures and shortages") with the participation of data journalists Davide Mancino and Riccardo Saporiti, authors of two data journalism investigations dedicated to the pandemic entitled "Pazienti dimenticati" ("Forgotten patients") and "La grande onda" ("The great wave"), and writer Paolo Giordano (connected live) who, together with SISSA, supported their creation with the proceeds of his book "Nel contagio" ("How contagion works"). The event will be moderated by Fabiana Zollo, researcher in computer science at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, where she coordinates the Data Science for Society laboratory.

Thursday 18 November at 12.00 - SISSA, via Bonomea 265 - "How to study Science Communication" with Massimiano Bucchi, Sarah R. Davies and Annette Leßmöllmann, authors of three important publications on science communication research.

Thursday 18 November at 18.30 - SISSA, via Bonomea 265, Trieste: "Perché la luna?" ("Why the moon?") with Massimiano Bucchi, professor of Sociology of Science at the University of Trento and Arturo Stalteri, musician. The event will be a reading concert telling the story of man's conquest on the Moon through the stories of many protagonists: not only the astronauts, but also John Fitzgerald Kennedy, film director Fritz Lang, Walt Disney and many more. All the characters who have contributed, in different and sometimes little-known ways, to this extraordinary achievement.

Friday 19 November at 16.30 - SISSA, via Bonomea 265, Trieste: "Le nuove piattaforme social: istruzioni per l'uso" ("The new social platforms: instructions for use") with influencers Dario Bressanini and Beatrice Mautino. During the event, the two experts will explain how young communicators can make themselves known and build their reputation but also – for those who already have an established career and want to consolidate it – how to promote their editorial products and identify ways to support their information activities.

Saturday 20 November at 12.00 - SISSA, Via Bonomea 265, Trieste: "Pietro e Rossella, due maestri per il Master in Comunicazione della Scienza" ("Pietro and Rossella, two masters for the Master's in Science Communication"). This will be an occasion to remember Pietro Greco and Rossella Panarese, two great figures in the field of science culture and communication, who died prematurely over the last year. The event will be attended by Silvia Bencivelli, journalist and co-host of Pagina 3, Yuri Castelfranchi, academic and populariser of science, Roberta Fulci, author and voice of Radio3Scienza, Gianluca Carta, coordinator of 10LAB, science centre of Sardegna Ricerche, and the journalist Fabio Pagan.

Meetings will be held in presence, with reduced capacity given the pandemic situation. Some events will be available in hybrid mode (both in presence and online). More information at: www.comunicazionescienza.com

Commentary by SISSA Director Andrea Romanino

"My mandate begins at a time when, thanks to the management of the health emergency, we can look to the future with greater optimism. We need to safeguard the path that has allowed us to bring our students and researchers back to the laboratories, in front of a blackboard. From this point of view, we will continue to play our part in safeguarding neutral, verifiable and reproducible science'. Maggiori

SISSA

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IMAGE:

L'edificio della SISSA - Scuola Internazionale
Superiore di Studi Avanzati.

Crediti: Cristiano De Nobili

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