Name of the MSC Fellow: Francesco Demichele
Nationality: Italian
Host organisation: The Energy and Water Agency
Country of the Host: Malta
Project Acronym: MARSoluT
Project start and end date: 01/03/2019 – 28/02/2023
Type of MSC action, H2020: ITN

Your story:
Project objectives and research field:
The project aims to develop regulatory recommendations for facilitating the application of Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) schemes in Malta. The ESR is involved in the modelling of MAR schemes in Malta’s largest sea-level aquifer and the implementation of a pilot MAR scheme in a smaller aquifer. The project will develop a risk assessment strategy to guide the application of future MAR schemes.

Tell us why your topic is important and/or how it brings to advancement in your research field:
The availability of freshwater is a key factor in the socio-economic development of any country. Due to the semi-arid climate and lack of any mountains, rivers and lakes, the freshwater supply that has provided a reliable water supply through the ages has been groundwater. For this reason, together with the ever-increasing pressures of climate change and population growth, the Maltese Islands have by far the lowest natural freshwater availability per person per year of all EU Member States. Within a comprehensive water management framework, groundwater is an important resource to be safeguarded and Managed Aquifer Recharge is an essential tool to sustain groundwater supplies and help to ensure that groundwater can keep playing this role well into the future in terms of sustainable yields and good status of quality.

What are the benefits of participating in an MSC action?
The benefits of participating in an MSC action are priceless and can be summarised that the Early Stage Researcher (ESR) is gaining excellent scientific expertise and thus becomes a proven expert in his field but also in terms of networking, communication and project management skills. Since the beginning of the MSC action, every ESR within the project was required to travel abroad to attend workshops, conferences and seminars. This is the best way to meet experts within our field from all over the world whose names could otherwise be known only through their research articles. The MSC action is also driving us to improve our communication skills through the dissemination process of our research results through the publication of journal articles and the participation in seminars and conferences with experts in the field of MAR. All our projects with the MSC action focus on tackling practical environmental issues related to real MAR projects that are undertaken by the host institutions.
Did you encounter any challenges during application/implementation and did you get any help?
The process of applying for the position and the transition was very straightforward.

Why did you choose a widening country as a Host? What was the reason that convinced you? What is making you professionally happy here?

My host institution in Malta, The Energy and Water Agency serves as the policy arm of the Ministry responsible for water in Malta. Being a part of the Water Unit allows me to challenge myself to learn and contribute to the development of policy to ensure secure, sustainable and affordable water for the Maltese Islands. My wish is that after gaining technical knowledge and experience in Malta in the development of policies which support MAR initiatives, I can support other countries drafting their own water legislative frameworks linked to water scarcity management including developing countries.

Would you recommend others to apply? What useful advice/tips can you give them?
The only advice I can give to those who wish to apply for an MSC action is to go for it. Although the research objectives may seem tough to achieve, be sure that you will never work alone, indeed, successful people are never ever alone.