Success Stories from MSC Fellows Hosted in Widening Countries

Name of the MSC Fellow: Dr. Konstantinos Makantasis
Nationality: Greek
Host organisation: Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta
Country of the Host: Malta
Project Acronym: TAMED
Project start and end date: 01 July 2020 – 30 June 2022
Type of MSC action, H2020: IF – Widening Fellowship

Your story:
Project objectives and research field:
The TAMED project aims to create new methodologies and algorithms for realising aspects of general emotional intelligence, one of the core long-term goals of artificial intelligence and artificial psychology. Towards this direction, TAMED exploits the representation power of tensor-based learning models to build general models of affect and investigate the degree to which such models are possible.
Tell us why your topic is important and/or how it brings to advancement in your research field:
The role of emotion is critical for the understanding of human intelligence. The underlying mechanisms of general emotional intelligence, however, are still largely unknown. As a result, the task of representing our general abilities to recognize and express emotion as a computational process is well under-explored. To address this outstanding challenge, it is essential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to focus on unconventional approaches and novel methods for discovering entirely new representations of emotional manifestations. Such representations will enable the development of affect models capable of generalising across different contexts, moods, personalities, social settings, and modalities of human input data. TAMED aims to uniquely couple algorithmic advances in tensor algebra, ordinal labelling and preference leaning for the construction of affect models with increased generalisation capacities, hence, directly addressing one of the main long-term visionary goals of AI.

What are the benefits of participating in an MSC action?
MSC actions are exclusively focusing on research and knowledge transfer. This critical feature allows me to enhance not only my research skills, but also my managerial, teaching, student supervision, grant proposal preparation, and industry oriented-skills. During TAMED, I will reinforce my existing skills. Still, at the same time, I will obtain new competencies, thereby enhancing my professional maturity, broadening my academic skills, acquiring industry-based experience, and diversifying my project portfolio. Therefore, the fellowship boosts my future career prospects. In the medium term, I will have a better career prospect as an experienced researcher in the academic sector. In the long term, the fellowship can create career paths both in academic and industry sectors, by helping me to attain a permanent academic position or to become a team/group leader in innovation leading companies.

Did you encounter any challenges during application/implementation and did you get any help?
Developing a successful grant application is a challenge on its own and requires collective work from different parties. For any research proposal, and TAMED is not an exception, the most challenging part is to develop the idea, and design the objectives and the research methodology. I carried through with this challenging part by discussions with Prof. Georgios Yannakakis, who is my supervisor during this fellowship. Besides that, a detailed description and implementation of hosting arrangements were also challenging, given that the University of Malta was a terra incognita for me. The assistance of Research Support Services Directorate, Project Support, IT Services, and Human Resource Management offices of the university was crucial for describing and implementing those arrangements during the proposal preparation phase, but also during the project running. Finally, meetings with NPCs were essential to make sure that the application qualified the MSCA eligibility criteria.
Would you recommend others to apply? What useful advice/ tips can you give them?

I strongly recommend others to apply for an MSCA Individual fellowship. This award provides a unique opportunity for researchers to work on what they like. At the same time, the skills acquired during such a fellowship can significantly increase their future career prospects. I suggest the applicants to have a close collaboration with their supervisor during the proposal preparation, as well as, with any entity of the hosting organisation that can provide them with information about the hosting arrangements. Finally, check that the proposal qualifies with the eligibility criteria with the aid of NCPs.