

European Commission awards ERC Consolidator Grant to two researchers from the University of Pisa

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Paola Binda and Elisa Coda have been selected for their “PredActive” and “ArOMa” projects

Two projects from the University of Pisa have been awarded the ERC Consolidator Grant, one of the most prestigious European Commission grants for mid-career researchers, aimed at strengthening their research groups and pursuing innovative research activities. The winners are **Paola Binda**, Associate Professor at the Department of Translational Research and New Technologies in Medicine and Surgery, who received EUR 1.99 million over five years for the “PredActive” project, and **Elisa Coda**, a researcher at the Department of Civilisations and Forms of Knowledge, who received EUR 1.55 million for the “ArOMa” project. In both cases the University of Pisa is the Host Institution of the projects.

“I congratulate the two researchers on the exceptional result they have achieved, which testifies to the excellence of their research”, commented Professor **Benedetta Mennucci**, pro-rector for the Promotion of Research. “The satisfaction is all the greater considering that the projects presented by Binda and Coda have benefited from the service activated by the University of Pisa in the last two years to support the preparation of projects for ERC calls.”

At the European level, 327 of the 2,313 projects received were selected for funding, resulting in a total investment of EUR 678,000,000. In particular, the two Pisan projects are among the 103 funded at the European level in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities. In Italy, a total of 20 proposals were selected, with the University of Pisa being the only institution in Tuscany to receive ERC funding.



PredActive - Predictions and Actions shape sensory plasticity

The PredActive project has the objective of providing an innovative explanation to a fundamental question: Why does the plasticity of our brain decrease with age? As we grow, the nervous system develops expectations which optimise perception but reduce learning capacity because they lead to ignoring much of the sensory information. PredActive proposes that this is what limits plasticity and will explore its mechanisms through neuroimaging and psychophysiological techniques. In addition, it will assess potential clinical implications, such as new strategies for rehabilitating sensory functions, for example in lazy eye syndrome. The financing of this ERC-Consolidator project was finalised a mere few weeks after the conclusion of the preceding ERC-Starting project, PUPILTRAITS. Paola Binda stresses that “PredActive is the product of teamwork. The ideas were conceived in our research group, and their implementation is contingent upon the collaborative culture of the University of Pisa and the specific infrastructures and skills that it offers. For example, both PUPILTRAITS and PredActive rely on our partnership with

Imago7, the sole ultra-high-field magnetic resonance facility for human studies in Italy. This collaboration provides a unique opportunity to investigate brain function at an unparalleled level of detail.”

ArOMa - “Aristotle One and Many. The Arabic Pseudepigrapha”

The ArOMa Project examines works attributed to Aristotle in Greek, Latin, Arabic and Jewish cultures between the end of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Of these, the most numerous and influential were in Arabic. The aim of the ArOMa project is to classify, study, translate and disseminate these materials which, in their diversity, together with the authentic works of Aristotle, have contributed to the medieval image of the philosopher as “the master of those who know”. Elisa Coda observes that “the transmission of philosophical and scientific knowledge from antiquity to the Middle Ages represents one of the most complex and interesting phenomena in the history of ideas. Moreover, our university has already been the site of an important ERC project on this subject. I am therefore honoured to be able to commence a new line of research in this field, for which Pisa is internationally renowned. The ArOMa project is centred on the figure of Aristotle in the Arabic, Latin and Hebrew reception and examines works that have been attributed to him but are not his. The texts that we will make available to historians of philosophical and scientific ideas are currently almost unknown, but in the premodern age they made a significant contribution to the development of a scientific language that was shared by the three cultures.”

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