Behind the scenes of international conferences: the 13th Young Minds Leadership Meeting

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One of the most enriching experiences in our scientific careers is the opportunity to attend international conferences: meeting new peers to discuss science, work on future collaborations, and in many cases, go sightseeing and have fun.

Nevertheless, have you ever wondered about the organizational workflow and experience behind an international conference? Come along with us, the Santiago YM Section, as we share our feelings, thoughts, and experience organizing such an important event as the 13th Young Minds Leadership Meeting.

Public outreach is a core value of the European Physical Society (EPS), and for over a decade, our section has worked to make science accessible beyond academia. In recent years, we have integrated diversity and inclusion as key pillars of our approach, building strong connections with local associations, universities, and experts. These experiences prepared us to take on our biggest challenge so far: organizing the 13th YMLM.

When did we begin planning? It all began in September 2024 (almost a year in advance!), with early discussions on logistics, accommodation, budget, and program design. Our goal was clear: create an event that combined scientific sessions with personal development and social awareness topics. The meeting was scheduled for 4–6 June 2025, starting with a welcome reception to break the ice and encourage attendees to connect from the very beginning.

What did the program look like? We curated a blend of physics talks on cutting-edge topics, including cosmology by EPS President Mairi Sakellariadou, quantum materials by Víctor Pardo (researcher at University of Santiago de Compostela, USC), attosecond optics by Bárbara Buades (PhD in Photonics, ICFO), and physics beyond the Standard Model by Meijian Li (postdoc, IGFAE). Broader issues were also addressed, such as AI from a gender perspective by Eva Cernadas (USC), and mental health in academia by researchers from USC's Clinical Psychology Department. Career-focused sessions included a "PhD-to-CEO" roundtable with Pablo Cabanelas (Neutron Insights, USC) and Bárbara Buades (Meetoptics, Barcelona), and a professional development session by Paulo Ferreira (Group Leader and Scientific Coordinator in INL, Portugal). Finally, two poster sessions were held, where the EPL journal prized the 2 most valuable activities from the YM Sections joining the event.

Was there time for fun? Of course! A networking activity, group dinner, and a live concert by the local band Ginko Biloba created a relaxed, friendly environment—essential for fostering connections and collaborations.

How did we manage to plan everything? A clear way of organising the team was fundamental. In our case, we relied on social media to create a community where all the different tasks (accommodation, social diffusion, etc) were discussed. A person was in charge of managing the event, and then individual tasks were assigned to the different team members. In addition, weekly meetings were held to discuss these points. We believe that good organization is key to making such an event work smoothly. Still, we are aware that in academia—where pressure and competition often speed things up—it is not always easy to maintain structure and clear communication.

Who helped us along the way? One of the most important lessons we learned was the value of asking for and accepting support. The EPS Young Minds Action Committee (AC) was incredibly helpful, offering guidance on complex matters like visa procedures. In particular, we would like to thank Damián Rodríguez (AC member), for his advice and constant support throughout

▼ FIG. 1: Welcome reception held on June 4th in Fonseca Palace (USC)

▲ FIG. 2: PhD-to-CEO Roundtable with Pablo Cabanelas, and Bárbara Buades

our journey. We also received significant support from OPTICA, especially for the PhD-to-CEO roundtable, with Yann Amouroux (Director, Europe at OPTICA), along with Lasha Dalakishvili (AC member), contributing both their time and expertise.

Did everything go smoothly? As with any large event, a few hiccups were inevitable (last-minute poster printing, rainy weather, small scheduling changes, *etc.*). These moments reminded us of the value of staying calm and relying on teamwork. The experience of senior members and efficient internal communication helped us respond quickly and effectively.

Was it worth it? This international experience has broadened our minds, not only from a scientific view but also from a personal growth aspect. Running such an important event was a big responsibility, and our major desire was that all the attendees enjoyed the event, the city, and our section in the best way. Throughout the long journey, we gained a lot of expertise in managing logistics aside from the scientific tasks, and we do consider it one of our most valuable professional experiences so far, not only for our Bachelor and Master members, but also for the PhD candidates who will, sooner or later, follow their own professional path. ■

▼ FIG. 3: Networking activity held in the sports hall of our University

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