



With the financial support of:



Soapbox Science Brussels: A Growing Outreach Platform for the promotion of Women in Science in Belgium

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The Soapbox Science outreach platform



- Aims at the promotion of women in science and their work.
- Mimics the format of the Speaker's corner in Hyde Park, London



Historical *Speaker's corner* in Sydney and in Hyde Park, London.

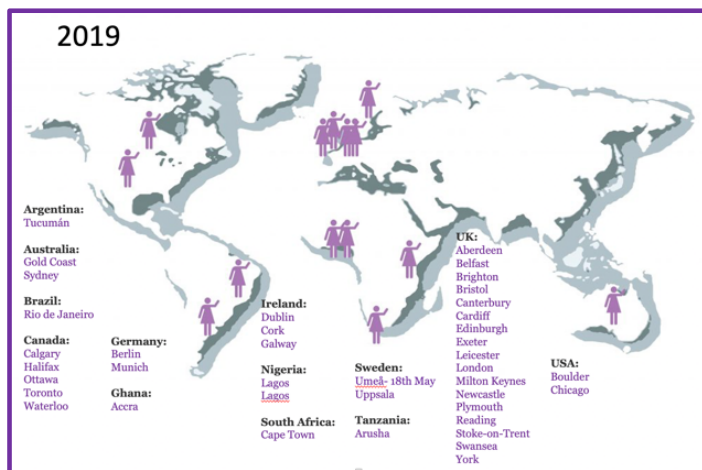
Source: [Victor Zammit](#)



The Soapbox Science outreach platform



- Created in 2011 in London; expanded rapidly

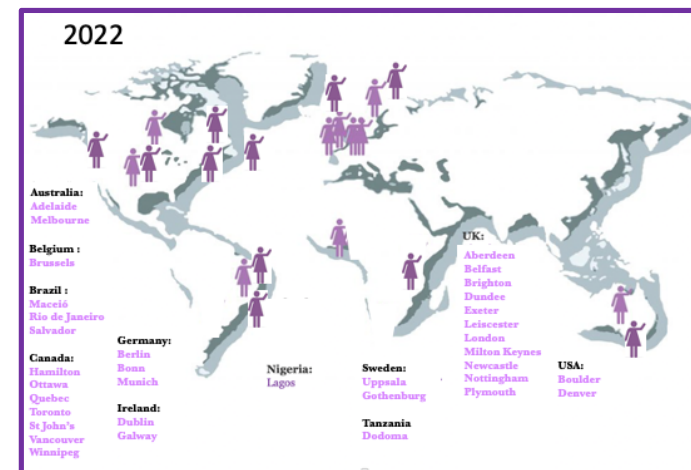


39 events
13 countries
4 continents

COVID pandemic



35 events
11 countries
4 continents



Source: www.soapboxscience.org



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Soapbox Science in Belgium



- First edition (2020) marked by the pandemic; eventually held online
- Edition 2021 on site in the heart of Brussels
 - Prepared in online and on-site format
 - Authorization given 2 days before the event



← Soapbox Science Brussels in 2021



↑ Belgian Soapbox Science event in 2020, adapted to the COVID circumstances



Soapbox Science Brussels in a glance



- Created in 2019
 - by 6 researchers from 2 Federal Scientific Institutions
- First edition online (2020):
 - 3 sessions (FR, NL, EN)
- Second session on-site (2021):
 - Following standard format of Soapbox Science initiative
 - 4 "soapboxes"
 - 3 one-hour sessions
 - For each session:
 - 4 speakers
 - At least one talk in each main language (FR, NL, EN)

	2020	2021	2022
Format	Online	On site	On site
Nb. of candidate speakers	24	69	40
Nb. of actual speakers	Selected: 12 Actual: 7	Selected: 12 Actual: 11	Selected: 12
Nb. of attendees	~40	~600	
Nb. of research institutions represented	Selected: 7 Actual: 5	9	9
Nb. of scientific disciplines represented	Selected: 8 Actual: 5	10	5



Soapbox Science Brussels: Overview



- Target: women in STEMM (Sciences, Technologies, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine)
- Edition 2022: Addressed research disciplines:



Candidate speakers



Selected speakers



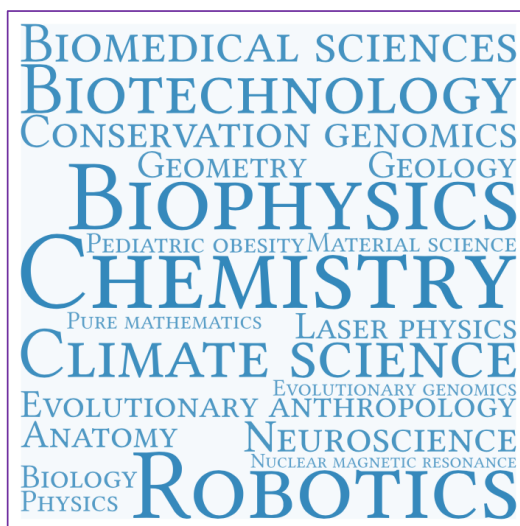
Soapbox Science Brussels: Overview



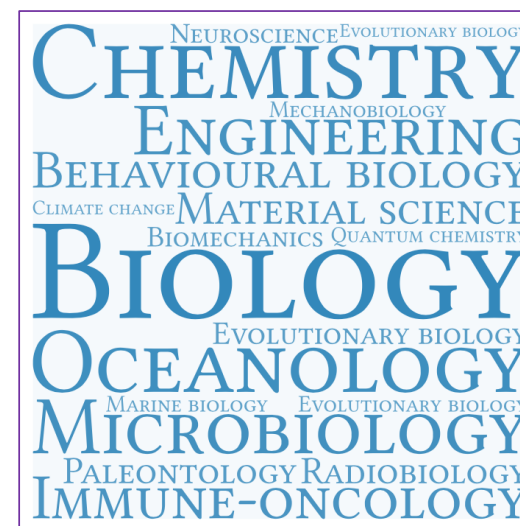
- Target: women in STEMM (Sciences, Technologies, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine)
- Research disciplines addressed by selected candidates:



2020



2021



2022

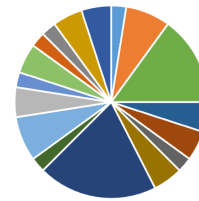
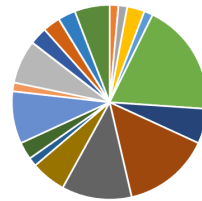
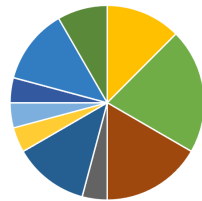


Soapbox Science Brussels: Overview

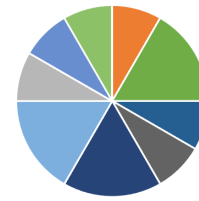
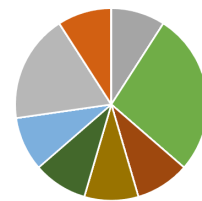
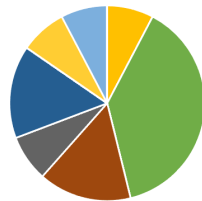


- Representation of **Belgian research institutions and universities:**

Candidates →



Selected →



2020

2021

2022



Soapbox Science Brussels: Lessons learned



- Communication is key
 - Find the right contact persons (E.g., comm. service, research affairs officers, faculty deans)
 - Importance of building a strong network
- Motivations for the academic and research institutions to participate:
 - Showcase their own institution
 - “Our institution is engaged in more gender equality”
 - Showcase their own researchers
 - (e.g. presentation of their speakers on their website)
 - Make use of Soapbox Science to indirectly address known internal issues
 - Address gender issues in a positive way and without frontal conflicts
 - This internal sensibilisation can appear more important than self-promotion
- During the event, initiating an audience (with volunteers, family, friends) helps starting and ensuring a successful event



Conclusions



- Soapbox Science Brussels gradually finds its place in the Belgian research community
- The organisation greatly benefits from the experience and support of the main team in London.
- Soapbox Science showed resilience with respect to the pandemic at international level, and at Belgian level when it could develop to a succesful event in the heart of Brussels, after a first online edition
- Building a strong network is key
- Ensuring a good diversity in research topics, a wide representation of the Belgian institutions, and a good balance between languages is important for the effectiveness, and the credibility of the initiative.

=> Importance of paying a constant attention to our own biases



Thank you for your attention !



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ADDITIONAL SLIDES

Why Soapbox Science: the gender gap



- Gender biases and stereotypes are difficult to address because
 - they are part of our culture and norms
 - they affect all people, *including the discriminated groups*
- affect the image of scientists and their role



Source: Wikipedia

Professor Calculus
(Tintin), and
Rick (Rick and Morty)



Source: Mead & Métraux Science,
126: 384–390, 1957

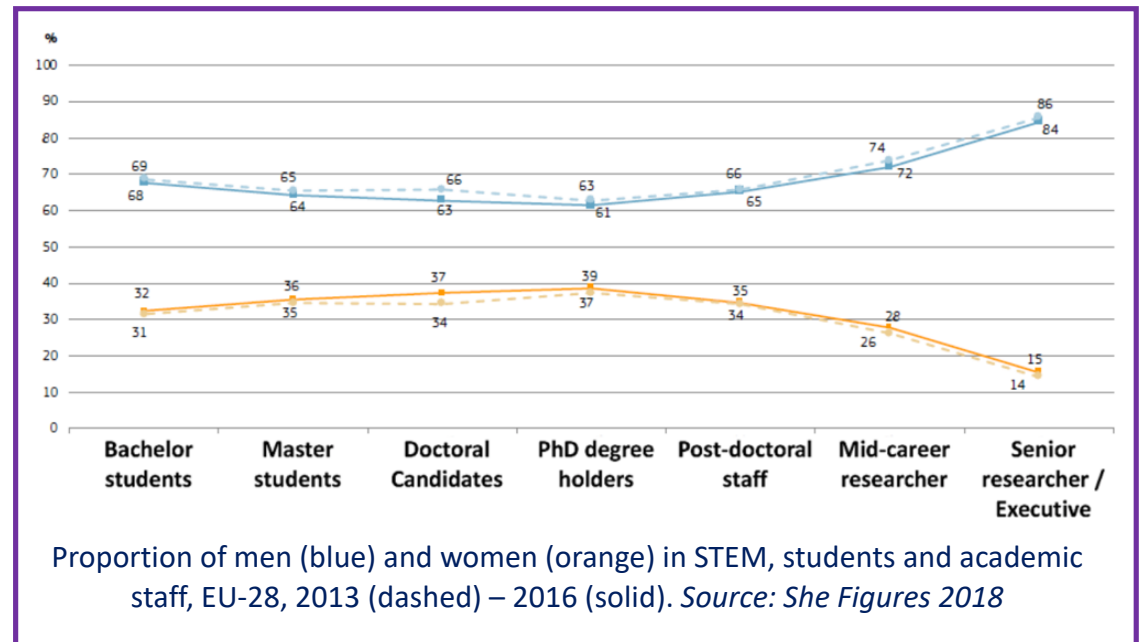


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Why Soapbox Science: the gender gap



- Impact on women and non-binary people in science:
 - Reduced visibility as a speaker, chairperson, expert, author, ...
 - Less involvement in committees, pannels, as project leads, etc.
 - More often victims of a hostile work environment , isolement, (micro-)aggressions, harassment, bullying, etc.
 - “Ceiling glass”



- ⇒ Importance of attractive female role models
- ⇒ Aim of Soapbox Science is to showcase women in sciences



Selection of the speakers



- Selection criteria
 - Based on the application form provided by the international organisation
 - Criteria were appointed among the local organizing committee in Brussels
- Main criteria:
 - Perceived interest of the subject for the public
 - Perceived motivation of the candidate for doing a Soapbox Science Event
 - Showcase “hard” disciplines (e.g., engineering) and less-populated disciplines (e.g., mathematics)
- Final criteria:
 - Diversity of the institutes
 - Diversity of the research fields/discipline
 - Diversity in seniority (if possible)
 - Balance in the languages used

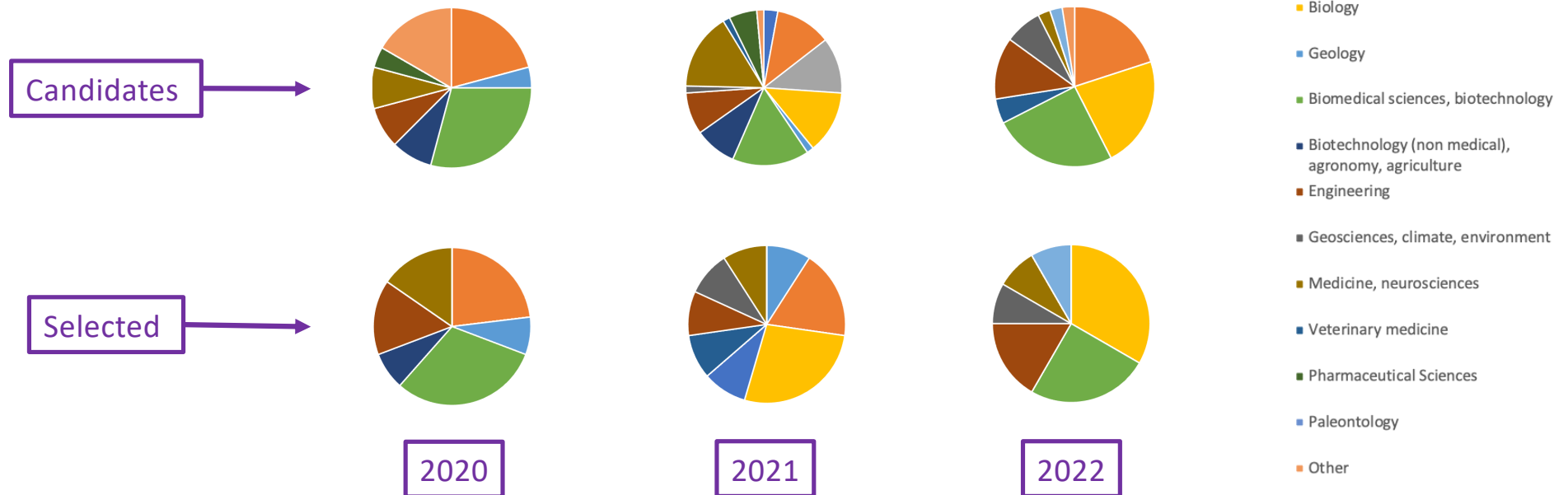


Soapbox Science Brussels: Overview



- Repartition of **research fields**

- NB: many interdisciplinary topics => only qualitative !



Soapbox Science Brussels: Feedback



- Survey immediately after the speaker's performances
- Main results in 2021:
 - 21% of the visitors “just happened to walk by” and hadn't planned to visit
 - On average, attendees listened to 2.24 scientists
 - 69% of the visitors found that the event was “effective” or “very effective” at promoting women in science
 - 93% of the attendees were “quite likely” or “definitely” going to recommend Soapbox Science to others



Contact and reporting in the media

- Contact: soapboxsciencebrussels@oma.be
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SoapboxScienceBrussels>
- Twitter account: [@SoapboxscienceB](https://twitter.com/SoapboxscienceB)
- Website Soapbox Science 2020 Brussels: <http://soapboxscience.org/soapbox-science-2020-brussels/>
- First event on Youtube and reportage on the 2021 event: <https://tinyurl.com/y5jqk6dv>
- Website Soapbox Science International: <http://soapboxscience.org>
- Soapbox Science International, [10-year report](#), June 2021

Written press:

- Camille Wernaers, [Soapbox Science Brussels](#), Axelle, n° 238, April 2021
- Pham, L. B. S., et al., [Soapbox Brussels, une première en Belgique](#), [Science connection](#), in French and Dutch, to be published in n° 65 (2021)
- Senne Starckx, [Wetenschapper is niet altijd oudere man met warrig haar](#), De Standaard, 28 June 2021

Audiovisual press:

- [Interview](#) in the programme “Super Nanas”, RTBF, channel Vivacité, 10 Oct. 2020
- [Interview](#) in the programme “Les Grenades”, RTBF, channel La Première, 1 Aug. 2021

