



2025 ECSITE DIRECTORS FORUM

Reuniting in a polarised world

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 20 November

**Lisbon
Portugal**
20-21 NOV '25
PAVILION OF
KNOWLEDGE

10.00 – 11.00 Main entry of the Pavilion of Knowledge

Check-in and welcome coffee

Reception of the participants and welcome coffee.

11.00 – 11.30 Mariano Gago Auditorium

Official Opening

Rosalia Vargas · *President of Ciência Viva & Director of Pavilion of Knowledge – Ciência Viva Science Centre, Lisbon*

Maria João Fonseca · *President of Ecsite, Head of Communication – Natural History and Science Museum*

of the University of Porto & Director of Hall of Biodiversity - Ciência Viva Science Centre

Catherine Franche · *Executive Director of Ecsite*

11.30 – 12.30 Mariano Gago Auditorium

Keynote speech

Survival in an Era of Ignorance, Prejudice and Polarization

Richard Zimler · *Journalist and novelist*

The people excluded from history are the result of the people who take control of history.

Minorities, the disadvantaged people, the silenced. Richard Zimler books focus on the vanquished, not the victors. Talking about polarisation is preserving memory and build new futures.

12.30 – 14.00 Atrium

Lunch & Networking

14.00 – 15.00 Atrium

Masterclass

Polarisation and Dialogue Part I

Agata Komendant-Brodowska · *Assistant Professor and Educator - University of Warsaw*

Katarzyna Abramczuk · *Assistant Professor - University of Warsaw*

Shaoni Wang · *Postdoctoral Researcher - University of Groningen*

The workshop will be presented by Agata Komendant, project leader of the ActIPLEx project, which aims to combat social polarisation among young people, in Europe, by educating them about the dangers of polarisation and increasing their understanding of the mechanisms responsible for the process. Starting with a game-based workshop on polarisation and dialogue, we will simulate an educational social case for the audience. In this two-part series masterclass, we will continue by analysing real life case studies and community insights gathered from all the participants. We will delve into the mechanics at play in polarisation and extend knowledge about why people find it so difficult to communicate effectively and peacefully, and discover strategies to identify a common ground.



15.30 – 16.30 Atrium

Coffee & Networking

16.30 – 18.00 Atrium

Masterclass

Polarisation and Dialogue Part II

Agata Komendant-Brodowska · Assistant Professor and Educator - University of Warsaw

Katarzyna Abramczuk · Assistant Professor - University of Warsaw

Shaoni Wang · Postdoctoral Researcher - University of Groningen

Continuation of the masterclass session.



18.00 – 19.00 Mariano Gago Auditorium

Ecsite Updates

The Board and the Ecsite Team will update member Directors on the Ecsite Network Programme and new activities for 2026.

20.00

Dinner and Literary Salon

Afonso Cruz · Writer

In this Literary Salon Afonso Cruz, an award-winning Portuguese writer, will present his view of a Polarised World and challenge your own view. Each participant will receive an Afonso Cruz publication.

Dinner and Literacy Salon will be held on [Casa do Alentejo](#), a restaurant which serves typical Portuguese food.

Address: Rua Portas de Santo Antão, 58, 1150-268 Lisboa

Friday, 21 November

8.00 – 9.00 Atrium

Coffee with pastries & Networking

9.00 – 10.00 Mariano Gago Auditorium

Keynote speech

How to stop polarisation? Nature should be the focal elementHelena Freitas · Full Professor in Ecology and Biodiversity - University of Coimbra | UNESCO CHAIR HOLDER
in Biodiversity Safeguard for Sustainable Development

Polarisation results from binary cognitive frameworks that structure public debate into rigid oppositions: us vs. them, development vs. conservation, economy vs. ecology. In contrast, natural systems operate according to principles of interdependence, complementarity and co-evolution, in which diversity functions as a foundation for resilience rather than a factor of conflict, where nature helps us move beyond binary thinking, in the “ecology of dialogue” with a new grammar for democracy and the earth. Refocusing political dialogue on our common ecological condition allows us to overcome adversarial logics and build systemic, cooperative and multiscale approaches, aligned with the complexity of the socio-ecological systems of which we are a part.

10.00 – 10.30 Exhibition Area

Guided visit to the Pavilion of Knowledge exhibitions and backstage areas

10.30 – 11.30 Atrium**Coffee & Networking****11.30 – 11.45** Mariano Gago Auditorium**Invitation to next year's Ecsite events****11.45 – 11.55** Mariano Gago Auditorium**Presentation of the Environmental Legacy Project**Raquel Gaspar · *CEO Ocean Alive***11.55 – 12.30** Mariano Gago Auditorium**Closing Remarks**Pedro Russo · *Incoming President of Ciência Viva*Maria João Fonseca · *President of Ecsite, Head of Communication – Natural History and Science Museum of the University of Porto & Director of Hall of Biodiversity – Ciência Viva Science Centre***12.30 – 14.30** Atrium**Lunch & Farewell****SPEAKERS****Afonso Cruz**

Afonso Cruz is a Portuguese multidisciplinary artist, author of more than 40 books, among novels, theatre plays, picture books, juvenile novellas, poetry, photo-text, poetry, non-fiction and essays. His books are published in more than 20 languages. During his career he received many awards, such the EU Prize for Literature for the novel Kokoschka's Doll. He also works as a filmmaker, an illustrator, and a music writer. He studied at Escola Superior de Belas Artes de Lisboa and at Instituto Superior de Artes Plásticas of Madeira, in Portugal.

Agata Komendant-Brodowska

Agata Komendant-Brodowska is a sociologist, project leader, educator and researcher, she is currently an assistant professor at the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Warsaw. She is most interested in understanding the micro-to-macro problems, that is how individual behaviours, decisions, motivations, or attitudes lead to group or global outcomes. Agata Komendant-Brodowska is leading multiple international educational projects, such as, ActIPLEx (Action for Interactive Anti-Polarisation Learning Experiences for a Better Democracy) whose aim is to create courses, educational games and game-based workshops about social polarisation and dialogue, and the project ACTiSS (Action for Computational Thinking in Social Sciences), to foster the analytical capability in behavioural dynamics using computational methods in social science students.

Helena Freitas

"Science holds a commitment to society": this statement perfectly encapsulates the mission of Helena Freitas. One of the most respected voices in the fields of biodiversity and nature conservation – not only for her academic and scientific contributions but also for her associative, political, and public engagement work – Helena Freitas is a Full Professor of Biodiversity and Ecology at the Department of Life Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology, University of Coimbra, where she also holds the UNESCO Chair in Biodiversity and Sustainable Development. Representative of Portugal and Vice-President of UNESCO's International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB-ICC), she is currently the Director of the Serralves Park. Among the many positions she has held, notable roles include: Founder and Coordinator of the Centre for Functional Ecology - Science for People & the Planet | TERRA - Associate Laboratory for Sustainable Land Use and Ecosystem Services IPBES Focal Point for Portugal. Scientific Coordinator of FitoLab, President of the League for the Protection of Nature and of the Portuguese Ecological Society, and National Correspondent of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences. She received her PhD in Ecology from the University of Coimbra, in collaboration with the University of Bielefeld, in 1993. She published hundreds of scientific articles throughout her career and wrote several science dissemination articles.

Katarzyna Abramczuk

Katarzyna Abramczuk is a sociologist whose work connects social theory, mathematical modelling, cognitive psychology, behavioural economics, and emerging technologies. She focuses on the dynamic processes underlying social phenomena and advocates for a multidisciplinary, multilevel approach. Her research covers social capital, trust, spatial segregation, group decision-making, web credibility, children's internet use, 3D communication, voice assistants and VR, technology engagement among older adults, and well-being in remote work. She is affiliated with the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Warsaw and the Laboratory of Interactive Technologies at the National Information Processing Institute. She has contributed to international educational projects such as ACTISS and ActiPLEx, and has collaborated with the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, the Institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.

Richard Zimler

Richard Zimler's books have been translated into 23 languages and have appeared on bestseller lists in 12 different countries. His most recent novel in English, *The Incandescent Threads*, was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Awards in the United States and a Number 1 bestseller in Portugal. Richard has lived in Portugal since 1990 and has both Portuguese and American nationality. He has published 14 novels and eight children's books over the last 30 years. He writes his novels in English and books for children in Portuguese. Since 2000, he has lectured about his writing, Jewish history and culture, and various political and social topics at more than 400 schools and universities, 150 bookshops, 100 libraries and 50 cultural centers. In July 2017, the city of Porto awarded Richard its highest distinction, the Medal of Honor. His website is: www.zimler.com

Shaoni Wang

Shaoni Wang is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Groningen, specialising in computational modelling of social behaviour and collective decision-making. Her research combines agent-based modelling, behavioural theory, and participatory design to investigate social polarisation and democratic innovation. Through EU and Erasmus+ projects such as INCITE-DEM and ACTIPLEx, she contributes to open-access education and co-develops dialogue tools that promote inclusion and civic engagement.

SELECTED ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY PROJECT

Ocean Alive

This year, the 2025's edition of the Ecsite Directors Forum will contribute to the conservation of the Portuguese seagrass meadows in the Sado estuary region by donating part of the registration fee to the Ocean Alive project. The project Sea Guardians is promoted by Ocean Alive to empower fisherwomen to monitor and care for seagrass beds in the Sado estuary. This habitat nurtures marine life, namely dolphins and sea horses, and provides a living for artisanal fishers, namely women. Seagrass beds sequester large quantities of CO₂ in their biomass and seafloor sediment and are an important component of Blue Carbon, contributing to climate regulation.

POST DIRECTORS FORUM TOURS

The 2025 Ecsite Directors Forum participants can take part in scientific tours across Portugal organised by the Ciencia Viva Network of 22 Science Centres.

The one, two or three day tours will explore how each Ciência Viva Science Centre feeds on the local culture, by bringing researchers, school community and society closer together. For those who do not want to commit to longer travel plans, a Friday afternoon guided tour to Oceanário de Lisboa will be available for no additional payment. Registration is mandatory for all tours – the registration form will be available upon finalising the registration for the main event. Details of the tours as well as prices: [here](#).

VENUE



Pavilion of Knowledge – Ciência Viva Science Centre
Largo José Mariano Gago, nº1; 1990-073 Lisboa, Portugal
www.pavconhecimento.pt
www.cienciaviva.pt

PARTNER

