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### ► To cite this version:

Nicolas Gallois, Roxane Dhommée, Paul Braylé, Lauris Evariste, Idrissa Soumaoro, et al.. Federating young researchers in microbial ecotoxicology: EcotoxicoMicYR 2021, the first international webinar organized for and by young microbial ecotoxicology researchers. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 2022, 29 (43), pp.65880-65885. 10.1007/s11356-022-22410-4 . hal-03780567

**HAL Id: hal-03780567**

**<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-03780567v1>**

Submitted on 17 May 2024

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## Federating young researchers in microbial ecotoxicology: EcotoxicoMicYR 2021, the first international webinar organized for and by young microbial ecotoxicology researchers

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### Abstract :

The EcotoxicoMicYR group was initially composed of 4 Ph.D. students and 4 post-doctoral researchers. In brief, the EcotoxicoMicYR webinar took place three Monday afternoons in a row from November 22 to December 6, 2021. These three half-day webinars reached a success beyond our expectations with 25 countries and 41 presentations. Keynote lectures were delivered by Dr Fabio Roldan (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia), Dr Belinda Ferrari (The University of New South Wales, Australia), and Dr Ahmed Tlili (Eawag, Switzerland). Their presentations provided an insight on latest research developments in the microbial ecotoxicology field and highlighted their specific contribution to this discipline. Twenty-two oral presentations and 16 pre-recorded presentations were diffused.

**Keywords :** EcotoxicoMic, EcotoxicoMicYR, Microbial ecotoxicology, Webinar, Network

38  
39 Context and objectives:

40 EcotoxicoMic is an open international network of partners from research, industry, and public  
41 administration. They share common interest for problematics related to Microbial  
42 Ecotoxicology, an emerging discipline facing contemporary environmental threats (Ghiglione  
43 *et al.*, 2016; Pesce *et al.*, 2020; Cébron *et al.*, 2022). More information on the network can be  
44 found on the website (<https://ecotoxicomic.org/>). This network, initially francophone, was  
45 opened to other countries thanks to the organization of a first international conference in 2017  
46 (Lyon, France) and a virtual one in 2020. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022, the number of members,  
47 including about one third of M.Sc., Ph.D. students and post-doctoral researchers, was 210  
48 with 42 countries represented in the network. The EcotoxicoMic network is in full expansion

49 and is glad to welcome new members (30 to 40 members join each year). To do so, simply fill  
50 out the form at the following address <https://ecotoxicomic.org/become-a-member/>.  
51 In order to increase and encourage the participation of young researchers (M.Sc., Ph.D.  
52 students and post-doctoral researchers) in the network, a sub-network entitled  
53 “EcotoxicoMicYR” for EcotoxicoMic Young Researchers, dedicated to and led by them, was  
54 created in 2021. This sub-group of young EcotoxicoMic members, supported by senior  
55 members, decided to get together and to propose a series of activities/initiatives. This section  
56 welcomes any M.Sc. and Ph.D. students as well as post-doctoral researchers with the desire  
57 to promote this sub-network at the international scale, with possible actions at the national  
58 level. While newly created, the EcotoxicoMicYR group, initially composed of 4 Ph.D. students  
59 and 4 post-doctoral researchers (Figure 1) was gathered with the aim to organize an  
60 international webinar: EcotoxicoMicYR 2021.



61  
62 **Figure 1:** organizing committee from left to right, top lane: Ph.D. students Paul Braylé,  
63 Roxane Dhommée, Camila Diaz-Vanegas, Idrissa Soumaoro; bottom lane: post-doctoral  
64 researchers Giulia Cheloni, Lauris Evariste, Nicolas Gallois, Floriane Larras.  
65

66 EcotoxicoMicYR 2021 proceedings:

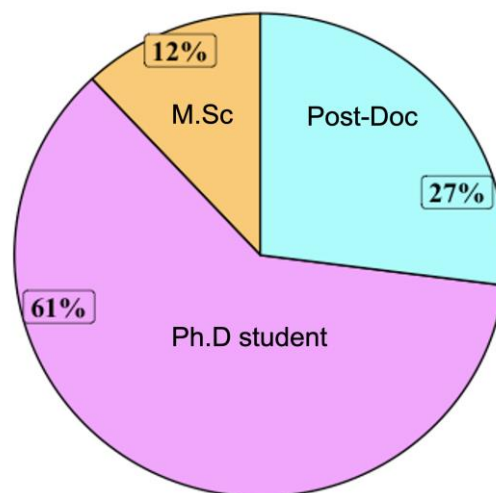
67 Organized by and dedicated to young microbial ecotoxicologists, this series of three half-day  
68 webinars took place three Monday afternoons in a row from November 22, 2021 to December  
69 6, 2021 ([https://ecotoxicomic.org/ecotoxicomicyr\\_2021/](https://ecotoxicomic.org/ecotoxicomicyr_2021/)). International keynote speakers,  
70 M.Sc., Ph.D. students, and post-doctoral researchers presented their research in microbial  
71 ecotoxicology to the international community as pre-recorded (3-minutes long) or live (12-  
72 minutes long) presentations. The registration was free of charges and opened to everyone  
73 (the organization costs were covered by the EcotoxicoMic network). The three webinars  
74 reached the presence of 75, 87 and 98 attendees (November 22, November 29, and  
75 December 6 respectively), representing a total of more than 760 viewing hours. Moreover,  
76 most of them stayed each Monday for the full duration of the 4 hours webinars.  
77

78 Keynote lectures were delivered by Dr Fabio Roldan (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana,  
79 Colombia), Dr Belinda Ferrari (The University of New South Wales, Australia), Dr Ahmed Tlili

80 (Eawag, Switzerland). They presented talks entitled “Bioremediation case studies from the lab  
81 to the field: dealing with recalcitrant compounds”, “Using microbial communities as indicators  
82 of soil health in the Antarctic environment” and “Aquatic biofilms in a changing world: why they  
83 matter when assessing impacts of multiple stressors?”, respectively. Their presentations  
84 provided an insight on latest research developments in the microbial ecotoxicology field and  
85 highlighted their specific contribution to this discipline.

86

87 During the webinar, 22 oral presentations and 16 prerecorded presentations were diffused.  
88 61% of the presenters were Ph.D. students and 27% post-doctoral researchers (Figure 2).  
89 Finally, the participation of M.Sc. students was lower than expected (12%) probably because  
90 their research time is shorter, and our webinar was scheduled during autumn long after the  
91 end of their research training period (at least in France). Nevertheless, we can only embrace  
92 that we achieve to reach M.Sc. students. University lecturers of the EcotoxicoMic network  
93 used the webinar as teaching activity for their students. The webinar participation fostered the  
94 student’s curiosity for scientific research and provided an example of international science  
95 communication activities. This educational approach was particularly interesting as one of the  
96 main objectives of the EcotoxicoMicYR team is to share and to make such events accessible  
97 to students.



98

99

**Figure 2:** EcotoxicoMicYR attendees’ grade.

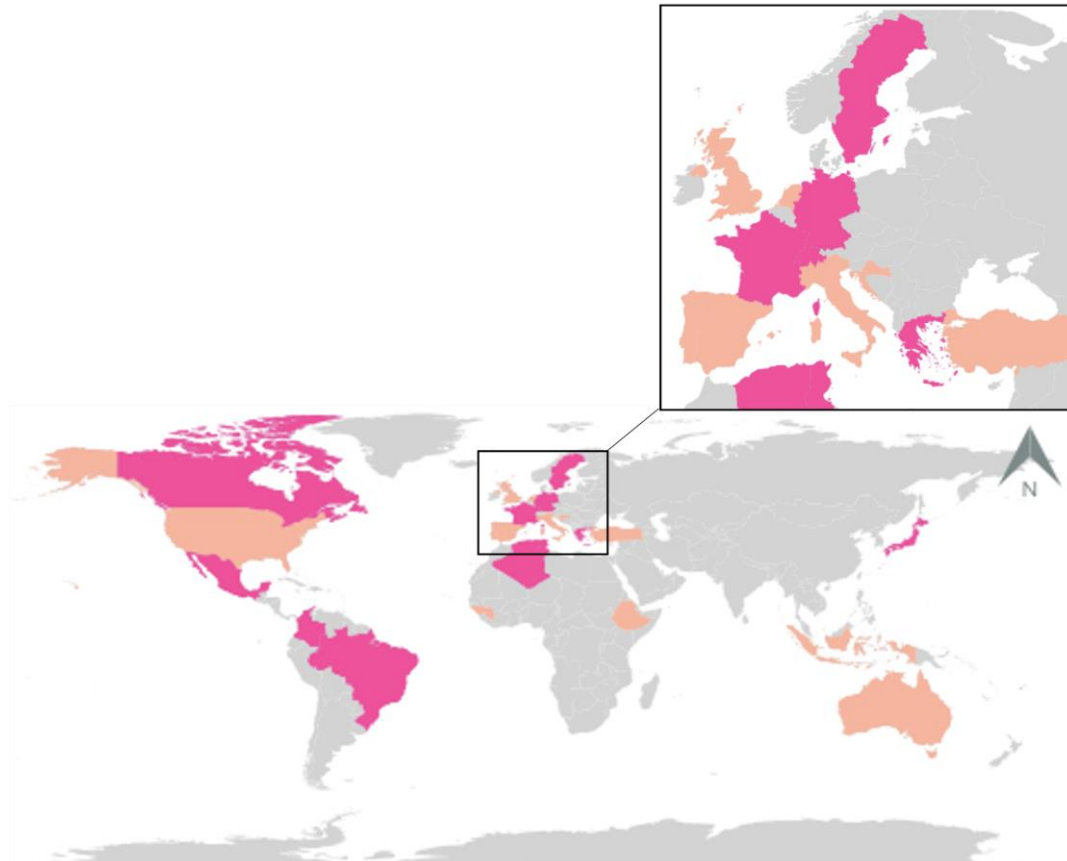
100

101 Organizers choose the SpatialChat platform to gather together speakers and participants. One  
102 of the main advantages of this virtual conference tool is the possibility to speak privately to a  
103 person while being in the same space as others (as in real life). A playful virtual space was  
104 created for all attendees with different online rooms: welcoming room, plenary room, coffee-  
105 break room and 6 poster rooms with the pre-recorded presentations that were accessible  
106 during the whole event. Comparably to a live congress, the interactions between attendees  
107 were possible in every room, with exception for the plenary room where only speakers allowed  
108 to reach the virtual stage could publicly communicate with the audience.

109

110 Overall, attendees were coming from up to 25 countries (Figure 3). The top 5 countries were  
111 France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Spain. The 41 scientists (3 keynote speakers, 22  
112 conference talks and 16 pre-recorded presentations) that provided a scientific communication  
113 represented 12 different countries. The majority of participants connected from France.

114 However, participants from all continents joined the webinar over the three afternoons,  
115 indicating that the EcotoxicoMiYR webinar have the potential to become an event that may  
116 bring together young microbial ecotoxicology researchers from all over the world.



117 **Figure 3:** attendees' country of EcotoxicoMicYR 2021 webinar. In light orange: origin of  
118 EcotoxicoMicYR webinar attendees. In pink: origin of EcotoxicoMicYR webinar participants  
119 including keynote speakers, talks and poster presentations. The frame in black represents a  
120 focus on the European attendees.  
121  
122

### 123 Conference sessions and highlights

124 The six sessions were rather ambitious in their scope, covering some of the main questions in  
125 the field of microbial ecotoxicology. The first afternoon, we aimed at exploring the research on  
126 the role of microorganisms on contaminant dynamics, biotransformation, and bioremediation.  
127 During the second afternoon, presentations focused on microbial responses to contaminants  
128 across multiple levels of biological organization. A special session was dedicated to  
129 introducing emerging approaches in microbial ecotoxicology (*i.e.*, volatilomics (Hidalgo *et al.*,  
130 2019)). We also looked at how contaminants impacted biotic interactions. On the third  
131 afternoon, to have some insights for stakeholders, some talks focused on the use of  
132 microorganisms for environmental quality assessment. Finally, the last session aimed to  
133 investigate what are the combined responses and effects of microorganisms exposed to  
134 multiple stressors.

135  
136 Our virtual conference covered a large diversity of research topics in the microbial  
137 ecotoxicology field. Works with different toxicants (metals, pesticides, antibiotics,  
138 nanoparticles, *etc.*), environments (soil, sediment, wastewater, seawater, deep-sea  
139 hydrothermal vent, *etc.*), and levels of biological organization (community, holobiont, pure

140 culture, etc.) were presented. Figure 4 highlights the word cloud created using the titles of the  
141 presentations. This is a good illustration of the research areas covered by the microbial  
142 ecotoxicology which correspond to concerns of the EcotoxicoMic network with interests,  
143 among others, in microbial communities from different environments facing various  
144 contaminants.

145 For each afternoon, a prize was awarded for the best oral presentation. The awarded Ph.D.  
146 students and post-doctoral (Katharine Thompson, “Glyphosate degradation by two novel  
147 *Ochrobactrum pituitosum* strains”, Microbial Ecology, Department of Geosciences, University  
148 of Tübingen, Germany - Lilian Gréau, “Response of *Populus x canadensis* and associated  
149 fungal endophytic communities to a PAH contamination gradient”, Université de Lorraine,  
150 CNRS, LIEC, Nancy, France - Louis Carles, “Role of wastewater microorganisms in the  
151 establishment of tolerance to micropollutants in stream periphyton”, Eawag: Swiss Federal  
152 Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Dübendorf, Switzerland) have been invited to  
153 present their work as speakers at the live EcotoxicoMic 2022 Conference (Montpellier, France,  
154 15-18 November 2022). Information about this conference can be found at  
155 <https://ecotoxicomic.org/ecotoxicomic-2022/>.

156



157

158 **Figure 4:** words cloud from the titles of the abstracts presented during the EcotoxicoMicYR  
159 2021 webinar.

160

### 161 Conference outcomes and main conclusions

162 In brief, EcotoxicoMicYR webinar (1<sup>st</sup> edition) reached a success beyond our expectations with  
163 25 countries and 41 presentations. EcotoxicoMic’s Young Researchers have the desire to  
164 repeat this event (each two years alternating with EcotoxicoMic International congress). As  
165 the format seemed to be appreciated, the EcotoxicoMicYR team will probably propose a  
166 similar webinar event for the next edition that is scheduled in November 2023. Moreover, a  
167 focus will be made to promote the broadcasting of the webinar during classes of M.Sc.  
168 students. Also, EcotoxicoMicYR wishes to promote young researchers' actions and reinforce  
169 networking at the international scale. The EcotoxicoMicYR group will organize a social evening  
170 during EcotoxicoMic 2022. This will be a great opportunity for Ph.D. students and post-doctoral

171 researchers from different labs and countries to meet and to share experiences. The current  
172 board would be glad to count for new members coming from different institutions and  
173 geographic locations for the upcoming EcotoxicoMicYR event. Anyone interested in joining  
174 the existing network or that wish to contribute to the organization of 2023 EcotoxicoMicYR  
175 webinar event, is warmly invited to contact us through our email address  
176 [‘ecotoxicomicyr@gmail.com’](mailto:ecotoxicomicyr@gmail.com).

177

#### 178 Acknowledgments

179 We would like to thank Drs Stéphane Pesce, Aurélie Cébron and Abdulsamie Hanano,  
180 members of the EcotoxicoMic steering committee, for their support during the whole process  
181 of organization, from the first meeting of the committee to the corrections of this manuscript.  
182 We also want to express our gratitude to the Rovaltain foundation for their involvement in the  
183 diffusion of the webinar and the financial management. A special acknowledgment is given to  
184 the Environmental Science and Pollution Research (ESPR) journal for the three grants  
185 awarded to the best presentations of each afternoon.

186

#### 187 Ethical Approval

188 Not applicable

189

#### 190 Consent to Participate

191 All authors have given their consent to participate to the writing and the submission of this  
192 paper.

193

#### 194 Consent to Publish

195 All authors have approved the version to be published and given their consent for the  
196 publication of this paper.

197

#### 198 Authors Contributions

199 Nicolas GALLOIS and Roxane DHOMMÉE have equally contributed to this paper as first  
200 authors. Nicolas GALLOIS, Roxane DHOMMÉE, Paul BRAYLÉ, Lauris EVARISTE, Idrissa  
201 SOUMAORO, Camila DIAZ-VANEGAS, Floriane LARRAS, Giulia CHELONI have contributed  
202 to the writing and reviewed the manuscript prior to submission.

203

#### 204 Funding

205 Not applicable

206

#### 207 Competing Interests

208 The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal  
209 relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

210

#### 211 Availability of data and materials

212 All information about the webinar is available on the website <https://ecotoxicomic.org/>

213

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