Expedition fund report:

Lipari School of Computational Complex and Social Systems, DATA SCIENCE: Models, Algorithms, AI and Beyond (July 17th - July 23rd, 2022), on Lipari Island, Italy.

With the QMUL expedition fund, I was lucky to be able to attend the Lipari summer school in Sicily. I am a PhD student in mathematics and was finishing my second year over the summer. Over the course of a week, I got to attend lectures by amazing researchers, meet incredible friends and fellow PhD students while discovering the island of Lipari.

Due to airport issues, my flight was cancelled, and as a result, I had to spend one night in Catania in mainland Sicily before I could reach the island the following day by bus, then hydrofoil. This was a great chance to get initially acquainted with the south of Italy, and meet other travellers in the hostel I stayed at. Following this, I travelled to Lipari and immediately mingled with the other PhD students, most of which I had never met. During the week, we listened to lectures in the morning, for example on the theory and some practical aspects of quantum computing, the breakthroughs behind the indexing of the human genome, dynamical processes and topological features of simplicial complexes as well as the difference between data science, data analysis and its implications for our society.

These lectures were incredibly interesting, and allowed me to discover new ideas, for example in quantum computing, where I was able to understand much better the principles behind it. Some of the best moments of the school were spent with other students discussing aspects of the lectures. In particular, one set of lectures titled “Data Analytics: The End of Science?” stimulated many interesting debates after lectures in the evenings. We discussed in particular our role as scientist, ethics, and our responsibilities with our work. We in particular disagreed with the amount of responsibilities researchers have towards the public. This was very interesting and important conversations for the development of our scientific identity.

So far, this week in Lipari was one of my best memories as a PhD student at QMUL. Aside from the lectures, we had the opportunity to discover the beautiful Eolian islands by boat, as well as observe volcanic eruptions from Stromboli. We spent our free time swimming with other students, and discovering the rich Italian culture. This made for an amazing setting to build long lasting friendships.
I have since this trip in particular been able to meet some of these friends again at conferences. This has made my experience at these big events very nice as we had so many shared memories together. Similarly, some of the other students of the school are based in London, and this was a great way to build community beyond my research group.

Overall, the expedition fund bursary complemented the funding my department was able to offer me, and was instrumental in having such a nice trip, build friendships and develop as a young researcher in applied mathematics.

Some pictures of Lipari: