

Dear all,

From now on you will get the MERIT newsletter twice a year with the topical highlights of our project. Within the first issue I would like to introduce two important MERIT people to you: Ulrike Zentgraf is our contact for Equal opportunities and Lorenzo Pedrotti represents the fellows within the project.

Enjoy reading and in this spirit:
¡ MEKIP !

Happy New Year and best regards,
Sylvia

Project manager



The MERIT – Team 2011

Content

Welcome
Project timeline
Meetings
Courses
Personalia

- Ulrike Zentgraf
- Lorenzo Pedrotti
- Management team

DEADLINES

Suggestions for the next issue are highly welcome!

Project timeline

- 01/11 start of the project
- 03/11 kick off meeting in Utrecht
- 09/11 website online
- 10/11 almost all fellows found
- 11/11 1.annual meeting in Madrid

First progress report is coming soon!

Successful 1. Annual Meeting

In January the MERIT project has officially started and now we had our 1. Annual meeting in Madrid organized by Jesus and his colleagues. It was a great success with more than 30 participants. For two days we introduced the project partners and their groups, presented our research and discussed the organization of the project. Each fellow introduced himself by giving a presentation about their part of the project or their previous research. Additionally Sylvia in her function as a project manager gave an overview presentation about the management details, e.g. financial issues and reporting (the presentation can be found on our website: <http://theory.bio.uu.nl/MERIT/html/index.html>). Here you will also find the notes of the meeting.

As a highlight Jesus organized an anniversary dinner for us. Accidentally the Westin Palace of Madrid offered a dinner on the occasion of the 100-year anniversary of the Nobel Prize for chemistry, Maria Sklodowska-Curie. We enjoyed the same menu that was prepared at the Swedish Academy's Nobel Ceremony in 1911. Regarding to our project (Marie Curie ITN) this was really special and extremely tasty!



Photo: Jebasingh Selvanayagam



Photo: Marcella Gomez Paez

The first network training:

How to give an inspiring scientific presentation?

You can always learn more ...

Associated to the meeting the fellows had their first network-training course about how to give an inspiring scientific presentation. The course, held by professor Carmen Sancho Guinda, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, (<http://www.upm.es/internacional/Researchers/44193917dff30310VgnVCM10000009c7648aRCRD>) started with some theoretical background. The fellows learned how to structure their talk, to keep the audience awake and how to style slides in an eye-friendly way. In the afternoon a

selected group of volunteers gave their presentations, which were prepared for the meeting of the next day. The presentations were discussed and improved by input from both the fellows as well as professional trainer with the focus on constructive result-oriented criticism. Special care was taken to give clear and understandable oral presentation. During the meeting the next two days the fellows than presented them selves and their research to the other participants of the project

on an impressive high level. The next network-training course (How to make a scientific poster) will be associated with our Midterm Meeting next year in Lisboa, organized by Elena Baena-González. We will start soon with the preparation, based on the experiences and evaluation of our first network course. More information will coming soon!

Evaluation of the course

Complementary skills training courses are one essential part of the network training in MERIT. Due to the different background and experience of the participants a critical feedback is indispensable for improvement. So the course

was evaluated by the fellows reing expectations and content and got a remarkable good review. Especially the enthusiasm of the teacher was very inspiring. The fellows highly appreciated the feedback they got on their presentations and agreed, that an extension of the practical part would have been useful.

The results and comments of the evaluation will help to improve our next complementary skill-training course next year. Overall the positive evaluation clearly shows the usefulness of this course and we will try to keep this level for the following one. The detailed results of the evaluation can be found on our website.

Personalia



Lorenzo Pedrotti

Student representative: Lorenzo Pedrotti

As you probably know my name is Lorenzo and I'm the PhD student of the MERIT project in the group of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Dröge-Laser.

Since I was a kid I preferred Science to Literature and as soon as I got the opportunity I took the advantage by neglecting the humanities to focus on what I liked best. During my last high school year my teacher of biology made me soon "fall in love with the double helix of DNA".

For this reason I decided to study Biology and the University of Padua, which offered a Bachelor in Molecular Biology. Could you imagine it? An entire course of study about biology at molecular level, with Genetic, Molecular and Cell Biology, Bioinformatics, Microbiology and Biochemistry as main subjects all in one Bachelor. Everything I wanted, without boring things to learn that a non-molecular biologist has to study. For me it was amazing!!

I proceeded the studies attending the Master Degree in Molecular Biology in the same University and spent the second year as Erasmus student in the University of Würzburg. In July 2011 I got my master, and only one month after I started my PhD at the MERIT project.

During my studies I've contributed to several fascinating and different projects, but at some point my attention has been captured by the plant biology: plants with their bewitching beauty, so green, so different, so self-sufficient (photosynthesis) and I addressed the remainder of my studies in their direction. Wolfgang offered me the MERIT position, and I realized that I really wanted to be part of it, starting to be a researcher but at the same time getting the opportunity to grow professionally, to learn new things and to deepen others. Working in a network like this, with peoples coming from several countries have always been my dream and my idea of science.

So, that's me in brief and I'm looking forward seeing you soon in Utrecht! [My email: lorenzo.pedrotti@uni-wuerzburg.de](mailto:lorenzo.pedrotti@uni-wuerzburg.de)



Prof. Ulrike Zentgraf

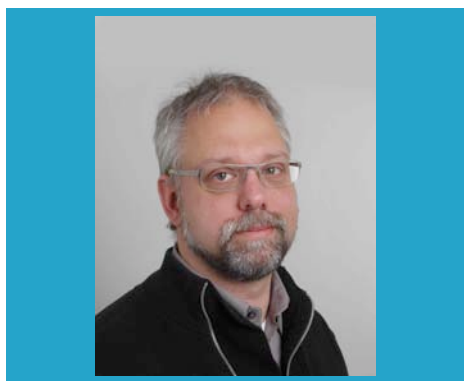
Photo: Jebasingh Selvanayagam

Equal opportunity commissioner: Prof. Ulrike Zentgraf

In 1999 the ZMBP was founded as a Center of plant molecular biology at the University of Tübingen and since than I'm the group leader of a research unit on molecular regulation of plant senescence. At that time I was also engaged in raising my two children, which was sometimes a big challenge to combine science and family. I managed with the help of an excellent childcare facility and mutual understanding of my colleagues and supervised many master, PhD students and postdocs. We always tried to work as a team and to integrate science, fun and family plans.

As equal opportunity commissioner I am in charge of monitoring that no one has any assets or drawbacks because of his gender. My first task was to supervise the selection procedure. We promised to hire at least 30% women in MERIT but we were even better in reaching 50%!

Whenever you feel that you have any disadvantages because of your gender and you need some help, please contact me and I will do my best to solve the problem together with you! [My email: ulrike.zentgraf@zmbp.uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:ulrike.zentgraf@zmbp.uni-tuebingen.de)



Dr. Johannes Hanson

I started in the group of Sjef Smeekens in 2003 and since 2008 I have a tenured position in his group. Unfortunately, I don't teach but this gives me more time to supervise, which is what I really like.

I'm running projects related to metabolic reprogramming and translational control of gene expression both within and independent of MERIT. Currently most of the focus of the group is on understanding how bZIP dimers affect metabolism by changing gene expression and how nutrient dependent signaling affect both global and gene specific translation (<http://www.uu.nl/science/mpp>).

Last year I got a position in Umeå Plant Science Center and my activities are gradually moving north (http://www.upsc.se/johannes_hanson). For the duration of MERIT I will be active in Utrecht so my final moving date is set to 2015.

I am a good example on how moving around in Europe is good for the scientific development. I am well aware of how complex it is to arrange personal issues in a foreign country but most importantly how stimulating and fun it is to live "abroad". I will forever be attached to the Netherlands and I sometimes even cheer for the orange football team.

The Management Team of MERIT



Photo: Jebasingh Selvanayagam

Dr. Sylvia Walter

Project management – for me as a scientist it sounded far away from being an interesting job in the beginning!

I started my career as a zoologist, investigating the influence of diet on the activity of digestive exo-enzymes of snails. During my study I worked as a student assistant in marine biology, which made me a slave of scientific research ship cruises! I mostly travelled the Atlantic Ocean and the feeling of complete freedom while looking on the water surface until the horizon was amazing. I always saved this view to the lab! After my master I was offered a PhD in Marine Chemistry at the IFM-GEOMAR, Kiel, to investigate the production pathways of N₂O in the ocean. Despite problems each PhD has to survive such as failing instruments, striking computers or long days in the lab after having nice party's I extremely enjoyed this time because of nice colleagues and also several ship cruises with lots of interesting results in the end! After this I moved to the Netherlands for my first postdoc, which again was about a completely different subject: the investigation of the global budget of atmospheric H₂ by using isotopologues!

For personal reasons I made a career switch to the project management, and although I sometimes miss to sniff lab air, I do not regret this decision! With managing two ITN projects there is always lot's of interesting and new things to do, the opportunity for traveling and meeting people, and I'm really looking forward to this time with you!

Our next network training course:

Statistics and bioinformatics – new and old tools for the biologist

Organizers: J. Hanson and B. Snell

Time and location: 23.01. – 03.02.2012, Utrecht

The course consists of two parts; 1) basic experimental statistics and 2) informatics which are both central to modern biological research. The workshop is therefore positioned as early as possible within the time schedule of the network and covers nearly two full working weeks. Preliminary program: The first week will focus on bringing all trainees to a sufficient level of statistical understanding. Much of the work will be in the form of computer practical's in which problems have to be solved by the trainees. The second week will focus on the rapid development of new methods in informatics-intensive experimentation such as massive sequencing, whole genome coverage microarrays, proteomics and metabolomics, etc. The aim of the classes is to: introduce and familiarize with the currently available online recourses, describe the strengths and weaknesses of the currently



available technologies and to provide the basics of the tistic tools used in high-throughput biology. JH and BS and WW will give all lectures except when indicated otherwise. Some lectures will be given by researchers, which are not members of the network (Dr. Leonie. Bentsink; Utrecht University and Dr. Wilbert van Workum; Service XS, Leiden).

More information will come soon!

Last but not least: Something serious... Our first report of MERIT

Within a few weeks we have to submit our first progress report to the EU. This report will cover the first year of MERIT, however, no financial reports are required for this period. All of you got the template, which has to be filled in for each fellow and send back to the project management. Thus, it will be quite easy for you and also for me ;)

Deadline for submission is the 31.12.!