

Interview with Valentina Garavini ESR - University of Strasbourg, France

I come from a small town in Italy called Ravenna and I've studied Pharmaceutical Chemistry and Technology at the University of Florence. During my third year I spent few months at the University of Shieffield (UK) with an Erasmus grant. Then I had the opportunity to take part in a summer school in Crete (Greece) on the chemistry of natural products. After these two great experiences it was clear in my mind that I would have done a PhD abroad and I ended up in France!



Valentina Garavini

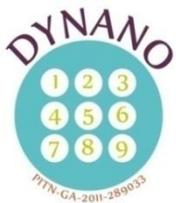
How did you meet Nicolas Giuseppone's team?

When I began looking for a PhD, I was still in touch with the people I had met in Sheffield. At that moment one of them was a post-doc in Giuseppone's team and she told me about this PhD position. I was very enthusiastic about the prospect of taking part in an interdisciplinary and international project and I immediately applied! This was the opportunity I was looking for to improve my scientific skills, but also to live in a different country and learn a new language!

Can you describe your project? And tell us about the objectives you have to reach?

The main objective of this project is to create a new class of constitutionally dynamic peptides. By adding a small group on the N-terminus of one of the amino acids, we have obtained two different classes of peptides. We have then proved that the reversible reaction occurred in mild aqueous conditions for both these classes. The new goal will be to demonstrate the possible use of this approach for the preparation or the discovery of bioactive peptides. As a proof of principle we plan to prepare an affibody® with this approach, in the presence of its target molecule. Affibodies® are synthetic peptides which are used as analogs of antibodies. Moreover, we will extend our approach to glycopeptides in collaboration with Prof. Vincent in Namur.





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What is the best thing about taking a PhD in the framework of an ITN European Project? What is challenging?

Interdisciplinarity. Having excellent scientist in the network, with different backgrounds and willing to collaborate on joint projects, is a unique opportunity. We have the chance to discuss face to face during our meetings and to spend a part of our PhD in different laboratories, learning new techniques. Another important aspect of the ITN projects is the presence of industrial partners in the network. Collaborations are essential in science and being part of a network makes it easier. Doing research is challenging: problems are not infrequent and there are always new concepts and techniques to learn. Being a researcher is definitely not boring, every day is different from the previous one!

What did you learn from your last participation to the DYNANO's workshop on October 2013 in Madrid?

It was the third time we met the other young researchers involved in our network and their supervisors. We know each other quite well now and I think it was a very nice week for everybody. In addition, the workshop involved another Marie Curie ITN, Glycopharm, and we had the chance to meet other researchers.

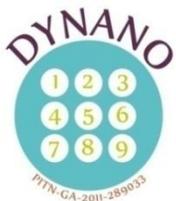
The best thing about these meetings is the opportunity to discuss joint projects face to face with the different supervisors and students. That's what happened in my case in Madrid and I find it very inspiring.

I would say that one of the best moments was the open discussion with the Nobel laureate Jean-Marie Lehn. He is extremely passionate about his job and his energy is contagious.

When and where your secondement will take place? And what do you expect from?

I will go to Namur, in Belgium, in few months. I've already been there to discuss the joint project with Prof. Vincent and the people there looked very nice. The main idea is to produce a dynamic combinatorial library of glycopeptides and to use a target molecule (a lectine and/or an enzyme) to drive the amplification of one of its members. In Namur I will synthesize few amino acids bearing a carbohydrate moiety to be used in solid phase peptide synthesis, therefore I will learn something more about the complex chemistry of carbohydrates.





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Do you have some advice to master/engineer students considering taking a PhD?

First of all my advice is to have an experience abroad before! The Erasmus program is a great opportunity and it really changes the way students relate with foreign people and cultures. Science is international and knowing how to behave in an international context is necessary nowadays. Moreover, it's a good opportunity to improve their English!

If they were considering starting a PhD, I would just encourage them! It could be in their own country or abroad, the important thing is finding an interesting topic and a good group.

What are your plans after completing the PhD?

I will keep doing research. I still don't know if it will be in academia (post-doc) or if I'll try to find a job in industry but I am sure that having been part of this ITN will help me a lot in my future career.

Thank you Valentina and all the best for DYNANO.

Interviewed by Sadika Guedidi



DYNANO in brief

Starting date: 1st November 2011

Project duration: 48 months

Number of partners: 15

Project Coordinator: Dr. Mihai BARBOIU,
European Membrane Institute -IEM, Montpellier, France.

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www.dynano.eu

