

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-EMBO Symposium
Conference Title:	Molecular Perspectives on Protein-Protein Interactions
Dates:	25-30 May 2013
Chair:	Marcellus Ubbink, University of Leiden
Rapporteur:	Prof. Sachdev Sidhu

General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

This was the fourth meeting in a series with previous meetings being held in Israel in 2005, Croatia in 2008 and Spain in 2010. The 2010 meeting and the current meeting were both supported by ESF-EMBO, which has provided crucial financial and administrative assistance to the meetings. I have acted as a participant and an advisor to all four meetings. The meetings fill a crucial need in the research community by providing a venue for researchers with a common interest in protein-protein interactions but with different experimental expertise and model systems. The meetings have brought together researchers with expertise in NMR, crystallography, site-directed mutagenesis, protein engineering, etc. and have included diverse researchers from Europe and North America, including academics and industry. The meetings have proven to be an extremely popular venue for exchanging advances in research methods and discoveries in protein interaction research.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The conference presented exceptionally diverse research of very high quality. Importantly, there was a great mix of speakers in terms of expertise and interests, and also, in terms of experience level. In addition to presentations from established principal investigators, there were also many presentations with early career principal investigators, postdocs and graduate students. Also, the talks were of sufficient length to thoroughly cover the areas of interest, while leaving plenty of time for questions and discussions. Although united by the common theme of protein-protein interactions, the sessions covered a diverse array of subfields and techniques, ensuring that there was a lot of new information conveyed to the audience. I am certain that all of the participants gained new knowledge in areas outside of their immediate interests.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information? Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

A major strength of the meeting was the friendly atmosphere which the organizers have created and maintained throughout the series going back to 2005. With approximately 130 participants, the meeting was designed to be large enough to cover diverse areas but to be informal enough for many interactions between participants. Interactions were promoted by group dinners, coffee breaks, poster sessions and a group outing. Young researchers were invited to give oral presentations or to present posters, and to participate in discussions with more senior researchers at the numerous social events throughout the meeting.

Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants? Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

There was a good balance between young and senior participants. Also, although many of the participants were from Europe (not surprising given the meeting site was in Poland), there was also ample representation from North America and Asia. Many of the speaking slots were filled by younger researchers, including young principal

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investigators and also students and postdocs, and the talks were generally of similar length, thus not biasing in favour of senior investigators. Although senior investigators also presented, the even playing field created an environment where all views were heard and younger investigators were given substantial opportunity to present their ideas and opinions and to also learn from more senior investigators. Also, students and postdocs had the opportunity to present their work in detail, in a manner that enabled the identification of future career opportunities. Overall, the organizing committee is to be commended for assembling an extremely impressive scientific program with exceptional diversity and inclusion of numerous subfields within the protein-protein interaction community.

Outlook and Future Developments

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference? (How) could the conference outcomes be utilized further? Are there suitable (ESF) programmes or instruments to further the work of the conference?

I am certain that the interactions at the meeting have led to many fruitful collaborations. My group has personally established several collaborations immediately following the meeting, and I am certain that others have done the same. This is a significant strength of this meeting, in that it leads not only to knowledge dissemination, but also to further strengthening of interactions and links between the protein research community. The meeting will also be a great help to the career development of many students and postdocs, who get a tremendous opportunity to interact directly with leaders in their field and to arrange for potential steps on the career ladder. Thus, these meetings are highly successful means for promoting scientific cooperation within Europe and beyond. Clearly, further support from the ESF and other organizations that can further promote these goals by funding future meetings will further reinforce the success of the current meeting.

Follow-up

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

In the short term, the participants from the meeting are well positioned to follow-up on the success of the meeting by ensuring that the series continues with a fifth meeting in the near future. We have already begun plans for a fifth meeting in 2015 and there is great enthusiasm for this, as virtually all of the participants expressed strong interest in a continuation of the interactions established thus far. However, in the long term, the continued success of the meeting and community can only be ensured by continued financial support from the ESF and other organizations, and maintaining (or even expanding) support for this exceptional meeting should be a top priority of the ESF and others interested in promoting science and collaboration within Europe and beyond.

Organisation and Infrastructure

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference? Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

The venue location was excellent. Pultusk is close enough to Warsaw to enable convenient travel yet the small village atmosphere was perfect for ensuring good interactions amongst the conference participants. The hotel staff were very friendly and professional and the food was very high quality and plentiful. The accommodations were also appropriate, being clean, simple and well-equipped. The conference room was also well-suited to the size of the meeting and the AV staff were very supportive. Moreover, ESF staff provided excellent support throughout the conference, and this support before, during and after the conference was a great help to the conference organizing committee and attendees.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

The conference was an overwhelming success which continues the strong track record of the meeting series. The conference achieved the aims of presenting cutting-edge research from diverse fields in an environment that supported young researchers and encouraged a collaborative atmosphere. Overwhelmingly, participants were very enthusiastic about the prospects of another meeting in 2015.

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences