

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	
Conference Title:	NanoCarb 11
Dates:	5-11 September 2011
Chair:	Sophie Lanon, INSERM, University Paris EST Creteil
Rapporteur:	Morris L. Aizenman, NSF

General Comments

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

This was an extraordinarily wide-ranging conference, with its announced intent of discussing carbon nanotubes and related nanomaterials, and describing the physical and chemical properties of these object and their biological and environmental effects. It was very unfortunate that a strike of the Italian transportation system (rail, air, bus) took place on the first day of the conference, which resulted in significant cancellations of flights and meant that the conference had to be delayed by a day. Fortunately, it is my understanding that there was only one person who was unable to attend because of these cancellations, and through the efforts of the Chair Sophie Lanon, the Co-Chairs, and the Conference officer, Ms. Anne Blondeel-Oman, the schedule was revised and all of the talks were able to be presented in the remaining days of the conference.

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.

With respect to balance, I felt there was a slight overemphasis on the toxicology and health impacts of carbon nanotubes. There were a number of talks in this area (one of the speakers gave two talks and participated in a roundtable discussion on nanotubes and asbestos) when the conference might have benefited from additional talks in the area of the physical and chemical properties of nanotubes. The resemblance of carbon nanotubes to asbestos is well-known, and so is not particularly surprising that some of the effects known to be caused by asbestos ingested into the lungs are likely to be duplicated by carbon nanotubes. In fact, one of the speakers from the United States pointed out that his agency had proposed certain health standards for ventilation in areas where carbon nanotubes are produced. The scientific organizing committee was international in scope, with members from Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The presentations were excellent, and it was interesting to see that major presentation and short presentations were included in the conference schedule. There was quite a bit of discussion following most of the talks. In terms of balance of participants, the list of participants at the conference was international in scope. And there was significant diversity in the age of the participants. The experience of the participants ranged from some who had just received their bachelor's degrees individuals who had spent many years as researchers. I was pleased to see major participation by women at this conference.

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?

The atmosphere of the conference was excellent and the venue was superb. Through no person's fault, the conference had to be compressed by one day, which did restrict the amount of time for interactions. However, as far as space is concerned, the venue had ample space for attendees to meet and discuss, and younger persons were integrated into the conference both during informal discussions and in the talks and presentations.

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?

In a word, yes. As I've mentioned earlier, participation at this conference was international in scope, and a large number of disciplines were represented at the conference. In terms of age balance of national groups, I felt it was appropriate.

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?

This was a follow-up to a previous conference on this topic, and so I believe many collaborations had already been in place as a result of the previous conference. But it is likely that as a result of the conversations and discussions that took place, new collaborations will be established. I believe this is most likely to happen among the younger participants at the conference (the older generation has, most likely, already established those collaborations), and it was heartening to see how many of them were at the conference.

Follow-up

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

The conference did not have a session devoted to future activities and next steps, so it is quite unclear to me what long-term follow-ups should take place. It was disappointing that such a session was not held, and if I have a criticism of the conference, it is this. I have participated in such discussions at other ESF-sponsored workshops and conferences, and have found them to be among the most lively and thought-provoking sessions of a meeting. Had such a session been held, I believe that it could have set the stage for future areas of investigation and collaboration. In terms of follow-up, I recommend that a "forward-look" session be a requirement of sponsored conferences. With respect to this particular topic, it seems to me that the toxic effects of ingestion of carbon nanotubes into the lungs is now well described, and future conferences on carbon nanotubes should move on into other areas.

Organisation and Infrastructure

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

The venue of the conference, the Hotel Villa del Mare was superb. The conference room was excellent, and the conference room was excellent. It was a thoroughly modern facility, and the services provided by the conference hotel were excellent. Catering and accommodation were completely satisfactory, and I found the staff at the hotel highly cooperative and helpful. I found the administration of this conference to be as good as that of any conference I have attended, and this in spite of the need for massive rescheduling because of the transportation strike mentioned above. I was unaware of any dissatisfaction by other attendees as to the conference setting nor of what was provided by the hotel at the conference.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

In terms of aiming to bring together scientists from a very wide variety of disciplines to discuss the growing impact of Nanocarbons on health, on the environment, and on the chemical and physical properties of carbon nanotubes, the conference was a success, and its aims were achieved. Certainly there was a wide diversity in the topics discussed, there was significant attendance by scientists from across Western and Eastern Europe, the UK and the US, and I believe this will continue to be an area of widening interest in the scientific community.

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