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Getting a First Foot in the Door

There continues to be a lack of opportunity for Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) to be independent and set up their first research groups. An issue close to its heart, COST gives reason to encourage the next generation of researchers.



Today's European research landscape sees a number of uncoordinated support schemes for ESRs whether they be multinational, regional or local. A lot of potential is going to waste and affecting future research talent. There is a strong need to support young scientists and give them the chance to develop their new ideas.

COST is reinforcing the use of its existing instruments in favour of ESRs. "National surveys and experience suggest that this group plays a major role in research projects running in the framework of COST Actions. There aren't many ESRs proposing new Actions or acting as Action or Working Group Chairs," explains Professor Francesco Fedi, President of the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO).

A Recipe for Success

Working in science means working with different disciplines and this requires teamwork. COST offers the ideal framework to do so. "COST provided me with a unique and essential framework for my career. I gained valuable insight into scientific cooperation," says Thomas Michael Bohnert, a German PhD student from the University of Coimbra in Portugal. "I have extended my profile and sharpened my focus".

By getting involved, ESRs receive an invaluable combination of technical feedback and social skills. They learn much more than they would by simply attending conferences. Thomas Bohnert now sees himself as a recognised technical expert equipped with strong management skills and this is mostly thanks to his involvement in COST Action 290. He has discovered new talents that have helped him participate in several scientific events throughout the world.

Thinking Outside the Box

COST definitively motivates early stage researchers to understand that working in science means much more than drafting papers. Peter Fibiger Bang, from the Saxo Institute of the University of Copenhagen, found out about COST through the European Science Foundation. He was told that COST also included arts in its activities.

"Once I had completed my PhD, where I explored Mughal India as a potential comparison for Roman History, I was faced with the problem of having a novel approach but not having enough followers," the young researcher testifies.

Having to cross disciplinary and departmental boundaries, comparative research often lacks institutional foundations and support. "COST enabled me and my colleagues to compensate by creating an extensive network, COST Action A36, where people from very wide backgrounds are now meeting across well-established departmental boundaries and traditional limits of subjects. It has helped us create a whole new scholarly forum".

It not just through its flexible approach that COST manages to open the door to ESRs. It recently invited ESRs to participate in the European Science Open Forum (ESOF2008). The mix of young and more experienced researchers contributed to the success of a series of interdisciplinary workshops. It was not just an opportunity for networking but also cultural exchange and enrichment. One of the invitees from Austria said: "Social and cultural networking is not a declared purpose of COST but it takes place when people from different countries and cultures are together".

This recent exchange shows COST's constant dedication to support all

An Early Stage Researcher is...

a researcher whose career spans less than 10 years between the date of the PhD/doctorate (or similar experience) and the date of involvement in the COST Action. Periods of leave have to also be included.

Key Documents

- ▶ [COST Strategy for Early Stage Researchers \(COST doc. 295/09\) \(PDF, 53 kB\)](#)

players within the European Research Area. Its flexible and bottom-up approach as well as its ability to interlink various scientific disciplines makes it an excellent programme for young researchers and those with more experience.

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