

Saša's story: from science to Grant Management



Meet Saša Jovanovic, the Grant Holder Manager (GHM) of the COST Action [‘ADHEsion GPCR Network: Research and Implementation Set the path for future Exploration’](#) (Adher N Rise).

He holds a Master's degree in Molecular Biology and Physiology from the University of Belgrade. His academic journey continued with a PhD in auditory neuroscience at the University of Leipzig, followed by three postdoc projects in Germany.

During his studies and first postdoc period Saša coordinated the DAAD-funded project [‘Academic synapsing in the Balkans’](#). In this role, he managed finances and organised academic events, which sparked his interest in scientific coordination.

In April 2021, he took over the role of Scientific Coordinator for the Brain Dynamics Graduate School at the University of Leipzig, while at the same time taking on the responsibilities of GHM for the COST Action Adher N Rise (CA18240).

COST: How would you compare your managerial experience of being a Grant Holder Manager before and after taking the role? Do you feel this experience enhanced your professional profile? If yes, how?

For someone like me, who had limited managerial experience before taking on the role of GHM, this position has proven to be immensely beneficial for improving my professional skills in various ways.

Firstly, I have greatly improved my communication and collaboration skills. Working with people from 28 different countries has been a great experience. Most of the time the e-COST system and the excellent work of the Steering Committee often ensure a smooth operation, but occasionally unforeseen difficulties and misunderstandings required clarification and guidance from my side. Learning how to deal with these issues delicately,

without being overly strict or imposing, has been a valuable skill I've developed in this role. I must mention that I have been very lucky to have Prof. Prömel as the Action Chair and Prof. Liebscher as the Grant Holder Scientific Representative. They are very involved in every aspect of the Action and we have great communication, which makes my job much easier.

Secondly, my role as a GHM has required me to work with the COST Administration and the e-COST system. This is the first time I have had to deal with an EU-funded project, and it is very different from the local University and German state regulations. It took me some time to get used to the differences, but having a great Administrative Officer Jeannette Nchung Oru certainly helped a lot. Getting to know the rules and the mechanisms of such a large and complex funding agency is a great addition to my CV.

Finally, integrating the COST rules into my home institution has been a big challenge. This was especially difficult with regard to the reimbursement rules, which are very different in COST compared to the Faculty of Medicine in Leipzig. The local administration is (understandably) not very keen on changing the way they do things, so this was probably the most difficult part of the job. By explaining the COST rules to the faculty's finance department and working with them on the implementation of the COST rules I gained important insights into the intricacies of financial mechanisms both in COST and in my home university's system.

COST: What personal story can you tell?

Last year, we co-organised a large scientific meeting called '4GPCRnet' here in Leipzig. I set up a stand next to the registration table with attendance sheets. However, some people either missed the information or just forgot about it, so I had to run around and collect the missing signatures. One of the missing signatures was from one of the two Nobel Laureates that we had as a keynote speaker. He had flown from the USA just for our meeting and it would have been embarrassing to get into trouble with the reimbursement. After circling around a few times, I finally spotted him and was so excited that I jumped in front of him and as I greeted him and introduced myself, I instinctively started to shake his hand, which was a bit stronger due to all the excitement. I noticed that he started to feel uncomfortable and it was only then that I remembered that he had had shoulder surgery just before the meeting and that the handshake was probably not the best at that moment. Fortunately, he avoided being injured by an over-zealous GHM

and gave a great presentation later that day.

COST : What advice can you give to newly appointed GHMs to help them be successful in their role?

COST has really taken care to cover all eventualities. Read the Annotated rules carefully and attend the seminars/webinars. If you are still unsure, your AO is always there to help. Make sure you discuss the financial procedures with your local administration in advance to avoid any problems later on.

[Read more about the COST Action Adher N Rise](#)

