



NANOSTEM

Developing new **NANO**materials for neural **STEM** cells drug delivery

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Welcome to the 6th issue of the NANOSTEM

It is sad to say that this is the last issue of our NANOSTEM Newsletter.

We are approaching the end of NANOSTEM Project. Several of our ESRs have already finished their contracts, however, they are still busy writing papers, deliverables and, of course, their thesis!

In the past three years we have seen our beloved ESRs growing so much, both professionally and personally, and we could not be any prouder of their incredible progress and their achievements! We are sure these young scientists have acquired the necessary skillset to help them through the next stages of their careers!

For this issue we have asked the ESRs to give an account of their experience within the NANOSTEM ITN. Have a look inside and read more about their experiences and their consideration at the end of the program.

Let's all wish our amazing fellows all the best for their future endeavours!



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Queen Mary
University of London

Nanostem! It was a pleasure!

An article by Federico Traldi

As for all good experiences, even my adventure with Nanostem is coming to an end and I believe this is the right time for me to think about my whole experience and what I have learned from it.

At the moment, I am writing from Coimbra, Portugal where I have just started my 2 months secondment at the CNC, where Ines, Angela and Francesca are currently completing their PhD. Here, I will have the amazing opportunity to gain experience with cell culture biology and in vitro testing of nanoparticles, which, as a chemist, provide an incredible opportunity to enrich my scientific skills and explore an area of science that has always attracted me a lot. This new scientific challenge also made me look back and appreciate better all the experiences and knowledge that I acquired in the past 3 years at Queen Mary thanks to this amazing network. Surely carrying out a PhD can be a challenging and demanding feat, but the confidence that I could gain through overcoming these adversities has improved my professional figure significantly.

Despite having spent only a week in Portugal, the welcoming atmosphere of the Coimbra Nanostem



Our first dinner in Coimbra!

group made me feel immediately at home. It was great to see again my fellows ERSs after more than two years from our last meeting in person, back in London in summer 2019. Although we could not meet in person as much as we would have liked to, I feel that the friendship that we have developed in the course of the past years during our scheduled online events and through the different collaborations is

undoubtedly one of the most valuable gifts that this project has given me.

Of course, the secondment is also an opportunity to travel and experience life in another European country. I still remember how at the beginning of this journey I would still find it difficult to adapt to a completely different and multicultural working environment. However, now that I just arrived in Portugal, I can feel that this process of adaptation has become a lot easier and that the transition into new routines has become rather a smooth process. I think that these years spent working within Nanostem helped me a lot in developing the ability to quickly adapt to new settings and, more importantly, to embrace change and to enjoy my time out of the comfort zone. This aspect will definitely improve both my professional career as well as my personal life.

Overall, I think that Nanostem made me really appreciate the value of achieving personal growth through undertaking challenges!

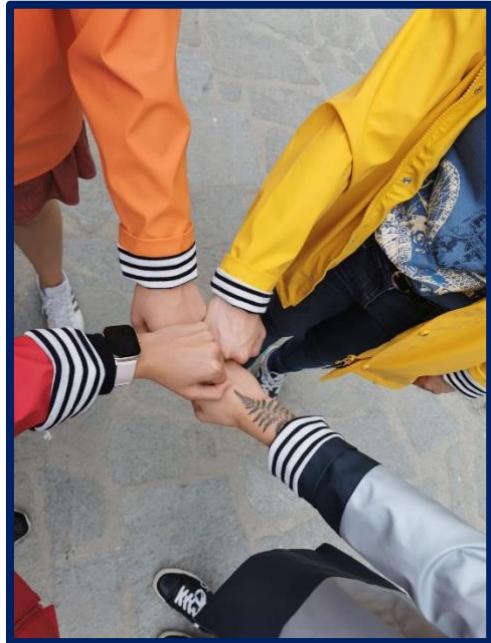
Federico

Thank you NANOSTEM!

An article by Alena Vdovchenko

I was wondering what I can say in the last NANOSTEM newsletter and I realised that I have so many words of gratitude towards everyone in the network and that it is my chance to express them all!

First of all, I want to thank Prof Marina Resmini for being extremely understanding and helpful coordinator that NANOSTEM could only wish for! During the project we had quite a lot of challenges, especially regarding the pandemic, but everyone in the network constantly felt your confidence and support. Of course, I want to mention our project managers - Dr Ana Maria Castilla, Dr Angelo Monteiro and Dr Fosca Mirata. Thank you for your huge work in the organisation and managing us, I know that it was not always easy 😊



My next words of gratitude goes to all the PIs who were motivating and giving us fantastic and very useful talks during workshops and summer schools. Especially I want to thank Prof. Rachel O'Reilly and Prof. Marie Pierre Dehouck for their hospitality and help during my secondments at the University of Birmingham and at the Artois University! Thanks to Dr Nazende Günday Türeli and Dr Caroline Mysiorek for being so supportive and inspiring panel!

Last, but not the least – thank you NANOSTEM ESRs! You made a great team, and I was so happy to be a part of it! Thank you to MR group members – Federico for being a great climbing buddy and



Roberta for our cycling-and-gelato-eating sessions! Thank you, Eirini, for the countless amount of epic hiking adventures that we had in all kind of English weather conditions! Thanks to the “French team” for their hospitality – Eleonora and Elisa, you made my secondment in France such a pleasant and unforgettable experience! Especially I want to highlight Eleonora’s professional skills in both growing in vitro

BBB model and making delicious Italian pasta. Then I want to thank our creative Nanogram team – Sara, Matteo and Ele for trying to keep our NANOSTEM social media alive! It was hard sometimes, but at least we kept our 152 Instagram followers (friends and relatives) entertained! Thanks to the “Portuguese team” – Ines, Sara, Francesca and Angela! Please don’t finish your PhDs too soon – I still hope to visit you in Portugal and have a proper summer school as was planned. Thank you, Sonia, for being extremely organised in everything you do – either in making an outreach video for NANOSTEM or in writing reports, it is always a luck to work with you in one team! Thank you, Patrick, for being so good in choosing Christmas lab outfits and I still hope to see you at QMUL in your last secondment (or at least short visit)! And of course, thanks to Georges for joining the NANOSTEM network, and I really hope that we will have a chance to gather all together again and meet you in person!

Thank you NANOSTEM for this incredible journey together!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alena". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'A' at the beginning.

Back to travel, finally!

An article by Roberta Bilardo

After a long period of restrictions, we have been finally trying to go back to normal during the last few months. Time goes much faster when you can travel and change your view for a while, and I was very lucky to be able to start my two-month secondment in Lille already in May.

My experience at HCS Pharma and overall, in France was great. It was my first time working with cells, and I enjoyed it very much! I had the chance to learn a lot by working side by side with people with a completely different background from mine and this team-working made this time exciting and productive. Moreover, given that my PhD moves directly from the chemistry lab to the testing on zebrafish, it was a fantastic opportunity for me to directly experience the intermediate step between these two levels of research. It was also very nice to spend some extra-lab time with the HCS Pharma team, despite of the initial challenges due to my poor knowledge of French. I could taste some of the famous French cheeses and wines, as well as the typical Welsh and a delicious “French version” of fish&chips, which I liked even more than any tried in London (sorry, British mates!).

Moreover, living close to Elisa and Eleonora allowed us to spend a lot of time together. Between European football matches nights and tree-top walking adventures, we spent amazing weekends. And the best came when also Alena joined us, for her secondment at the University of Artois. As small Nanostem delegation in France, we organised an on-the-road weekend trip in Normandy.



After seeing the fascinating coast of Étretat, the several tower bells of Caen and the fairy-tale beauty of Mont Saint-Michel, we all felt in love with this part of France. For the four of us, it was great to spend some time together, especially after the disappointment of the Nanostem summer school done online, again.



Within the HCS Pharma lab



After summer holidays with my family, it was time for me to return to London. I was very happy to come back, I must admit it, and I felt full of new energy for resuming my research at QMUL. This recharging time I spent in France and Italy has been very important for me, as we are all getting towards the final part of our paths and more worries tend to pile up rather quickly.

Although I still have some time before my PhD ends, the past three years of sharing time, thoughts and experiences with the other Nanostem fellows have made me even more aware of the preciousness of this type of networks which, for sure, enriches not only from the scientific, but also the personal point of view.

Roberta

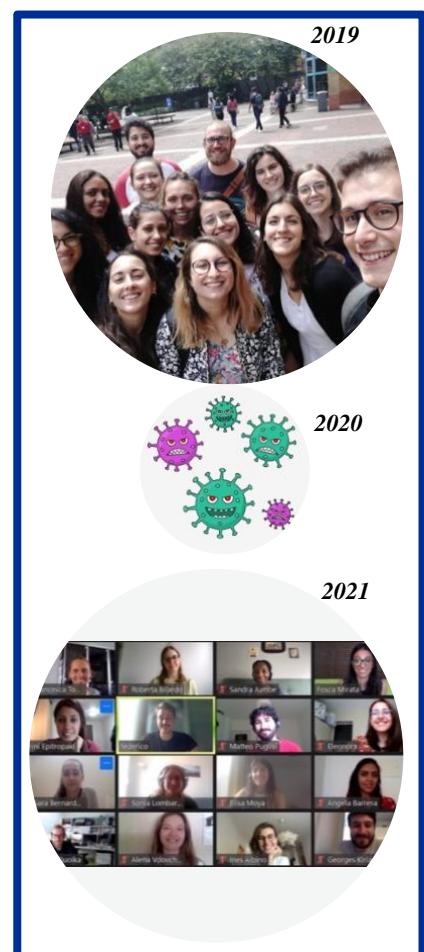
Life-saving benefits of a PhD

An article by Ines Albino

After experiencing three full years as an early-stage researcher in the NANOSTEM project, I became aware of the opened opportunities ahead of me. As we entered through NANOSTEM doors, more doors were opened which resulted of a new and enormous international network of people. This list started with the fellow PhD students, supported by the group leaders, extended to collaborators and participants of the NANOSTEM events, to people involved through outreach activities. NANOSTEM has had an influence on me on many ways but those I met in the network defined what I will bring from here to the future.

I saw many people participating in our summer schools. In the first event, the atmosphere felt nervous yet inspiring. I was amazed by the excitement of the event. In the second one, we could have enjoyed more if it were not the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. All events were converted to an online format, but still under those circumstances, online platforms proved to be great in bringing people in long-distances to meet up. In fact, summer schools kept us close together.

Apart from the annual event, the NANOSTEM team has always been connected. Either through a combination of ongoing collaborative projects, joint deliverable reports or in a more relaxed setting by sharing our thoughts on Whatsapp. We have been committed to share and celebrate each other's scientific achievements. We have connected to former ITN alumni and gained the knowledge of their path and experiences along the way. Finally, engaging with the public on our social media networks was essential for closing the circle.



While the NANOSTEM project is heading incredibly fast towards the end, it remains all I have learned through it, my personal growing and friendships that definitely makes it worth it. Don't you think all these sound like almost life-saving benefits of a good PhD experience?

Ines

My evaluation of the three years of NANOSTEM!

An article by Francesca Tomatis

The NANOSTEM experience came to an end and therefore it is time for me to think about what it represented for my professional and personal growth. It seems I arrived in Portugal yesterday and entered for the first time in the modern building of UC-Biotech in Cantanhede. I was super excited for the new adventure, far from my family but in a wonderful country, ready to meet new people not just in the lab but also in the European network.

Now, if I think about the three years spent here, I can say for sure that I grew a lot as a person. The first two years were not easy at all, for many different reasons: bad transport connections to be able to visit my family, difficulty in keeping long distance relationship, too many hours of work with the consequent problems in learning the new language and meeting new friends. But these years and their obstacles helped me not only to realize once more how fundamental are friends and loved ones while running through life, but also to understand the importance of an equilibrated work-life balance. I learnt that I need some time for myself, to recharge the energy and work better too, so I discovered again some hobbies and I got awareness of what I need in my days to be happy. I often thought about quitting the PhD and change career, but now I am grateful I did not give up, because I met incredibly amazing people during the journey, and I discovered friendships that I hope will last for a lifetime even if we'll be living in different countries and doing completely different jobs. The NANOSTEM network is what helped making my PhD easier, thanks to the extraordinary people, the summer schools, and the secondments. Speaking with the group was useful to realize that everyone was struggling for some reason, therefore it helped to understand that I was not alone fighting something that seemed much bigger than what I could manage. Moreover, the secondments (both mine to go to other labs or of other students coming to Cantanhede) were good to change a bit the routine, to have a sensation of fresh air and find again enthusiasm. Unluckily the pandemic situation did not allow us to exploit all the opportunities that were initially offered by the ITN, so we did not meet as often as we were supposed to do, and we could



Working together in the lab and our lab retreat during Eirini's secondment in Portugal

not have all the periods abroad that were in the plan. However, we managed to become closer and to learn a lot.

Concerning the professional life, I am grateful to the NANOSTEM network for all the useful lessons during summer schools and international meetings, for the possibility to meet people with which in the future we can establish collaborations, for the chance to work in different laboratories and in different countries, broadening our knowledge and making us observing things from multiple perspectives.

For sure I still have a lot to learn, and my PhD is still not over, but I am thankful I had the opportunity to join the group for these years. I am extremely happy about this experience, and I am glad for everything I lived, discovered, and learnt thanks to the NANOSTEM family. Now it is time to travel across Europe to attend all the PhD defenses of the NANOSTEM friends!



A dinner out with the NANOSTEM team from Portugal

Francesca

The NANOSTEM experience!

An article by Angela Barrera

It has been more than two years since I joined the NANOSTEM network, many things have happened since then. Most of the ESRs are in the last stage of their Ph.D, I still have some time to go because I was one of the last recruited students. During this time, I had the opportunity to share with all these



*Having a coffee with "tapas",
the coffee was Colombian!*

amazing people, being part of this network gave me the opportunity to participate in several training and networking activities. What I liked the most were the summer schools and the international meetings, unfortunately, they were not held in person due to Covid-19, but they were very interesting and useful to enhance our scientific career. We had very good lectures carried out by key researchers that share part of their work, furthermore we had workshops based on the development of our

scientific career.

I am very grateful about the experiences we have had within the network, the opportunity of learning about the scientific field I am working with and especially about the people I have met. Here in Portugal, we have been very supporting between each other's all the time. Fortunately, the pandemic situation started to get better during this year, we were allowed to go out and travel, so before the holidays we did a road trip to Spain with the girls. We went to Sara's hometown, Leon. We drove back-and-forth for 7 hours leaving on Saturday and coming back on Sunday, a bit crazy but a totally worthy experience. Sara gave us the best city tour and showed the places from the city.



Visiting Leon and spending time together!

Being part of an ITN also means that we are living in a foreigner country. With the pandemic situation seeing our families was a bit difficult for most of us due to travel restrictions. The situation started to get better when the vaccine came out. The vaccination process in Portugal went well, but for me was a bit hard to get the vaccine for a problem with the system, but as soon as I could do it, I started to plan my trip back to Colombia. Finally, after all this time, I was able to go home to see my family and to hug my mom again. I was waiting for that moment for more 2.5 years.



I could see my parents, my siblings, and the rest of my family. I could taste my mom's food, I could feel my home country weather and all of that made me very happy. I felt family love again, do you know, that feeling when your heart is full of joy and love? I was with family again after all this time, they were very happy with my visit finally and they spoiled me all the time.

I really hope all the NANOSTEM group will be able to meet again someday and to share all the NANOSTEM experiences and amazing memories this program has given to us. Since now I wish all the best to all of us and to achieve all the goals each of us have set.

Angela

A visual representation of my experience during NANOSTEM!

An article by Eleonora Rizzi.

It is unbelievable for me that already 3 years have passed by since I started my PhD and now we are almost at the finishing line of this incredible journey. Looking back, I have so many memories and I overcome so many hurdles that I am overwhelmed by that. For sure it was not an easy journey, both scientifically and on a personal level. You face so many difficulties that is hard sometimes to believe you had the strength to overcome them, but I would not have meet so many wonderful people in my life and seen so many places around the world without this experience.

A PhD is not an easy task, and you face more downs than ups sometimes. From the infinite hours in the lab doing experiments that at the end of the day do not work, to the endless number of papers to read and memorize, everything while being far from home in a country where they don not speak your native language can sometimes be burdensome. Having a safety net of people with who you can share your struggles and victory and that understand and share your feelings is something really helpful in the big adventure that is the PhD. I will always cherish all the good memories I was able to create and even if COVID19 didn't allow us to meet in person so much I commit myself in creating many many more memories in the future.

I would like for this final newsletter issue to let the images speak about my experience in the NANOSTEM family, to demonstrate that not everything was negative but actually pretty funny! 









P.S. **The end of a PhD:** a pretty accurate representation of me now writing the thesis manuscript

and whispering to myself 'you can do it!'



Eleonora

Merci, thank you, gracias

An article by Elisa Moya

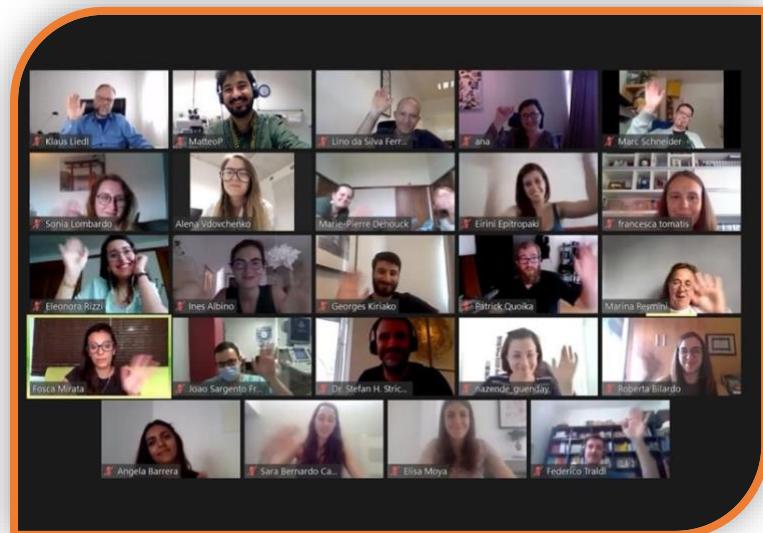
I remember when I was saying goodbye to my family and friends three years ago before my departure from Spain. For one side, this seems to me that it was one life ago. But in fact it was, because we have created new life in our new places, that we can also call *home*. But for the other side, when I open my eyes, I suddenly see myself at the very end of that stage, where the time has passed very fast.

“Three years seems to be a long time. But time is relative.”

Throughout this experience, we have overcome a lot of ups and downs, such as, being far from family, but with new adventures, people to meet, and places to visit. Or a lot of very exigent and dedicated work, behind big challenges and laboratory difficulties, but surrounded of great professionals who help, guide and support you in the way. Moreover, specifically, to our promotion, the Covid pandemic affected us, not only on the laboratory work restrictions, but also with big problems concerning the lack of materials, where we needed to adapt as much as we could. But Covid has also shown us that we are more capable, stronger, and adaptable than what we thought.

“Just keep going despite the difficulties. Never give up.”

Nevertheless, caused by this pandemic situation, what we missed the most has been the chance to meet more times Nanostem network in person. The firsts and very few events that we had the opportunity to met personally the group were wonderful. However, it was not the end, but just our workshops, summer schools, international meetings, looked like this ➔



Now, we are in the very last stage of this Nanostem project challenge, finishing up our thesis manuscripts and the last papers under journals to be published.

Between University of Artois beneficiary and the private pharmaceutical company partner HCS Pharma team, we developed a miniaturized human Blood-brain Barrier in vitro model adapted to

automated technology, that allows a much higher and faster screening of compounds or nanomaterials. Moreover, in collaboration with the Sonia Lombardo, ESR working in Mybiotech, in Germany, we collaborated in the study of the interaction of surfactant coated PLGA nanoparticles developed by using MicroJet reactor® (MJR) technology within the human brain-like endothelial cells, to evaluate their suitability to be used as drugs carriers and decipher the cellular mechanisms of transport behind them.

A Marie-Curie experience is an experience that change your life. It is often said that “we are made out of our experiences”, and this was a very challenging one that has made us much stronger and became more professional within an impressive international network. Therefore, I can only encourage to anyone who has the ambition to pursue big challenges, live new experiences abroad, “where probably 3 languages will be in your head every day”, to pursue a vacancy under these wonderful fellowship opportunities within an Innovative Training Network (ITN) projects.



I am sincerely grateful to have taken part of this amazing NANOSTEM project network, and I wish you all the best for the next future career steps and adventures.

Thank you with my whole heart!

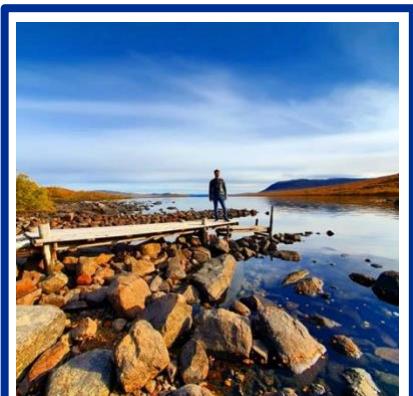
Elisa Moya

The Swedish part of Nanostem!

An article by Georges Kiriako

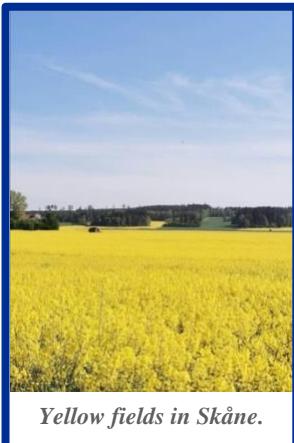
It's been two years since I started my PhD journey in Sweden. These years were wonderful, full of excitement and joy, full of dark winters and sunny summers. My work at Karolinska institute has been going really well. I got my first co-author paper, and I learned a lot of interesting and complicated techniques. During this time, I discovered a hidden passion of mine which is microscopy. I always liked to image cells, but I never knew it will bring so much happiness and joy. Seeing things on the micro and the nanoscale is truly magnificent and awing. It also allowed me to be involved in many projects and collaborating with interesting and passionate people. Microscopy might have changed my career path in the future and I'm grateful for that.

On a personal level, there were ups and downs as always. The pandemic was hard on all of us but hopefully, it will end in the near future. I was hoping to visit many countries in Europe but due to the circumstances, I went on a one-week trip to look for hidden gems in Sweden. I visited the north for second time to see the northern lights and I went on a one-hike on the king's trails which is the longest and most famous hiking trail in Sweden. I also visited Skåne Rapeseed fields where a beautiful blanket of yellow color covers the south as far as the eye can see.



Abisko national park in the north of Sweden.

visit
went
the
week



Yellow fields in Skåne.

Sweden is a great country to live in and I'm truly grateful in doing my PhD here.

I'm looking forward for the many years to come.

Georges

Time flies!

An article by Sara Bernardo Castro

After three amazing years, the NANOSTEM journey is coming to an end. It seems like yesterday this adventure was starting and we all were meeting each other in our first trip to London, and today we can start seeing the finish line at the end of the road.

These last months have been a real hard work, finishing up some important parts of the project and starting some others. Having completed my secondment at ICNAS, I feel kind of comfortable behind the wheel of medical imaging so it was time to start an amazing collaboration to work for real translational science with CNC! After three years focusing my work outside the lab in was nice to get in touch with that old friend again.



From bench to bedside! Francesca and me working on an in vitro model.

Now, that scary moment of writing a PhD thesis is getting more real and I cannot believe how quick time has passed. Being part of a MSCA ITN is, by itself, amazing. But I am sure this experience has been even better thanks to all the people taking part in the wonderful NANOSTEM family.



Unfortunately, we have spent half of our NANOSTEM time in a pandemic and as such a lot of meetings and travels did not happen. But strange as it is, I have always felt close to all the ESRs and ended up having an amazing time every time we met online!

Lucky me, I have here in Portugal three wonderful NANOSTEM ESRs who have been my support during

these years.

Being part of this network have taught me a lot of things not only at the scientific level but also on my day-to-day life. Thanks to it I have discovered new things and opened my eyes to a great number of brilliant possibilities that I would have never thought of. One of the most important things I have learnt from being a part of the NANOSTEM team is that it doesn't



Francesca, Ángela, Inês and me enjoying Portugal!

matter how many roads you have to take to find your place in science, the important thing is to get there and enjoy it.

It is always sad to say goodbye to wonderful things, but even though the ITN is finishing I am sure that what we have built-up here, is not!

Sara

NanoSTEM Newsletter Autumn 2021

January 2022 will be my last month within the NanoSTEM network. Even if I will continue working on my PhD project a bit longer, such deadline marks the end of a big chapter of my career. Ironically, January is also traditionally considered the month for taking stock and making resolutions for the future. So, why not doing the same in this final newsletter? Looking back at the last couple of years, my experience within the NanoSTEM was definitely intense and enriching. Such experience cannot be reduced to a simple scientific training. Surely, I feel privileged for having had the opportunity to interact and learn from all the members of the network and the invited speakers at the Summer Schools. Science was always great, and I really had to push myself out of my scientific comfort zone to try to understand the PhD projects of my chemists and computational colleagues. However, NanoSTEM has been much more. Over the years, me and my fellow ESRs had to juggle between in-presence and on-line summer schools, reports, and activities of science communication – all while doing our own PhDs in our host institutions – half of the time during a world pandemic. It feels almost crazy just to think about it. Just going through the whole experience (with a certain number of successes and missed deadlines as well) reminded me that a scientific career is made of so much more of just experiments. And this makes doing science even more enriching and beautiful! Being part of a network that trained us not only as experimentalists, but also as communicators, managers, writers, and as many more things was refreshing and helped to stick my nose out from my lab book and look at the “big picture”. After all these years, I have a clearer picture about which kind of scientist I want to be and NanoSTEM surely had a huge role in it. Thinking about the future, I am everyday more confident that I want to keep pursuing my dream of being a neuroscientist, wherever it will leads me. I will always be grateful for the amazing human interactions I had with the NanoSTEMers all over the years. January 2022 is just a formal deadline for me, because the Network that came up in the last year will surely last longer.

Matteo

PhD life is over!

An article by Sonia Lombardo

Dear readers,

Time has really flown during these last three years. At the time I am writing this, PhD life is over for me since two weeks, even if I still have some work to do from home. It feels like yesterday that I was uprooting myself to move to Germany and start a new adventure, and now I am busy organizing my move back to France. Until I defend my thesis probably next year, it will not really feel like closure, even if saying goodbye to everyone at MyBiotech was a bit emotional.

The last months of my PhD were busy with writing: one joint paper with Elisa, one on my own, and of course my thesis. I was out of the lab by mid-May, and after spending all of my time in front of the computer, I soon started to miss it. But writing is very time consuming. It sometimes felt like I was very slowly giving birth to a 150 pages-long baby, and some parts of the labor process were harder than others. I was only so thankful for all the reports I had to write during these three years, which at some moments were a bit of a pain, but proved so useful now when I could just copy-paste parts of them. When having to write about some experiments that I performed in 2019, I could also grasp the usefulness of GMP documentation, where all details of my experiments were carefully written in one of my many lab journals.

Before leaving Germany, I tried to enjoy my time there as much as possible, with the relaxation of COVID restrictions. What a pleasure it was to be finally back in the restaurants and in the bars with my friends. Travel was still a bit difficult, and I am very sad that this prevented us from meeting face to face with the NANOSTEM consortium in Lens and in Porto.



I am very thankful to all the people that helped me along the way of these three years: Nazende, Marc, Emre, Cemre, Lara, Simon, Esra, Selin...The list is very long, and I should save this for the acknowledgment part of my thesis. I think I definitely grew as a scientist during this time, and I am now looking forward to a new chapter of my life. Being part of the NANOSTEM project was a real pleasure, and I really hope we will meet again sometime with the merry band of ESRs.

Thank you all again,

Sonia

There and Back Again?

An article by Patrick Quioka

A little more than three years ago, I moved to Innsbruck to start my PhD studies. Definitely, a lot has happened within this time and thereby, I am not (only) referring to the pandemic, but actually to my life in general. Right now, I am trying hard to finalize my thesis and it feels completely natural to me to be here in Innsbruck. However, almost certainly I will leave this city soon. Currently, I am in a state between one and the next episode of my life. This is somewhat exciting, but also creates an unease: At present, I do not know, where I will go next.

Since the last newsletter, I took part in several conferences. Unfortunately, I could only attend one of these in person. Indeed, that was the one I enjoyed the most: Visiting Vienna with my supervisor Klaus and my colleague Monica for the European Biophysical Society Annual meeting was a lot of fun. Generally, I attended many interesting scientific talks on all the conferences, which I attended this year. However, at none of the remote conferences, I was able to have as many interesting discussions as in Vienna, in person. There, I met many interesting people and, apart from the scientific discussions, I also had many other fun conversations. This conference definitely moved me closer to the scientific community than any of the other events.

Even if I did not hand in my thesis, yet, I already started writing applications. I am currently considering a career in academia. However, such a career would require me to move to yet another place, possibly, to a place that is considerably far away—on another continent, even. I really see the benefits of joining a different group to get new perspectives and learn new methods. Nevertheless, once again leaving the place where I am comfortable now, sounds still scary.

It feels weird to think about leaving Innsbruck. Indeed, I would like to move back or at least closer to my family. At the same time, I would not really want to move too far away from here. This city has evolved to be my center of life. My colleagues here in Innsbruck are now really good friends. In fact, we even went on vacation together: We visited Budapest in a group of nine people. This was a lot of fun and definitely a highlight of the past year. Ultimately, I am torn between my career perspectives, my family and my current life here in Innsbruck.



Above all, this is the last newsletter of Nanostem and therefore the end of the network. Actually, I have not seen any member of Nanostem since February 2020, when I met Matteo in Munich. In fact, this was shortly before the pandemic hit Austria. Besides that, the last time I met any other member of the network in person was over two years ago. It is sad that we could not meet more often. I believe that Marina, Fosca and everyone else, who took part in the organization, managed to make the Nanostem events in the past months as enjoyable as possible. However, I believe that remote meetings can never fully replace personal meetings. I would have loved to spend more time with the other ESRs and even more, I would have loved to say goodbye in person. I really hope that we will find an opportunity to meet again outside any official meetings.

Eventually, the past three years ended as quickly as they started. Looking back, I definitely do not regret my decision to do my PhD studies with Nanostem. I enjoyed my time at the network and in particular, I enjoyed my time here in Innsbruck. I wish every member of Nanostem all the best for their future, in case I do not meet them again.

Patrick

Secondment in Coimbra at the final stage

An article by Eirini Epitropaki

After the coronavirus era I was finally able to travel and conduct my long-awaited secondment in



Figure 1. ESRs 4,5,6 and 14 at CNC

Coimbra. I was looking forward to moving to a more biological related field and to a warmer climate. I got to explore new techniques and got more hands-on experience with various cell lines that will be valuable for the future. The reunion with some of the other ESRs was a welcome change of pace since I hadn't met them in person for last 2 summer schools. We talked about our research and progress, our future plans and skills that we are still lacking. They helped me adapt quickly in the new environment of CNC, since I couldn't speak Portuguese and I had mostly chemical training so far. ESRs 4,5 and 6 organized a warm welcome for me in and out of the lab as seen in the pictures (Figure1).

Francesca and Angela (ESRs 5 & 6) took me also to a very nice trip on the beach so I could swim in the ocean, where we saw the most majestic sunset and acquire moments that I will forever cherish (Figure 2 right). Angela helped me a lot with the transportation around Cantanhede and in general as she is an expert in the field, since she is using them every day to commute to Coimbra for her experiments. Francesca was extremely kind helping me around in the lab and always offering a ride to the most amazing places. Ines (ESR 4) showed how hard working she is and organized an amazing lab retreat for the whole team where I socialized with other people from Prof. Ferreira's laboratory. In the lab retreat we had a funny hat competition where I brought a brain so Angela can study in depth the BBB (blood and brain barrier) as she does successfully with her mice (Figure 2 left).



Figure 1. ESRs 5,6 and 14 in wild adventures

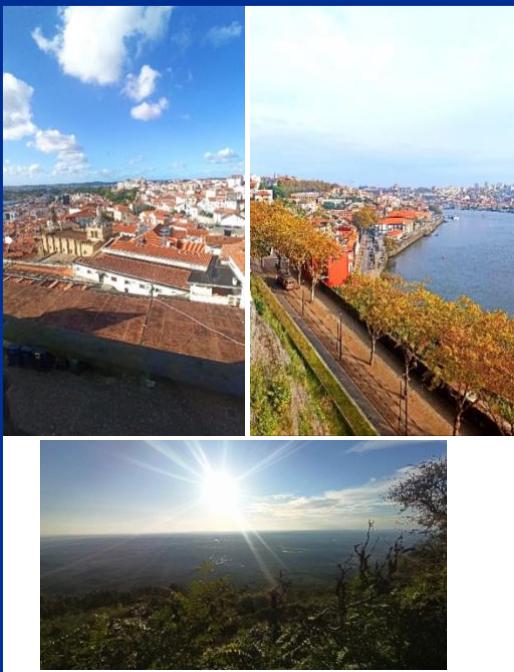


Figure 2. Coimbra (left), Serra do Buçaco (bottom), Porto (right)

Cantanhede is a beautiful place, but I optimised my time here in Portugal between experiments by visiting various place, where I could experience the culture in different depths. First stop was Coimbra, where I met with Sara (ESR 10) that offered a tour of the city with spectacular views and fun moments. Next was Serra do Buçaco a mountain in close distance from Cantanhede, where I had a small hike while missing my hiking buddy and adventure partner Alena (ESR2), but the dramatic scenery recompensate me. Last place on my list was Porto, which I liked fairly a lot and I can't wait to go back.

Lastly, I had to return to Coimbra to welcome at CNC its newest member Federico (ESR1). With Federico here we had quite a few people from Nanostem so we organised a welcome dinner for him and a goodbye dinner for me, and it looked like the summer schools that we used to have. It was a night filled with laughter, science and amusement (Figure 4). It was nice socializing with the other ESRs and I hope it won't be the last time as I proceed to the end of this adventure.



Figure 3. Last dinner in Cantanhede

As I reach at the end of my research career as a student, I can't help but think back to when I first started and all the experiences and skills I've learned during my time with the Nanostem family. I made a lot of friends and met people from all over the world, which helped me cultivating my interest for learning different languages. I am grateful that I was part of this spectacular project, which taught me many things and helped change and progress over this brief period. Hopefully, a more prosperous future awaits, and I think Nanostem has prepared me for my future endeavors.

Eirini