Interview with Marcos FALLANZA

*Postdoc researcher at **GVS** SPA*
Italy

«I was born in Torrelavega, a city located in the region of Cantabria in the north of Spain. I took a degree in Chemical Engineering and after that I did a PhD in Chemical and Process Engineering in the "Advanced Separation Processes" research group of the University of Cantabria. The PhD was in collaboration with the Universidad Autònoma in Madrid and Imperial College London. During my PhD I decided that I wanted to develop my career in R&D and finally just after finishing my PhD I had the opportunity to embark in a post-doc within the BIOART project at GVS SpA in Bologna.»

Welcome in the BIOART project Marcos. What is your postdoc project about? What objectives do you have to reach?

Currently I am working to contribute in the research and development of an artificial kidney device. The project involves research and development of novel PVDF membranes to be used in the development of a filter for the removal of heparin – a blood thinner- during dialysis treatment. The studies comprise technology development, membrane production, as well as membrane surface modification devoted to produce an effective heparin filter device.

You participated in BIOART's meeting and training sessions in January 2014. What did you learn there?

During the meeting I had the opportunity to meet the rest of the people involved in this project, which was by itself a great personal experience. In addition, as we have so many different backgrounds it was really interesting to share our knowledge and our different points of view of the same issue.

The technical training was mainly focused on the kidneys, ranging from kidney biology and physiology to kidney diseases and how they can affect your daily life, highlighting the reasons why the development of bio-artificial kidney devices is a critical issue.
Then I realized how important and ambitious the final goal of this project is.

The programme for BIOART's training session next September has been released: what is of specific interest to you in this programme?

Of course I consider extremely interesting all the issues regarding the technical basis of the project like tissue engineering, (bio) artificial systems and membrane devices for instance. In addition, as a post-doc I am really interested in the development of other complementary skills such as communication skills, project management, networking or leadership. I consider them essential to develop my future career in R&D.

Did you attend any conference or workshop since January, or maybe visit another firm or get specific training?

Within this project my work is mainly focused on polymer and material science, which was not my expertise. In this way, by my daily work I have the opportunity to broaden my previous scientific knowledge. At the same time I have the opportunity to take specific courses on quality, security and environmental issues.

Moreover, as a part of the R&D department in a big company, I have the opportunity to work in a multidisciplinary environment: this will definitely enrich my background. I'll be dealing with other topics in other areas that are not closely related to my previous knowledge, such as industrial production, marketing, relationships with customers, buys and sales, relationships with stakeholders, quality control.

Furthermore, within this new and complex work environment I can acquire new communication, management and leadership skills as well.

What is the best thing about doing a postdoc? How challenging is it?

Definitely one of the best things about doing a postdoc is that it is a unique opportunity to keep on continuously learning while having the chance to work with leading experts in their areas. In addition you have the opportunity to meet new people with a different approach to work, while working in a multidisciplinary area.

Do you see anything specific in doing a postdoc in a company? Do you think you'd work differently if you were in a public research lab?

Based on my personal experience I would say that the R&D work is really similar. Maybe the main difference between doing research in a public lab and in a company is the relative importance of the different criteria used to evaluate the project.

In my previous experience in a public lab, the major part of the efforts was oriented to develop the technical part of the project to make it technically feasible. On the other hand, I am surprised about the complexity that the project acquires when considering all the rest of the stakeholders and variables involved: from the company point of view, the projects are evaluated as a whole. In addition to the technical part, the economical assessment becomes a critical issue. In this sense, the project success depends not only on fulfilling the technical product requirements but also on meeting the environmental, health and security regulations while considering other aspects like marketing issues and customers' feedback.

What is appealing to you in being a researcher?

For me the best thing in being a researcher is that it is very challenging. Each day has something new to offer: new problems to solve, new issues to think about, new trials to do and new problems to overcome. I find it so exciting and self motivating! From my point of view, R&D starts with the need of solving a problem.

At the beginning the only thing you have is just a single idea, then you start to develop this idea, which gets more and more complex and hopefully after some time it becomes a reality.

I find very appealing the fact that you can do something that really counts, something that can contribute to make a difference.

Do you have any plans after completing the PhD?

For the time being, I don't have any specific plan after completing my post-doc. I would like to keep on developing my career in R&D but I have not decided yet whether in the private industry or in academia.

Thank you Marcos for answering my questions, and all the best for your PhD!

GVS S.P.A

GVS S.P.A. is of the world's leading manufacturers of injection-moulded plastic filters and components for various sectors: medical, automotive, laboratory, pharmaceutical. GVS also manufactures membranes.
www.gvs.com

BIOART in brief

BIOART is a Marie Curie Initial Training Network funded by the European Commission.

Starting date:
1st December 2012

End date:
30th November 2016

Number of partners: 11

Coordinator:
Dr. Dimitrios STAMATIALIS,
University of Twente, MIRA Institute,
The Netherlands

Programme:
FP7-PEOPLE-2012-ITN

Project Reference: 316690