Dear all,

It is a pleasure to introduce the 2012 edition of ENLPress and to welcome all new and old ENLP members. We hope this magazine will give you a flavour of some of the activities ongoing within the ENLP network. ENLPress serves as a tool to facilitate member communication, to disseminate ENLP vision and to inspire us through reports and reflections from the network. This year over 20 alumni contributed to the magazine and we would like to thank all for their excellent contributions!

In this issue, Rick Koster and Louise Mennen discuss leadership behaviour and the leaders that inspire them. Angelika de Bree and Professor Mirjana Gurinovic reflect on how to make a difference by identifying factors underlying previous success, and the importance and potential of strong networks. Simone Frey writes about another strong network, that of the South East Asia Nutrition Leadership Programme, which she visited in 2011. You will also find that ENLP has been visible at the conference scene during the year. Jose Penalvo summarizes the ENLP activity “Shaking the Nutrition Tree” organized at the FENS conference in Madrid where scientists were invited to discuss and think outside the box on how to ensure global access to food in 2050. At the same conference Jessica Schwarz received the Young Investigator Award 2011 (congratulations!!) and she shares with us her ideas on leadership and its importance for future nutrition research.

As you may know, there is a life after the hectic ENLP week - there is ENLP2! Claire Mac Evilly reports from the successful launch of the pilot of the European Nutrition Leadership Platform Advanced Seminar. ENLP2 will provide an opportunity for efficient leadership training for ENLP-participants and external people who have reached a bit further in their career. You will also find the winning articles from the ENLP nutrition writing competition 2011 and much more!

On behalf of the ENLPress committee (Anne Mullen, Claire Whittle, Sandra Crispim, Maria Tabernero and myself, Rikard Landberg) I wish you pleasant reading!

Uppsala, 2nd of February 2012
Rikard Landberg
Dear all,

I am writing this piece for the ENLPress at the end of January 2012 so most of my New Year’s resolutions are already forgotten. Like other years, my list of resolutions is not very different from that of last year (practicing more sports, eating more healthily, etc). The difference this year is that I am reading a book called Switch, by Chip and Dan Heath.

I can highly recommend this book as it is very entertaining, but it also shows that the difference between success and failure can often be reduced to a few determining factors. This, to me, makes Switch stand out from many other books on the topic.

The other interesting part of the book are the many examples to illustrate change, which is often a matter of turning only a couple of switches, come from the arena of nutrition and health - just the kind of information that we love to learn more about! Just think about our slogan: “ENLP, for people who want to make a difference”.

One of the examples used in the book is the story of Jerry and Monique Sternin. In 1990 they went on an assignment to Vietnam as staff members of Save the Children. Their goal was to help fight the problem of malnutrition in the country’s villages and they were given only 6 months to make a difference.

Jerry Sternin had read as much as he could about malnutrition and concluded that three intertwined problems were causing poor health and malnutrition: 1) poor sanitation, 2) unavailability of clean water, and 3) rural people tended to be ignorant about nutrition. While this was all true, Jerry Sternin also concluded that “millions of children cannot wait for those issues to be addressed”. Jerry Sternin had a better idea. He travelled to rural villages and met with groups of local mothers. He asked them “Did you find any very poor kids who are bigger and healthier than the typical child?” The answer was “Yes”, so he visited these children and their mothers to find out what the mothers did differently with exactly the same resources. There he discovered the switches: 1) feeding the children more frequent smaller portions over the day instead of the same amount of food divided over only two occasions, 2) hand-feeding of the children and 3) adding ingredients that other mothers considered “low class food” such as sweet potato greens. Subsequently, Sternin made sure that the switches were shared by the mothers of the healthy children with the mothers of the malnourished children during community cooking sessions. This change came from within the communities: something that arose from the local wisdom of the village. Sternin’s role was only to help them see that they could do it: conquer malnutrition on their own! Not surprisingly, the work that was done in Vietnam is now serving as a model for helping tens of thousands of children in 20 countries!

I think we all want to make a difference, in our own life, in the lives of our loved ones, in our organizations, in the world around us. This book has shown me that it is time well spent to analyze the positive deviants, like the poor mothers with the healthy children, to know what the switches are.

Anyone who knows the positive deviant in the area of the ‘ambitious mother with three young boys and husband – and being sporty’, please drop me a note on: angelika-de.bree@unilever.com.

Angelika de Bree, President of the ENLP alumni

April 2011 saw the launch of the pilot of the European Nutrition Leadership Platform Advanced Seminar, a 3 day course held in Luxembourg. For many years it was felt by the ENLP Board, Alumni and Continuing Education Initiative that there was a real opportunity to build on the once off training events and support Alumni who are more advanced in their careers.

The tipping point to get things in motion has been setting the new Platform vision last year. The inspirational vision: ‘To develop, inspire and connect leaders within Europe to advance nutrition and health’ clearly indicated that one of our focus areas should be the ongoing development of leaders.

The participants of the pilot of ENLP Advanced Seminar 2011 were from diverse backgrounds including non-for profits, research and academia. As with the ENLP Seminar, aimed at early career scientists, the Advanced Seminar was an intense learning experience and provided the pilot participants with new skills and techniques to lead, effect change and expand their networks.

Commenting on the pilot Dr Jose Penalvo, Assistant Professor from The Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Cardiovasculares, Spain said “Leadership today is about self-evaluation, understanding people and having insight into other’s styles. ENLP Advanced is a step further on developmental leadership and gives you this understanding”.

The success of the pilot affirmed our thinking and as a result we are rolling out the ENLP Advanced to the wider Alumni and others in 2012. The Advanced Seminar will run in parallel with the current Seminar. ENLP Advanced will help to deliver the vision and mission of the Platform. Working with a leading UK leadership training company, The Greenbank Partnership, we have developed a seminar that has diverse speakers, experts, and learning sessions. The sessions are focused on best practices and new strategies for leadership and cover a range of topics including building trust, influencing others and leading teams. The seminar is as much about sharing the best and the brightest ideas, programs, and practices as it is about sharing how to work together to do them.

The ENLP Advanced Seminar is a targeted at mid career professionals who have 6-10 years of professional experience, and are in a Senior Manager position in the nutrition, food and health sectors. The course is open to ENLP Alumni and those who have not previously completed the ENLP Seminar.

Claire Mac Evilly who participated in the pilot, was appointed Director of ENLP Advanced by the Board earlier this year. She added “ENLP Advanced builds on the success of the original seminar and reinforces the commitment by the Board and the sponsors to support the development of leaders who carry real life responsibilities in a variety of food and health fields and contexts”.

For more information about ENLP Advanced, please visit www.enlp.eu.com
In 2050, the expected 9.1 billion world population will overwhelm our current food system capacity and we will not be able to feed people anymore. In parallel to this trend, obesity rates increase globally pointing, once again, to an ineffective food system.

In the scenario of the FENS, where World leaders and promising scientists gathered to discuss nutrition and food-related issues, the ENLP organized a session where diverse cultural and professional backgrounds were used to ‘shake the nutrition tree’, setting minds out of the box to bring ideas forward and share them with peers with the ultimate goal of changing the system direction now.

Ellen Gustafson, a ‘sustainable food system activist’, Founder and Executive Director of the 30 Project, the FEED Projects and the FEED Foundation (and a brilliant speaker) set up the grounds for discussion. The audience was then challenged with the question “What would you do, if no money restriction applies, to ensure global access to food in 2050?”

After a brainstorming session in random groups and a general debate, the final discussion led to a general agreement among the participants that education about nutrition will be very important to change some consumer habits, but that education alone will not be enough. The world needs to invest in sustainable agriculture and more local and regional production of fruits, vegetable, whole grains and healthy proteins so that we will all have food security and access to the right kinds of foods to eat. Governments and consumer activists should work together to make sure that the healthiest food is the most available. Global agricultural production will need to shift towards healthy foods AND consumers need to be educated on eating the best, most nutritious foods.

In October 2011, around 2000 people fascinated by the world of nutrition and food gathered for the 11th European Nutrition Conference held in Madrid. The conference was organised under the topic ‘Diversity vs. Globalisation – A Nutritional Challenge for a changing Europe’ and brought four days of discussion and exchange for the delegates from all over Europe and further. For me personally it was a good opportunity to reconnect with the global picture of nutrition research which sometimes gets a bit lost in highly specialised meetings and symposia. Also, having participated at the ENLP 2009, the FENS offered me a fantastic opportunity to reconnect with my former ENLP mates, meet up with the other active alumni and to get to know new ENLP participants.

My submitted abstract on the mechanisms preventing hepatic steatosis by consuming a high protein diet using transcriptomics was chosen for oral presentation. This gave me the chance to talk about my current research and discuss with the leading researchers. In my opinion this kind of exchange is crucial for moving forward. The development of high-throughput technologies currently allows us insight into a complete new world of scientific discoveries. Now, entering the post-omics era we have to live with the consequences and interpret these discoveries consisting of tremendous amounts of information. In this nutrition research 2.0 age the lonely researcher cannot succeed on his own anymore. We have to integrate competence and expertise from multiple groups with complementary knowledge in big European or worldwide consortia.

To make those consortia work and do large scale, cutting-edge nutrition research, we need capable, strong leaders who know to inspire people. I see myself on this way to bring nutrition research forward by using my own scientific expertise but likewise my growing professional network. As a future leader I want to integrate separate islands of knowledge by bringing experts together and thereby succeeding in breaking down the complex data to comprehensive messages and useable nutrition guidelines.

True to the vision of the ENLP, to develop, inspire and connect leaders within Europe to advance nutrition and health, the debate ‘Shaking the nutrition tree: Time to move forward’ organised by the ENLP alumni was a great success. Ellen Gustafson, founder of ‘30 projects’ gave an inspiring talk on the topic ‘Obesity + Hunger = 1 global issue’ concluding that our goal should be to ensure good, nutritious food for everyone. In the subsequent debate on the question how to achieve this, scientists, representatives of food industry as well as from NGOs were excited discussing different options on production, distribution of food products as well as the pros and cons of promoting mainly local food. At the end of the debate participants left with the message ‘Start on your own plate’.

Thank you to the ENLP alumni for the presentation of the prize, the selection committee for having chosen my abstract as well as the Judith Swartz foundation for offering the prize.

I am looking forward more to come into the exciting area of nutrition and leadership.
Louise Mennen and Rick Koster are in the business of identifying and developing leadership qualities in others. At ENLP, Louise and Rick facilitate the transition of raw material into leadership material, and they do this by investing their time in the individual. We thought it would be interesting for ENLPress to invest some time in Louise and Rick, to find out what leadership means to them personally and who they admire as leaders themselves. We began the interview by asking 'how do you define leadership? What does leadership mean?'

Rick: There is no consensus at all on the definition of leadership. Everyone has his/her own perspective. So do we! Being social animals, leadership is an important issue because there are always leaders and followers and communication is the means by which you can see leadership. We've thought about our own definition of leadership, and that would be 'to take the responsibility to improve each other'. That can be in all kinds of ways: you may be a mentor to others, you may teach others about your subject, or you may be a good friend and allowing others space for growth when they need it.

Louise: Leadership is more about leadership behaviour than ‘being a leader’, and everyone can have moments in which they show leadership behaviour. In a group, one moment one person can be showing that and another moment another person can. During the ENLP we talk about informal and formal leadership and I think the real leadership is not so much the title someone has but the behaviour someone shows. An expression I like is that ‘leadership is not so much about the number of followers you have but how many leaders you develop’.

Who inspires you as leaders?

Louise: During my professional life I came across a number of formal leaders and most of them I was very disappointed with! The one who really inspired me was Alfred Haandrikman, my boss and the head of research and development when I worked in nutrition at an ingredients company. Alfred was a very good listener and he really respected everyone. He saw clearly that everyone in a team is necessary to do the work. And of course he had his own opinions! When he made decisions against my advice he had very good arguments which he would come to me to explain, so I was still valued by him. He was a very good communicator, good at social talk and spending time with others talking about many things. So he showed a lot of respect, and that made me feel like I really wanted to work for him.

Rick: In answer to this question, I have come up with three categories! The first one is political: Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister. He is very cheerful, especially in this difficult economic situation. In Holland, we have a difficult coalition of parties and he is able to mingle in-between them. And I also think Angela Merkel is doing a good job.

Leadership is not so much about the number of followers you have but how many leaders you develop.
In one sense I really admire her, but I wonder if she will manage to align all prime ministers in Europe. It’s a terribly difficult situation, of course, but that could really inspire leadership behaviour.

In business, I admire Richard Branson and late Steve Jobs. They are so innovative, are driven by what they think is right and they have changed the way we work and the way we think – that’s amazing!

And in my last category, ‘the mystifier’, like Silvio Berlusconi. He also inspires me. In the same way does Johan Cruyff, the former Dutch soccer player. There is something about this kind of person - they mystify themselves, and if they can couple that with a sense of ethics, a sense of morality, that would really make them effective leaders.

“There is something about this kind of person - they mystify themselves, and if they can couple that with a sense of ethics, a sense of morality, that would really make them interesting leaders.”

Louise: I think it must be difficult if you have such a personality, or when other people mystify you, to do away with your ego and work for the greater good. If everyone adores you, if everyone listens to every word that you say and if what you say is ‘gold’, then it must be very hard to take on critics. So the followers have a responsibility - to tell their leader the truth.

Rick: Indeed it really is the task of the followers. If the leader collects only nodding ‘yes-men’ they won’t fulfil their potential as a leader. Where you are in that position fear and ego can creep in, and those are devastating and can become lethal for the leader and his organisation.

Louise: If you are a good leader, it’s one of your tasks to avoid isolation, and have critical people around you who will tell you the truth.

Rick: I’d also like to mention the ‘unknown leaders’ or the ‘ordinary heroes’. I really like those terms. They are the people you don’t see. They are not as visible as the people we normally talk about as leaders, but they have such an influence. We can say that for the Arab Spring. We don’t really know who the leaders of those protests are, but we know they are there.

“If you are a good leader, it’s one of your tasks to avoid isolation, and have critical people around you who will tell you the truth.”

Who are your favourite current political leaders?

Louise: I think a very obvious leader is Aung San Suu Kyi from Burma. The film about her, “The Lady”, by French director Luc Besson shows her tenacity and her good cause. She has been blocked so much in what she strives for but she’s still doing it, maintains a good spirit and she still inspires so many people. What I like a lot about her is that she is without vengeance. Now that things seem to be opening up a little bit over there she is willing to talk with those people who have oppressed her and instead of seeking revenge she is taking the situation forward and looking to the future.

Rick: For me, also interestingly from the East, Wen Jiabao, the Chinese prime minister. Although there is still debate about freedom of speech and civil suppression in China, I admire the balance of what he does, how he connects with the West, and how he has become a public figure. He is the first prime minister in China to show his feelings on television! That is an interesting change coming to China to watch.

So if we were to take your favourite political leaders. Louise, yours is Aung San Suu Kyi and Rick, yours is Wen Jiabao. What would the world be like if all leaders were like your leaders? Would it work?

Rick: It would be terrible!

Louise: It’s about diversity. It’s the same as what you hear a lot at the top businesses - they need more women and people of different cultures at their boards because that is what makes a business do well. And I think that’s exactly the diversity you need in leadership positions.

Rick: It’s important to avoid tunnel vision and be aware of your blind spots. You need a range of views from different people.

Who is your favourite leader from the films? And why?

Louise: I found this question difficult. I thought of the film the King’s Speech for two reasons. I think it is a very good film, and I really like Colin Firth as an actor. He’s not my idol or anything, but I admire the perseverance of his character in the film, how he finds his way and takes the lead even though he doesn’t want it at all. That’s leadership to me! He takes the responsibility, were there is the need, and it is a combination of formal and informal.

Rick: I have two! One is Hannibal from the A-Team and that’s because he always has a plan! He has self esteem, is innovative and always comes up with some crazy idea to find solutions. He knows the qualities of others and makes use of those. In my youngest day, all the kids wanted to be Hannibal as he is the cool leader. And my second is Annie, from the movie.

Annie has guts to do what she thinks is right, she is persuasive, and also she transforms people. That is a very important task of a leader, they transform others....
Annie has guts to do what she thinks is right, she is persuasive, and also she transforms people.... she has a moral compass.

Louise: Leaders who are over their time say things like ‘that’s how we have always done it’. If you hear someone saying that, you should really think about something else now!

What would the world be like if all political leaders were like your chosen favourite film leader?

Rick: Again, I think it would be terrible! Politicians really have to go for consensus, whereas Annie and Hannibal do not go for consensus. They follow their own plan and they know how to persuade people to go along.

Louise: Colin Firth might be a good leader but not on his own; maybe with a team.
Recent observations from the 8th SEANLP
by Simone Frey (simone.frey@bioanalyt.com)

As an active member of the ENLP Alumni Association I had the great honour to be a delegate and contributor at the 8th SEANLP programme held in Jakarta from Nov 14th to 18th 2011.

The NLP in South East Asia was established in 2002 by Siti Muslimatun, who took part in the ENLP in 2000. The SEANLP is organised under the umbrella of the SEA Ministers of Education and the University of Indonesia. The SEANLP resembles the ENLP and the programme starts also with an outside team building session. The SEANLP participants, 20 in total, came from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Vietnam. In contrast to the ENLP, the majority of the SEANLP participants, 10 in total, work in the public sector such as the ministry of the health or universities; only one participant worked in industry (Unilever). With Prof. Corazon VC Barba and Prof. Khor Geok Lin as faculty members, the programme has two very experienced, esteemed and humorous mentors.

The aim of delegating an ENLP alumni to the SEANLP is to strengthen relationships between ENLP and SEANLP alumni and to learn from each other. I was involved in the SEANLP programme with 3 tasks. The 1st was to give an after-dinner speech to the SEANLP participants and the 2nd was to lead the session “A Vision for Nutrition in SEA”. The 3rd task was the request to present my company and our products that came up after my after-dinner speech where I was briefly referring to my current job in a start-up company.

For my after-dinner speech, I started to analyse (I am a thinker!) the after dinner speeches I had listened so far during the ENLP and extracted the most important from these speeches to me: focussing on the personal experience and decisions made in the career and communicating a personal vision. Only the audience can evaluate my speech, but as a result several participants came to me afterwards to thank me personally for the inspiration and the sharing of experience.

For the session “A Vision for Nutrition in SEA” I stimulated the audience by showing that we nutritionists are the ones who have to solve the challenges related to nutrition in the world in the next years. Through several brainstorming sessions, the SEANLP participants developed their vision for nutrition in SEA: “Ensuring equitable and sustainable nutrition and health for South East Asian people by 2030”.

On the last day of the SEANLP, I presented the background and the revolutionary products of my company including how research and science can be brought into an innovative product.

Participating at the SEANLP, and observing the participants during the session, was a powerful experience and I thank the ENLP for sponsoring this trip as well as Siti Muslimatun and Helda Khusun for the warm welcome. The aim to strengthen the relationship was definitely reached since during my last visit in Jakarta in January 2012 I had a lot of new friends to meet.

Bringing it all together, I realized that it doesn’t matter if you take a look at nutritionists of the ENLP in Luxembourg or at nutritionists of the SEANLP in Jakarta, we have one big vision which we all share: improving the world through better nutrition.
I was the elected chair of the Network for Capacity Development in Nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe (NCDNCEE) since its inauguration in Budapest in 2005. The emphasis of this short article is to reflect on my own experience while being the Chair of this network. It was part of the working groups established by the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, and became known as the UNU/SCN Network for Capacity Development in Nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe (NCDNCEE), (www.agrowebcee.net/ncdn/). The focus was on Central and Eastern Europe, and the aim of its work was to support countries in developing research and training projects, and approaches in nutrition based on country specific needs and to promote food and nutrition national action plans through CD.

It became quickly clear that CD is more than formal training; it also includes human resource development, organizational, institutional and legal framework development with the aim of enhancing knowledge and skills. It was also obvious that CD cannot be done overnight, but would have to be seen in a long term perspective; it is a continuing process, and takes also account of national priorities, policies, plans and processes.

The Network had one initial meeting in 2005 and six meetings between 2006 and 2011; results are published in scientific journals and the reports are available at the website www.agrowebcee.net/ncdn/. The NCDNCEE meetings were arranged for continually identifying specific challenges and training needs and to arrange and implement workshops on such needs, often within what one can call nutritional tools or skills.

The NCDNCEE created a framework for analyzing actors and responsibilities in nutrition in CEE and for the CD based on the challenges and needs of the region provided by the participants from CEE and the planning guidelines for the CD in CEE. This turned out to be an important guide and was used in many different phases of the Network. The NCDNCEE Steering Committee followed up CD needs, identified new needs for further activities; identified other sources of funding; it also established collaboration with FAOREU in Budapest (http://www.fao.org/europe/en/), WHO Europe (http://www.euro.who.int/en/nutrition) and other regional nutritional networks for CD such as MENANA covering the Middle East and North Africa. The Netherlands and Norway provided support by facilitators, one from Wageningen University representing the UNU, and one person from Akershus University College.

It addition to this I felt it was crucial that the Network developed a good relationship to projects funded by the EC, such as EuroFiR (www.eurofir.org) and EURRECA (www.eurreca.org). Such a collaboration and engagement may be an important funding source of meetings and training/education opportunities for NCDNCEE members/young researchers.

The outcome of efforts has been considered very positive and useful by the participants of the Network. There have been many issues on the agenda; some cross-cutting themes were: academic training, workshops, networking and sharing of experiences. Network meetings/ CD workshops (2006-2011) included: collection and use of nutritional grey literature; micronutrient recommendations; identification and prioritization of nutrition training and education needs in CEE; Media Communication Training; presentation of EURRECA/EuroFiR nutritional tools; Food Composition Data Base (FCDB) workshops; micronutrient adequacy assessment in CEE countries’ development of nutritional software’s and e-learning modules; FCDB development, the right to adequate food as a policy tool, WHO’s new child growth reference standard, food and nutrition action plans and selected issues for follow-up and other activities in the future. The need for additional tailor-made training on nutrition was identified. EuroFiR signed a memorandum of understanding with several CEE countries to help development of national FCDB.

Participants have also presented an impressive amount of activities in each country, guided by the plans from earlier meetings of the Network. That included input to the arrangements, the leadership and the implementation of CD activities.

Video film from the last meeting of the NCDNCEE in May 2011 is available at You Tube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGAaVs3po-c

I was invited to 17th ENLP seminar in April 2011 to deliver an after dinner speech to the participants. For me to share my professional experiences and my career development with young researchers from the whole of Europe was a challenge, but turned out to be a success that has influenced my views on me as a professional in nutrition in Europe. My involvement in ENLP has been beneficial to connect with many colleagues from different countries, establish collaboration and links with many of them. I was also nominated to be an ENLP board member. Based on my own experience I am promoting ENLP in my region and will encourage young colleagues and researchers from CEE countries to apply and attend ENLP seminars in the future. I see also another role for ENLP: it could profit from supporting and maybe engaging in developing future networks in the nutrition field across Europe. Such supporters are rare but highly appreciated.

In conclusion I would say that nutritional training, exchange of information and cooperation with other networks and EC projects are excellent opportunities for nutritional CD in CEE. As this article highlights there is considerable potential in such a network, an approach that has led to quick achievements that otherwise would have been difficult.
Working abroad

by Sandra Crispim (sandracrispim@gmail.com)

In a later section of ENLPress 2012 you can find an article I wrote last year for the ENLP writing competition, which I questioned if it is worthy to spend time abroad during our scientific career. As you can read there, I do believe that such experiences are worthy and can contribute to our personal development as well as more successful outcomes in our international co-operations. However, to obtain more insights into what other people in the network experienced, we asked two ENLP colleagues, Sophie Hawkesworth (ENLP 2009) and Carl Lachat (ENLP 2008) to write about their experience working abroad. So, let’s see what they have to tell us.

Working in The Gambia: research in the dusty heart of the tranquil African bush

by Sophie Hawkesworth (sophie.hawkesworth@lshtm.ac.uk)

The MRC International Nutrition Group has a research station in an isolated rural village of The Gambia, far from the sandy beaches that attract scores of British winter sun seekers. For 9 months I was lucky enough to call this research station in the bush home, learning lots about myself and the realities of working abroad. We were pretty spoilt by our working and living conditions having electricity (including much needed air-conditioning), running water and a semi-reliable internet connection but a step outside of the MRC took you into another world. Here were dusty compounds, curious children and hard working women carrying the daily water supply on their heads or pounding millet for the evening meal; the regular boom mingling with the...
I was 22, preparing for my exams in the months to come. Leaving for Ethiopia 5 days after my exams was surely not something that I saw coming during the last months of my postgraduate training in Nutrition. I took the opportunity with both hands, printed a few manuals - internet was quite non-existent at that time in Ethiopia - and left for something that would set the tone of my professional life. The volunteering work led to consultancy work in large multilateral project in Ethiopia, Burundi and Somaliland and resulted in my love for Ethiopia, its culture and wonderful people.

After my field work in Ethiopia, I worked in China for a few years, and coordinated a food processing project in vocational college in western China. What was I thinking with my bakery, meat processing and pickling manuals in China? Everywhere around me, beans were being transferred into noodles, street food vendors turned smelly ingredients into delicious meals; my Western insights looked medieval compared to what was happening on the local market... We soon found ourselves organizing courses in quality control.

call to prayer. I fell into the habit of daily walks at dusk, when the temperature was becoming more bearable; the views were of endless skies and a landscape that reflected the seasons, changing from tall grasses to scorched earth over the year. In some ways it was strange to be so far from home and I missed the familiarity and ease of working in London within a culture I understood. I had to learn how best to communicate my point and I sometimes became frustrated with the slow pace of life that seemed at such odds to the frenetic pace at home, although I came to appreciate the rhythm too.

I quickly realised that I had as much to learn from my fieldworkers with their wealth of experience as they did from me. One of my best memories is of our morning field trips bumping along in the Landrover whilst gazing out at the sun rising over the African bush and feeling the camaraderie that comes from knowing that you are all working towards a shared goal.

If I was available during summer to travel to rural Ethiopia to coordinate a baseline survey?

by Carl Lachat (CLachet@itg.be)
measures for small scale food enterprises in the region. China was opening up and business opportunities were looming. Increasingly, my practical work focussed on making cider and cheese, a choice much appreciated by my fellow expats.

I also could elaborate on how the SARS frenzy in China, being confronted with your colonial pasts in Burundi or the confinement to a hotel for weeks in Somaliland changes you. Above all however, working abroad is about meeting people. It’s about discussions and insights that make you question your assumptions and widen your horizons. Working abroad has provided me with unique insights into development work in general. It showed me the relevance of applied nutrition research and the challenges to upscale research into programming, issues that are still at the heart of what I do today.

Although my research work still deals a lot with nutrition in developing countries, those early experiences working abroad are precious. As one moves on in professional life, hectic time schedules and family life limit time in the field to workshops, project meetings and short courtesy field visits. Looking back, my time abroad was decisive as it made me think of what was truly important and let me reflect on what I would like to spend my time on during my professional life. Some may argue that you don’t need to be ‘there’ to understand the issues of nutrition in developing countries. I beg to differ.
ENLP get-together at FENS, Madrid, October 2011: Delicious tapas with 22 ENLPers

by Simone Frey (simone.frey@bioanalyt.com)

The 11th FENS conference held in Madrid was the perfect occasion to bring together ENLP alumni from many years. The network initiative organized, with the help of the locals (Maria and Jose), a get-together on Thursday, October 27th in the beautiful bar Viva Madrid. In this authentic Spanish Tapas Bar 22 ENLPers, including Renger Witkamp and Onno Korver, met to enjoy great food and drinks. In the beginning of the evening we made a “line-up” according to the year of attendance and everyone introduced him/herself. The line started with representatives from the 1st year, 1994, and ended with representatives from 2011. It was quite nice to see this range over all years. All in all, it was a very active evening with inspiring conversations. To all those who have not been able to be present, we at the network initiative hope to see you next time!
The 5th International Conference on Polyphenols and Health was held in Sitges on 17th -20th October 2011 and was organised by Prof. Cristina Andres-Lacueva from the University of Barcelona.

Polyphenols are nowadays recognised as important functional components of plant-based foods and their role in maintaining good health is taken into account alongside the traditional nutritional evaluation of food. The interest in polyphenols and their effect on health is an enormously increasing area of research as was evidenced by the high number of delegates (over 700) participating in the conference. From my Northern European point of view, the fact that the conference was also organized in the +20°C sunny location of the Mediterranean coast, when the temperatures back home were already below zero, was an attractive point.

Altogether there were 82 oral and 556 (!) poster presentations divided in 11 sessions including cardiovascular disease, functional food & ingredients, bioavailability & microbiota, methodologies & omics, cancer, and neuroscience sessions. The opening keynote lecture was given by Prof. Gary Williamson, School of Food Science and Nutrition, University of Leeds, UK. He emphasized that as life expectancy for humans is now longer than ever, the focus is presently how to improve the quality of the life, “to live longer and healthier”, and in this context dietary polyphenols will be in a key role. Prof. Williamson also brought out an important aspect, namely the role of microbiota in modulating the dietary polyphenolic compounds before they enter the circulation. The impact of microbiota is huge, as it can render metabolites into forms that have very different bioactivities than the ones in the native form in plants, and thus alter the biological effect once they have entered the body. This topic was evident also from various other talks, such as that presented by Prof. Ian Rowland and Drs. Annett Braune and Andrew Waterhouse. It is clear that the effect of microbiota will remain one key area in the research around dietary polyphenols.

Another important message delivered in talks from many presenters was that typically the bioactivities attributed to polyphenols are brought out only (or are more pronounced) when the plant extracts are studied as whole mixtures rather than as isolated compounds. This has been shown for various flavonoid-rich mixtures on inhibition of amylase, glucosidase and pancreatic lipase (Dr. Balz Frei, Linus Pauling Institute, Oregon, USA), and in the effect on expression of proteins in the oxidative and inflammatory pathways by olive oil and the by-product, alperujo, that is formed in the oil extraction (Dr. Baukje De Roos, University of Aberdeen, Scotland). Although there are various well-established links between polyphenol-rich diet and reduction of chronic diseases, the actual bioactive mechanisms underlying are far from clear. Presently we have a collection of small pieces of evidence and face a big challenge in putting these pieces together to get the bigger picture, necessitating multidisciplinary research.

During the conference breaks we were able to enjoy various industrially sponsored tastings including olive oil caviar, polyphenolic rich beverages with detailed information on their polyphenol content, as well as other polyphenol rich snacks such as strawberries dipped in chocolate fondue. This is something all conference organizers should take example from!

The organisers put a lot of effort into the social activities during the conference. We were able to enjoy a performance by the ‘Castellers’, a group of people building human towers. This is a historical Catalan activity which has received the status of UNESCO as an element of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. On the last evening, the conference dinner took place at an old farmhouse with an excellent barbeque and live music. No one was left uncertain of the fact that we were at the roots of Spanish small bubbles, the ‘Cava’.

Overall, the conference was a great scientific occasion that will give a lot to digest for a long time and, simultaneously, it was a very pleasant social event in perfect surroundings. It is easy to appreciate the words of the chef Jaume Biarnes (Fundació Alicia and El Bulli restaurant) as he concluded that, optimally, the situation is that “food is good for pleasure, and health is the consequence”. What could be a more suitable diet to achieve than a polyphenol-rich one?
Is it worthy to spend time abroad during our scientific career? What can we learn?

by Sandra Crispim (sandracrispim@gmail.com)

I still remember the day I was hired as a PhD student at the Wageningen University in the Netherlands. In one single day, I was interviewed, hired and invited to join a group of European researchers who were having the kick-off meeting of what also became my project. At certain point of that meeting, one of the researchers congratulated me for the hired position and cheerfully told me: “I heard you are going to spend some time at INRAN1 and at IARC2, how nice! This will be very important to your development as a scientist.” It was my first day in the Netherlands and I immediately thought: NO WAY! It is frightening enough to be in the Netherlands and I am not going to IRAN and IRAQ; these are not safe places to be at the moment. I even thought that maybe that was the reason why the hired me, a Brazilian, to be a PhD in a European project. It all made sense, as I remembered hearing something about that not too many people in the recruitment process were willing to travel and stay the required long periods abroad. Laughs apart, I eventually realized that my destinations were Italy and France and that the whole thing was just a confusion of names (or prepositions), but I never understood very well why researchers in Europe (at least the ones I have met so far) hesitate to spend some time abroad.

Four years later, it may seem cliché to say that a learned a lot during those periods abroad, but indeed that’s the way I see it. By spending time abroad, you not only gain knowledge on new methods and concepts but you also learn how to cope with diverse groups and circumstances. For example, I have learned how different two research groups may manage a project even though they are working towards the same goal, or how different their realities to perform research are because resources and incentives are not the same across countries, as well as many other multicultural issues that can play a role in the development and end-result of research projects - especially if that involves cooperation between international groups. Yet, the biggest lesson of my experience abroad was how important effective communication is to the scientific world.

People from different cultural backgrounds may perceive ideas and situations in different manners. They may not control very well the universal language that we are all entitled to communicate. They may not be used to the directness of some cultures in communicating issues while cooperating in a project. Or they may have a different timing to develop their tasks just because that is how their culture works. For all that, I have learned that a good communication is essential. Of course, to spend some time abroad also offers a great opportunity for you to expand your network and enjoy new environments.

Although these were my own lessons, I definitely think we should spend some time abroad during our scientific careers; that will certainly contribute to our own development as a researcher and hopefully to more successful outcomes in our international cooperations. Thus, I encourage you all to do it. You can learn a lot with it - perhaps more than you think!

1 National Research Institute for Food and Nutrition, Rome, Italy
2 International Agency for Research Cancer, Lyon, France

“People from different cultural backgrounds may perceive ideas and situations in different manners.”
While ‘social media’ has only recently become part of mainstream culture and the business world, people have been using digital media for networking, socializing and information gathering almost exactly for 30 years now. But only in the last decade has social media been used by a large part of the population with the arrival of Friendster, MySpace and Facebook. The big trend on the web from then evolved away from static ‘pages’ into real-time stream of status updates on what is hot and happening right now; enter Twitter. Twitter is a service that offers a social networking and micro blogging service. It enables its users to send and read messages called tweets: a text-based post of up to 140 characters displayed on the user’s profile page. Users may subscribe to other users’ tweets – this is known as following and subscribers are known as followers or tweeps. People often publish what they are thinking, doing, or planning at that particular moment, and their followers may answer directly to those tweets. In addition, one user’s statements may be ‘retweeted’ by other users to their followers. In this way, messages can spread very fast. Tweets may also contain links to other websites such as weblog articles, and multimedia resources. Since its creation in March 2006, and launch in July the same year, Twitter has gained popularity worldwide and is estimated to have 190 million users, generating 65 million tweets and handling over 800,000 search queries per day.

So what has this to do with Science? The word ‘Science’ literally means ‘knowledge’ (derived from the Latin word scientia). It is an enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the world. To communicate science within the science community an enormous range of scientific literature is published. Scientific journals communicate and document the results of research carried out in universities and various other research institution, serving as an archival record of science. Science today is collaborative, everything depends on communicating and sharing ideas, and therefore it seems perfect for scientists to share information fast. In addition, science communication today does not only mean transferring scientific knowledge from scientists to the public. It also includes transferring knowledge from non-scientist to scientists, in other words: scientists and non-scientists communicate and profit from each other. And this is where Twitter comes in– apparently an excellent tool for these kinds of communication. Surprisingly, the actual number of scientist using Twitter has been low. Why you might ask? There are some speculations ranging from Twitter being associated with other ‘time wasting’ social networks (like Facebook), to the social character of Twitter being unnatural for the stereotypical scientist, to the ‘open-access’ character of Twitter. Whatever the reasons were, it seems times are changing and scientists are catching up. More and more scientists are embracing new means of communication. But why should you use it? The primary benefit is that Twitter keeps you in touch with the people around you through a single source. Via connections of people you follow you might connect to people you not recently knew, opening your view to new insights concerning your research. Also, it is very up to date in many aspects: aside from recent information regarding Japan, Libya or other ‘hot topic’ news, there are now scientists live reporting from scientific conferences. In addition, magazines like Nature, Science, Cell, NJEM, and many others also use Twitter actively to promote their most recent published papers. On Twitter many topics are covered; there are people tweeting on food, health, pharma, nutrition, etc. But it is not a one-way street. You, as a scientist, can also rapidly share your findings with the world, reaching people beyond your usual circle. And as Twitter is not solely ‘business’, but mixed with personal notes, you might even discover that prestigious professors have off-days; Twitter allows you a peek behind the scenes.

So this is Twitter: offering you a great tool to communicate your research with the world in a fun and easy way. Social media and science – I would say Friends Forever!

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In May 2010 the UK government changed from Labour to a Conservative/Liberal democrat coalition. This has also led to a radical change in the way UK health policy is decided, which had previously taken a ‘top-down’ approach under Labour’s 13 year rule. Instead, the Coalition announced the need for a shift in the way policy makers go about improving the nation’s health, with a focus on tackling obesity, physical activity and alcohol intake.

**A Public Health Partnership**

The Responsibility Deal is designed to be a partnership between the Department of Health (DH), industry, retail and non-governmental organisations, all of whom must work together to ensure success. The DH argues that the involvement of industry is paramount. People will be helped to make better decisions about their health through the provision of more information to consumers, reviews of nutrition content, and healthier promotions.

The previous government’s approach, says the Coalition, led to the existence of a ‘nanny state’ where individuals lost ownership of their health. Instead, under this ‘big society’ scheme everyone is responsible, including the individual, the government and industry. The DH argues that seeking EU legislation is costly and sometimes elusive, and that it cannot react quickly enough. In contrast, the Responsibility Deal is promised to deliver more to the country, and quicker.

**Sign Up**

So far, over 170 organisations, including food manufacturers, restaurants, food service companies and retailers, have signed up to a broad range of pledges aimed at bolstering public health. These organisations include supermarkets such as Tesco, takeaways such as McDonalds, and food manufacturers such as Kraft and Kellogg’s. These companies think that they, too, have an important role to play in tackling what and how much people eat. Pledges include displaying the calorie content on out of home foods, and the removal of trans fats and reduction of salt in foods.

**Conflict of interest**

However, the response from health organisations has delivered a firm blow to the Responsibility Deal’s credibility. The British Medical Association said that “the plans did not go far enough” and Diabetes UK said it “cannot consider” signing up to the deal which it thinks is “too soft” on unhealthy food. Doubts have been raised over whether there can be a workable compromise between the cuts in consumption needed to drive public health vs. the commercial interests of industry to make money. Is this just the replacement of state action with corporate action? And can the food industry really regulate itself?

A major flaw, it is said, is the lack of track record to show that this new approach will actually work. Some academics, including leading Health Psychologist Professor Marteau from Cambridge University, say that these new unproven methods dictated by industry may divert attention away from proven methods already being used.

Perhaps the critics have cause for concern – voluntary action hasn’t always worked in the past. Daily salt consumption in Britain has fallen by 0.9g as a result of the Food Standard Agency’s voluntary agreement. In contrast, in Japan and Finland it fell by 5g after legislation was passed. Likewise, a trial introduced in 2009 to provide calorie labelling on out of home foods buckled within months. Of the 18 companies involved in the trial 17 have since abandoned the idea.

**A new stance**

Accusations that the government has “gone soft” on industry have been met by forceful rebuttals by the Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley, who said that the approach is aimed at “arming the public with the tools they need to cope in an obesogenic environment” and that “each decision is taken after speaking to a diverse range of experts from the health field”.

Lansley does, however, acknowledge that many steps will be needed to maintain momentum. More organisations are being encouraged to sign up and existing ones are expected to develop further pledges. This way, Lansley says, firms will be more likely to set ambitious targets for themselves.

What we do know is that progress on complex problems like obesity will require efforts from all relevant parties. The Responsibility Deal aims to do this by bridging the gap between government and industry. The critics will only be silenced, however, if we see real results from this bold and ambitious new stance on UK public health. And if firms do break their promises then the Government will have no choice but to reconsider legislation.
The incidence of childhood overweight and obesity is rising at an alarming rate the world over with debilitating metabolic diseases such as type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease, once relegated to the realm of ‘adult onset’, creeping down the ladder of chronological age and appearing in children as young as 10 years old. This sobering reality on the metabolic health of our children has galvanized the medical and academic communities’ resolve to better understand the root causes of childhood obesity in order to develop effective strategies to combat and, more preferably, prevent this treatable condition.

The battle against obesity can be described by the 1st Law of Thermodynamics, which states that in a closed system energy can neither be created nor destroyed, only transformed; in other words, a calorie “in” equals a calorie “out”. Application of this law to the problem of obesity has commonly led to the ascription of diet (calories “in”) and exercise (calories “out”) as the major dependent factors. Some may argue this to be an oversimplification of the problem as it does not take into consideration other factors pertinent to the equation such as genetic variation or the thermic effect of food. However, this viewpoint nicely highlights the components of energy balance that are largely under voluntary control and therefore represent the most feasible targets for intervention in the general population.

It is without question that the environment we live in today is highly obesigenic with ubiquitous access to calorie dense foods and technology that enables, or indeed encourages, us to lead a sedentary lifestyle. This has led to the potentially misplaced ‘forks versus feet’ debate, which argues over the merits of targeting diet or physical activity to tip the balance in favour energy deficit. On the one hand, advocates for dietary intervention argue that energy expended during physical activity is all too easily offset by common food choices that make it difficult to induce and/or maintain the negative energy balance necessary to control weight. In general, it is argued that dietary restriction is the more effective strategy to combat weight gain and enhance weight loss, an approach that has shown some success. However, this approach may be complicated by the observation that overweight youth typically eat less than their leaner peers, which brings into question advocating restricted energy intake that might in turn impinge on the nutritional demands of normal growth and development.

On the other hand, the advocates of targeting physical activity suggest that the positive effects of exercise on general health and well-being should be prioritized. Proponents of this approach also highlight the importance of characterizing individuals according to body composition as physical activity can have a positive impact on lean tissue and bone growth but with no effect on overall body weight. In fact, children who engage in the greatest levels of vigorous physical activity are leaner than their sedentary peers despite having greater energy intakes, which alludes to the nutrient partitioning effect of exercise towards lean and away from fat tissue.

While there is merit in the arguments provided and positions taken by both camps we must appreciate that the battle against obesity must be fought on multiple fronts. There should be no “US” versus “THEM” in the scientific and political debate of what is more effective, exercise or nutrition, but rather a “WE”. Not surprisingly, lifestyle interventions that address both arms of the energy balance equation have shown to be more effective for weight management and health improvements for overweight and obese youth than either alone. These observations make clear sense thermodynamically and arguably make the debate over forks versus feet a moot point.

More importantly, if we are to truly conquer the obesity epidemic we must become less reactive and more proactive by weighting our efforts more heavily on obesity prevention rather than treatment. While great efforts are needed to implement strategies that target both feet and forks, we must start approaching the issue of weight management from a holistic perspective. It is with hope that programs aimed at early education on the importance of proper nutrition combined with an appreciation for physical activity will instil in our youth the behaviours and choices that make a healthy lifestyle a matter of habit. For in essence the laws of thermodynamics are essentially incorruptible and a calorie “in” will equal a calorie “out” regardless of an individual’s body weight, so let us strive for an early lifestyle rich in good nutrition and activity to help us defeat obesity at all ages.
The sequencing of the human genome 10 years ago has been marked as a historic event for science and humanity in general. This great scientific achievement has opened an avenue of opportunities for biomedical research aiming to tackle chronic diseases, which are causing a huge burden in modern societies. Among chronic diseases, cardiometabolic diseases including obesity, diabetes, heart disease and stroke are taking the lead as the major ‘killers’ in our societies. In fact, the aforementioned diseases account for 1/3 of all deaths in developed societies.

**How can the decoding of the human genome help fight disease?**

Genes are responsible for the inheritance of features from our ancestors. For example, the colour of our eyes and hair does not occur by chance. It is inherited from our parents. In the same way, we also inherit other features which are not so apparent. For example, some people’s metabolism may make them more prone to accumulating body fat and thus becoming obese. Also some defects in metabolic processes, which are also inherited, can result in inadequate regulation of lipids and glucose (blood sugar) in our bodies resulting in higher risk for developing diabetes and heart disease. With the decoding of the human genome, what scientists can now achieve is the translation of the genetic code. If you think that the genome is a book, the genetic code is the sequence of sentences which gives the meaning. It is like decoding and trying to understand the meaning of ancient scripts in archeology. Even though the research of ‘translating’ the genetic code is at its very early stages, we have managed to identify several genetic loci (specific locations in the genome) which are responsible for metabolic defects related to higher risk of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. In other words, we have managed to identify genetic alterations, inherited from generation to generation, which make some people more prone to developing certain diseases.

**Gene-environment interactions**

The last 2 decades have seen an unprecedented increase in prevalence of cardiometabolic diseases, especially obesity and type 2 diabetes. Recognition is growing that genes alone cannot account for this global pandemic. It is now increasingly accepted among the scientific community that environmental and behavioural changes, in interaction with a genetic predisposition, are responsible for these trends. The term ‘environment’ in this case goes beyond describing the environment as we perceive it in our daily life and refers to anything external to our body that interferes with it. For example, the food we eat, the air we breathe, our physical activity, or even our experience of stress. There is now accumulating evidence that all of the above factors (and much more) are interacting with our genes and this has an impact on disease development. For example, being physically inactive is a risk factor for several diseases and engaging in regular exercise has been shown to decrease disease risk dramatically. However, some people may be more responsive to the beneficial effects of exercise than others. Along the same lines, some people may be more prone to the detrimental effects of an unhealthy diet. And all these based on their genetic makeup. Genes, lifestyle and their interactions are determining our health and longevity. The complex mechanisms linking our genes to our lifestyle have just started to be elucidated but there is still more to come as we unravel the secrets of our genetic code. On the other hand, people who may have a genetic predisposition to a disease (say type 2 diabetes) may in fact decrease their excess risk to null by engaging in a healthy lifestyle. A few studies so far have identified such gene environment interactions but big advances are expected during the next few years given the explosive increase in interest by scientists worldwide in the specific research field.

Genes, lifestyle and their interactions are determining our health and longevity. The complex mechanisms linking our genes to our lifestyle have just started to be elucidated but there is still more to come as we unravel the secrets of our genetic code.
Concluding Remarks from the Editorial Team

Congratulations!!! You have reached the end of this bumper edition of ENLPress!!! We hope you are as inspired as we have been by the diversity of articles and the generosity of spirit with which over 20 new and old network members have contributed to this magazine. The ENLP newsletter initiative would like to extend sincere thanks to all who have been involved in ENLPress 2012, a warm welcome to new network members, and an invitation to all to, in any art form you chose, express yourself in ENLPress 2013!