

VIRTUAL NETWORKING SUPPORT (VNS) GRANT REPORT

This report is submitted by the VNS grantee for approval to the Action MC.

Action number: CA16107

VNS Grantee name: Ralf KOEBNIK

VNS Grant start and end date: 24/06/2021 – 15/09/2021

Reference to the Action strategy on virtual networking approved by the MC

<https://euroxanth.eu/grants/virtual-networking-tools-vnt/virtual-networking-strategy>

List and brief description of virtual events and collaboration activities organised during the Grant Period

4th Annual EuroXanth Conference (28-30/06/2021)

The EuroXanth COST Action held its annual conference online (three afternoons). This conference served as a platform to exchange knowledge and to share technical knowhow with respect to members of the *Xanthomonadaceae* family.

As the VNS Manager, I identified several private companies that are experienced in organizing virtual events. Three of them were contacted and details of organizing the conference were discussed in virtual meetings with them. Upon comparison of the platforms and quotes and in agreement with the scientific and organizing committee it was decided to work with ARIA.ONE. The preparation of the conference included three additional virtual meetings with the company, where details were further discussed, thus contributing to the great success of the conference with 170 participants from 31 countries.

As the VNS Manager, I also used the EuroXanth website and blog, the ResearchGate platform and – in collaboration with the Science Communication Manager – the EuroXanth Twitter account to advertise the event and to share the participants' contributions and a virtual group photo, which I generated from 129 individual photos that I had requested from participants. Videos of all 29 invited talks and 45 poster presentations were collected, edited and uploaded to the EuroXanth website in a dedicated password-protected zone.

Core Group Meeting (10-12/08/2021)

The 2nd Core Group Meeting with eleven participants from ten countries took place as a hybrid event with six participants meeting face to face at the ZHAW in Zurich (Switzerland) and five getting connected virtually. The meeting analysed the status quo of the COST Action with respect to its achievements, the budget situation and challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This meeting gave also room to discuss perspectives of the COST Action beyond its end and allowed preparing the final Management Meeting and Assessment of this COST Action. As the VNS Manager, I used the opportunity to encourage colleagues to apply for Virtual Mobility (VM) grants, which will help disseminating the COST Action's achievements, improve some of the Deliverables and may lead to a new COST Action proposal.

MC Meeting (19/08/2021)

The 5th (and final) MC Meeting was organized virtually using the Zoom platform. This meeting was chaired by me and all Core Group members reported on their specific responsibilities.

VM Grant meetings (01/09 – 07/09 – 13/09 – 21/09)

As the VNS Manager, I assisted VM Grantees in their application, management and reporting activities. I also participated in their meetings, where a future COST Action on genomics-based diagnostics (WG1), data sharing (WG1, WG2) and a Special Issue in NANOMATERIALS (WG4) were discussed.

Contribution to the COST Action and the COST Strategy for each of the virtual events and collaboration activities organised

Describe this information giving details on the contribution towards:

- Progress towards the Action objectives and deliverables.
- COST Excellence and inclusiveness Policy, especially towards the support of researchers in COST Inclusiveness Target Countries
- Stakeholder engagement and promoting participation of researchers from NNC and IPC (COST Global Networking)

Since the EuroXanth COST Action is in its last year, all proposed Goals were well addressed over the last four years and most Deliverables were provided in due time. Importantly, the VNS Grant allowed progressing beyond what we had proposed in the COST Action.

Working Group 1 compiled and published protocols for detection of *Xanthomonadaceae* (Deliverable 5) and lists of molecular markers (Deliverable 6). I considered it useful if this static resource could be transformed into a web-based, dynamic resource. Therefore, I encouraged WG1 Leader Joana Costa (Portugal) to use a VM Grant to transform the compiled and published data into a web-based, dynamic resource, and I assisted her in this initiative.

Working Groups 2 and 3 have well advanced on establishing the repertoire of important bacterial factors in the microbe-eukaryote interaction (Deliverable 10) and on compiling the inventory of plant resistance genes (Deliverable 11). As the VNS Manager, I encouraged WG2 Leader Joël Pothier (Switzerland) to use a VM Grant to enhance, valorize and promote the WG2/WG3 DokuWiki resource beyond the COST Action limits, and I assisted him in this initiative.

Working Group 4 has compiled and published a promising green solution for the future, i.e. bacteriophage-mediated control of phytopathogenic xanthomonads (Deliverable 12). As the VNS Manager, I encouraged WG4 Vice Leader Tamás Kovács (Hungary) to use a VM Grant to coordinate the publication of a Special Issue in NANOMATERIALS (WG4) on the “Antibacterial application of nanoparticles in the crop production”, and I assisted him in this initiative.

In February 2021, members of the EuroXanth COST Action had applied for a COST Innovators Grant (CIG) on “New strategies for disease diagnosis of plant-pathogenic xanthomonads based on genomics-informed targets”. As the VNS Manager, I identified this CIG proposal as a solid basis to build a future COST Action targeting a wider range of bacterial plant pathogens, and I encouraged MC Member Jaime Cubero (Spain) to use a VM Grant to assess the opportunity and define the scope and structure for such a COST Action, and I assisted him in this initiative.

The EuroXanth COSTAction uses several channels to disseminate its activities and outputs, such as a dedicated website, internet blog, press releases, ResearchGate and Twitter. We have also engaged in the production of videos, progress of which however got affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the VNS Manager, I encouraged Science Communication Manager Joana Vicente (UK) to use a VM Grant to enhance dissemination of outputs from the EuroXanth COST Action to increase the Action impact, and I assisted her in this initiative.

Colleagues from ITCs were well presented in all the activities and two out of five VM grants went to them. Important stakeholders in the field, such as the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) were involved in the Annual Conference and the Chair of the EFSA Panel on Plant Health, Claude Bragard, and the Assistant Director of EPPO, Françoise Petter, participated in the preparatory virtual meeting for a new COST Action.

Description of identified successful practices and lessons learned

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in postponement and cancelation of several of the planned activities, virtual networking has been identified as an option to compensate for these obstacles. However, since the EuroXanth COST Action ended on 15 September 2021, this new tool (announced by end of April 2021) came a little too late in order to make full use of it. Yet, we succeeded to implement a virtual networking strategy, which focusses on the specific Goal and Deliverables of our COST Action. This allowed progressing beyond what we had proposed in the EuroXanth COST Action.