



# Young European Biotech Network

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[www.yebn.eu](http://www.yebn.eu)

Official newsletter of the Young European Biotech Network (YEBN). Edited by the YEBN communication task group.

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*Dear all,  
Welcome to our last YEBN newsletter issue in 2011. This time we invite you to take a rather unconventional look at interdisciplinary research and to read how geology and tea can be combined to a fascinating research project on pages 1 and 2. Get insights how btS supports young scientists to find their career path at the ScieCon and further dive into Life on top at the Rockefeller Institute in New York in an article*

*from the YEBN section in New Biotechnology on the last page of this newsletter.*

*Looking forward to meeting some of you at our Annual Meeting in Bologna! And to everyone who cannot join us this time: Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*

*Christine Weckenmann, Annika Hohendahl, Marie Müller*

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## Geotea – why a geologist does tea research

I do not know how many geologists contributed an article to this newsletter section. I guess there are not many of us since generally, traditional geology does not overlap with topics of the life sciences. However, nowadays 'geology' is rather a generic term for numerous independent disciplines, similar to all the topics we subsume as 'biology'. Thus, I am not a 'geologist' (this term only fits students in their first semesters) but an environmental geochemist. One day, intending to write my diploma thesis on volcanoes in Kamschatka, drinking tea turned my life upside down. During a standard experiment on the ICP-MS (Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometer) we ran out of samples. Off the top of our head we started to measure the brewed tea out of our cups. Nearly two years later, after having conducted several exciting experiments, undergoing countless failures and some destroyed parts of the spectrometer, I finally visited Darjeeling in Northeast India to collect samples of soil, tea plants and manufactured tea from different gardens. In the rural parts of East India the annual tea

### YEBN scientist focus

production is an important economic factor. Unsurprisingly, my visit attracted the attention of officials and locals. Chats with tea garden managers, the minister of tea, tea scientists, tea pluckers, tea pluckers' unionists, a visit to the tea garden medicals and tea factory managers, an exchange with tea traders and friends shaped my field campaign. If people asked why a non-foodchemist or non-botanist is so intensely interested in tea I always answered: 'I plan to do a journey around the world and tea grows everywhere' – an answer always



Solveig in Darjeeling

convincing among geologists, but of course it was not the main reason. While analysing tea gripping questions always arose – which by now have turned into a catalogue of questions.

Strikingly, neither the idea of my environmental geochemistry topic nor the technique were new, simply the combination of the two appears unusual. As a geologist everything green and living I call 'organic' and everything reacting non-brittle while hammering on it I call 'soil' – both of which I have very little knowledge. But we geochemists developed methods to completely dissolve any kind of rock and measure the concentration of elements down to the ppb scale (0.0000001 %). Hence, I also treat all my tea samples as if they were rocks which provides me with different data than what botanists or foodchemists obtain. With

these data I try to answer simple questions like 'Which tea factory has the biggest machinery abrasion?', 'Is the content of nickel in tea leaves of natural origin?' or hopefully also questions like 'Which region does the tea come from?'.

Coming up with a new topic independently is really challenging: There are only very few routines you could use and often creativity is demanded. However, it is my very own topic in which I dive deeper and deeper – to discover the complex and fascinating world of tea. The path I have chosen may sometimes be difficult, but it is something I have never regretted.

Solveig Pospiech

## Event Report

### Many Companies – One Way – Your Job!

That was the motto of the third ScieCon NRW, hosted by the Life Science Students Association btS e.V., which took place in Bochum, Germany, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October. 1000 undergraduate and postgraduate visitors of the 18<sup>th</sup> ScieCon, by now the biggest career fair in life sciences, experienced a unique opportunity to start off their own careers. This year ScieCon took place under the patronage of the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Research of the federal state North-Rhine Westphalia.

"We wanted to create an event that would satisfy the needs of our industry partners and the undergraduate and postgraduate students as well, like the years before," said project leader, Till Olfers.

"ScieCon won't let any questions be unanswered".

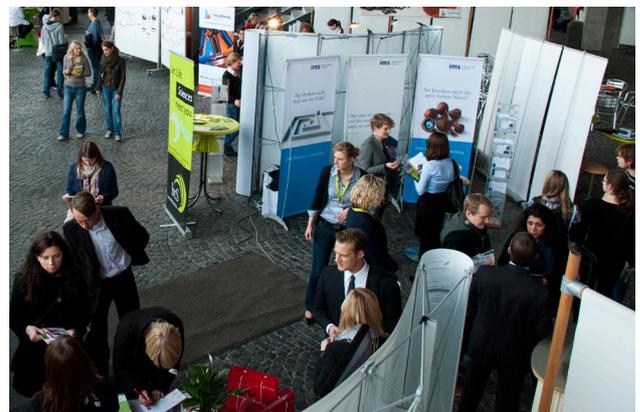
Hence, the 24 industry representatives connected with the visitors in an ideal atmosphere to present their companies, methods and products in lectures. The visitors got recent information about entry-level and career opportunities of the companies, first hand, and answers to every question they had.

The fringe events were also very well appreciated. The LIVE job interview, which allowed visitors to simulate a job interview with a human resources manager as it would occur in many companies, and the application checks were crowd-pullers. The participants took home useful advice for their next application.

Another highlight to the programme was the open forum discussion with experts from industry. Judith Mönch-Tegeer, member of the executive board of btS, said, "As one of the oldest projects of btS, the ScieCon is also the most purposeful platform for undergraduate and postgraduate students to create their future careers".

The next ScieCon NRW will take place in October 2012, so watch out for further information at [www.ScieCon.info](http://www.ScieCon.info)

Serhat Ceylen



## Best of YEBN in New Biotechnology

### Life on top—working at the Rockefeller

*The Rockefeller University was founded in 1901 as The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and is located in New York City. With its 69 scientist heads of laboratories, it provides cutting edge research in interdisciplinary biomedical fields, such as biochemistry and structural biology, immunology and microbiology, human genetics, neuroscience, and mathematical biology. Rockefeller University's scientists have discovered fundamental tenets of science like the origin of blood groups, the molecular basis of genetic heredity, and developed therapies for heroin addiction and AIDS. Overall, 23 of its scientists have won the Nobel Prize; currently, six of them still work on campus.*

Last year of college: all the applications for the graduate programs in sciences have been handed in. The interminable waiting process to hear whether the school of your dreams will welcome you has started. After all the tests you have passed, the exams you have taken, and the extracurricular activities to boost your resumé, you start daydreaming what it would be like to join the perfect graduate school, and like adding ingredients to some good gourmet food, you keep hoping that the recipe will turn out delicious.

Would not it be wonderful to have a fair amount of labs led by famous professionals, recognized in their field and winners of the world's renowned awards (maybe even the Nobel Prize); a small enough program so that you can receive the best training and get lots of attention and a nice group of people to work with, drawn from the best institutes from all over the world and working toward the same goal? Let us add to this an international community all around so that you could learn how to deal with people coming from different backgrounds and

immerse yourself in a multicultural environment; a pinch of extra-curricular activities to do – when not entangled in a thesis project – to keep up with the artistic inner-self; and maybe even a place where people can unwind when work becomes really too much. Make it 'happy hour' three times a week, work can produce quite some stress!

Oh! Let us not forget to include a salary for the graduate students, so that you do not have to worry about applying for fellowships and running out of money to complete your thesis, and so you can focus solely on the scientific part of it. It would also be great to have the money independently from the lab you join, so that professors have one less salary to pay and students can change labs freely. Maybe even a small budget in addition, so that attending conferences and buying scientific books do not have to interfere with activities such as eating and paying the bills. . .

Since we are daydreaming, why should we stop here: let us put the school in the middle of a city that also offers cultural events, theaters, museums, sports games,

and why not, fashion and delicious food. It would not be a negative thing if the students also had an opportunity to 'live the city', besides living IN the city. So why not giving them a small amount of money to enjoy cultural activities and place students' housing right in the middle of the city, would not that be great? We have pretty much the recipe for the perfect graduate school: let it simmer for about five years, check annually to make sure everything is in place and add a grain of salt to taste.

The Rockefeller University in New York City has all of the above, and more. It is difficult to think that, after all the efforts made to be accepted into a graduate school, you will have to leave one day.

Maurizio Pellegrino, The Rockefeller University, New York, USA

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