

Biotechnet Annual Report 2020

Personnel

As announced on June 2020, Samantha Paoletti (CSEM) replaced Helmut Knapp in the Steering Committee and the General Assembly. We thank Helmut for his long-lasting contribution to biotechnet and welcome Samantha to the Steering Committee. At the platform level, Thomas Villiger (FHNW) replaced Daniel Gygax as leader of the platform "Training for Pharma/Biotech". We thank Daniel for establishing the platform and wish Thomas much success in the future. After the departure of S. Schneider from biotechnet towards the end of 2019, the platform Personalized Medicine practically ceased to exist within the biotechnet.

In May 2020, the "young scientists" group formed in 2019 and represented by Thomas Villiger and Samantha Paoletti proposed a potential way forward for biotechnet towards 2025. This input from the member institutions is the basis for the discussions towards the re-shaping of biotechnet to continue to be of value for its members.

2020 annual financial statements

The 2020 annual accounts show that the year ended better than budgeted, in particular due to Covid-19-related smaller number of events. One example was the cancellation of the summer school in Palermo. In addition, CHF 6'000 were received as extra revenue as a final instalment of the former NTN. Also, financial support for a research project by ZHAW (CHF 10'000) was accrued but not invoiced. Hence, the report shows a surplus of CHF 4'462.55. The revenues of about CHF 90,000 were thus sufficient to cover the total expenditures. Support for networking events by the participants amounted to approximately CHF 50'000, distributed over several members.

Communications and advertising expenses totalled CHF 6,000, dedicated to support the Swiss Biotech report. The financial report was revised by Marvin Schneider in April 2021.

The year of Covid-19

The year 2020 has been an unusual year marked by the pandemic. This affected biotechnet and its member organizations. As described in the Swiss Biotech report 2021 released in April, the biotech industry did not suffer under the global pandemic, but grew in Switzerland (and abroad). This phenomenon also had an impact on the members of biotechnet, who were involved in specific research and implementation activities supporting the biotech-industry during these challenging times. The strong link between biotechnet members and industrial partners was the basis for a quick and successful response to specific technical challenges. Specific examples can be found in the Swiss Biotech report 2021, that summarizes all activities in 2020 and includes an interesting article by L. Suter-Dick, president of biotechnet (<https://www.swissbiotech.org/report/>).

As a highlight in 2020, the long-term commitment entered between Lonza and HES-SO in Visp vouches for the good interactions between biotechnet members and industry. This strategic collaboration announced in January 2020 is the result of continuous, fruitful interactions and highlights the importance of the interchange between education, research and industrial implementation, one of the key objectives of biotechnet Switzerland.

However, the restrictions imposed by the pandemic had a strong negative effect on the networking activities, one of the key tasks of biotechnet Switzerland. For the most part of the year, meetings needed to be held on-line or were cancelled all together. As an example, the Swiss Biotech day 2020 could not be held on site. However, some of our "classic" events took place very successfully.

In addition to the networking restrictions, many biotechnet partners are heavily involved in teaching activities in their respective institutions. The uncertainties and massive changes in the teaching modalities throughout the year put an incredible burden to many of the members, naturally limiting the energy and resources available for networking activities.

Summer school

The XIV Summer School on Advanced Biotechnology, where biologists traditionally gather to exchange ideas, was postponed. The new date is September 2021, if the situation allows.

Future financing

We have continued discussions on future structure and financing of biotechnet. The NTN-proposal submitted by members of the TEDD and IVD-platforms led by Markus Rimann was unfortunately rejected. However, based on the positive review, the proposal has been updated and resubmitted in 2021. At the time of the writing of this report, the outcome of the resubmission was not known. However, this shows the continuing interest of our members in working together in the future. At this time, no additional sources of financing have been found, and the membership scheme is being discussed.

Supported events

The year was not very conducive to events in presence or meetings. However, the two largest meetings supported by biotechnet in 2020 were the traditional TEDD Annual Meeting as well as the POC (point of care diagnostic). The TEDD-Event 2020 marked its 10th year anniversary and was dedicated to "Microphysiological Systems, including COVID applications". The meeting was held on-line with approximately 70 attending participants (many more registrations). The outcome of the meeting was reported in ALTEX. The report on the TEDD-Event 2019 was published in Chimia in 2020 (doi:10.2533/chimia.2020.426).

The on-line POC meeting boasted excellent speakers such as key note on diagnostic applications of CRISPR/Cas 9 by founders of Sherlock Biosciences, and M. Essenpreis (CTO Roche Diagnostic). It also included a session with focus on regulatory aspects. The meeting footage is still available and was reported in Chimia in 2021 (doi: 10.2533/chimia.2021.219).

TCBM, Biocatalysis, SUT platforms also held several smaller scientific and networking events on line. Bioresources and Antibiotics postponed the planned events to 2021.