



*Synergies to fuel Researchers' Careers*  
Luxembourg, 10 – 11 December 2015

organised by  Fonds National de la  
Recherche Luxembourg

10 December 2015 – Parallel Session “Managing International Programmes: Challenges for COFUND”

**”We can work it out”**

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## **“Fixing a hole”** Need for Research

- How to motivate (Swiss) researchers to coordinate a Cofund?
- Formalize and concretize informal feedbacks
- Share Best Practice and collect it
- Provide Feedback to the EC

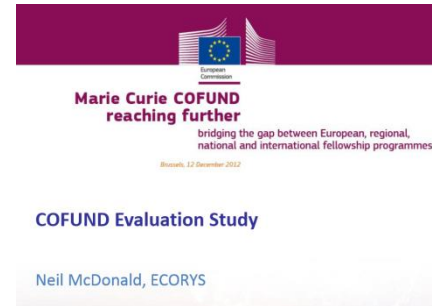
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# “Things we said today”

## State of the Art

- “Enhancing the international dimension of a number of national and regionally-based fellowship programmes” → in how far?
- “Structuring effects – administrative and operational procedures in some research organisations” → what are these?
- “Consideration should be given to implementing measures aimed at ensuring lessons from COFUND are learned and shared” → which ones?
- Additionally: How can COFUND be improved?



COFUND Evaluation Study  
Neil McDonald, ECORYS  
2012, data covering 2007-2011

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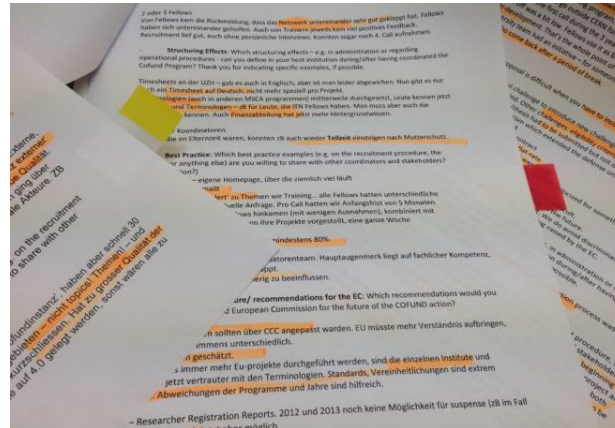


## “Ask me Why” Research Question(s)

- What do (Swiss) Coordinators think of this action?
- What did they like – and what not?
- Did they implement structuring effects – if so, which ones?
- What would they recommend to other coordinators?
- And what would they recommend to the EC?

# “How do you do it” Methodology

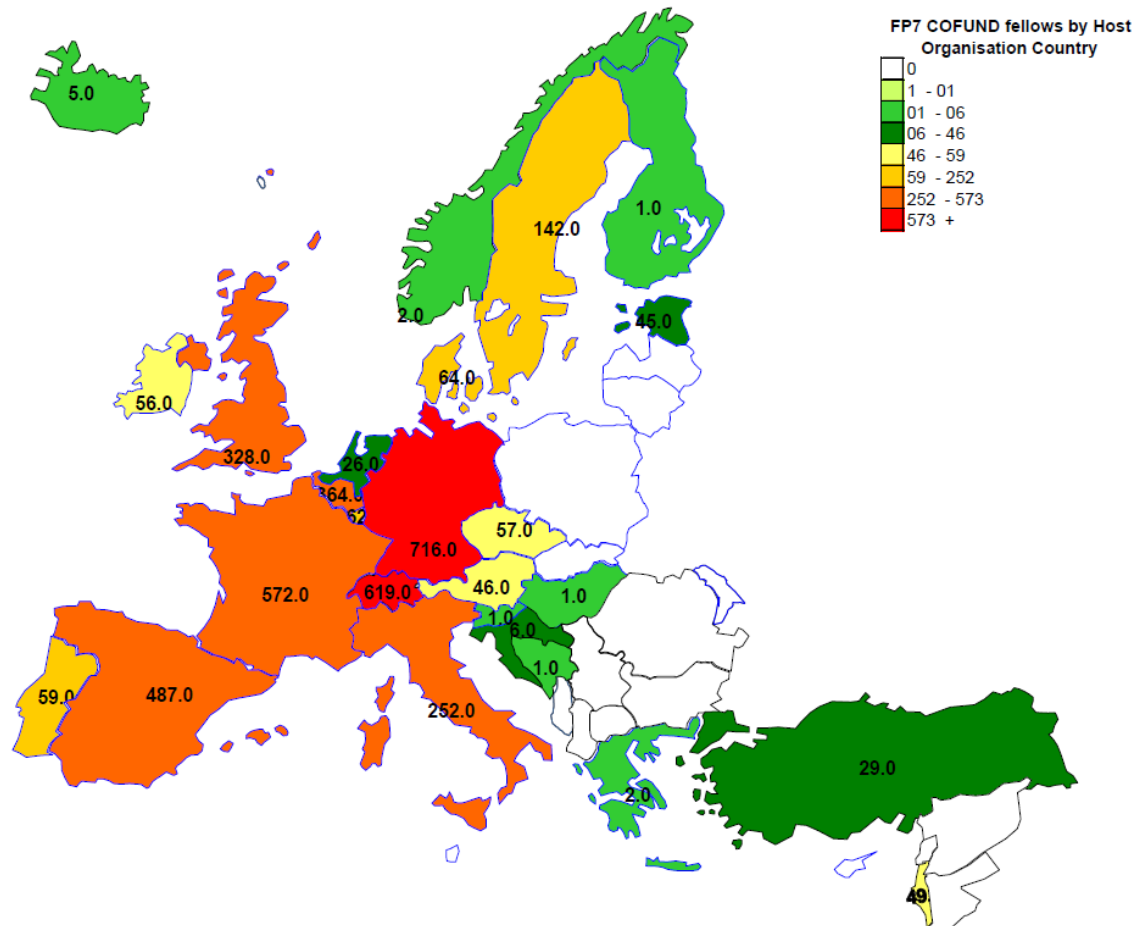
Qualitative Survey: ‘a flash light in a dark room to find out if and what kind of furniture is in there’



- Sample: 11 Swiss based coordinators
- Semi-structured guided interviews (phone/email)
- Timeframe of the interviews: 27.10. to 18.11

# “Here, There and Everywhere” Why Switzerland?

*FP7 COFUND FELLOWS IN HOST ORGANISATIONS FROM MEMBER STATES/ASSOCIATED COUNTRIES (at end of 2014):*



# “Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite”

## Main benefits

- **International dimension:** International recruitments and networks
- **Excellence:** Financial attractive conditions helped recruit excellent researchers
- **Visibility:** Organizations placed themselves in the EU research landscape
- **Interdisciplinarity:** could be increased
- **Sustainability:** via the long time frame of the programmes
- **Networks and collaboration on different levels were created on different levels:**

*Individual level:* Postdocs among themselves

*Inter-Departmental:* better collaboration, e.g. between HR and Research or different research labs

*Institutional:* Host Institution with the Postdocs  
(to stay on or with incoming fellows)

*Inter-Institutional:* Organizations among themselves

«Our programme became a brand»

«The research departments now collaborate better with HR»

«We were able to attract excellent researchers»

# “Help!” Main Challenges

«My institution wanted the money, but did not give much support»

- **Financial issues:** The currency exchange rate!
- **Application/Submission:** How to bring a new feature in terms of reapplication
- **Management of the program:**

Fellows: to motivate them to participate in non-research courses

Institutional: Internal support lacking

EC and Coordinator: Changing Project Officers, different interpretation of the rules

International: (Programs with Partner Organizations and Outgoing Programs)

All rules have to be the same

International Outreach and Dissemination

«Read the regulations!»

- **Evaluation and Recruitment:**

Establishment of international evaluation board with the best gender balance

Quality of Evaluators' Briefings in the correct way

- **Recruitment Process:**

Personal Interviews vs remote interviews

«It's a big investment with a small return»  
(70%/30%)



## “Getting better” Structuring Effects

- **General Expertise, Resources and Collaboration:**

Project writing and management expertise increased

Better interdepartmental collaboration

Better process management and internal organization of events, conferences etc.

Terminology and procedures now established, also useful for other MSCA projects (e.g. ITNs)

Staff resources

- **In particular for Evaluation and Recruitment**

Technical infrastructure (e.g. Set-up of IT platform)

Establishment of international evaluation committee can be used for other programs

Establishment of sound recruitment process

«The COFUND opened our recruitment process»

«The programme brought some ‘glue’ between labs in our center»

«A new electronic platform was developed»

# “I should have known better” Recommendations to other coordinators

“Transparency with the Project Officer! Build up a good relation with the PO. They try to be helpful!”

«Direct (email) communication with the fellow»

“Have an Indian or Chinese prof on board to be able to correctly judge upon the CVs”

“Good administrative staff is important (at least 80%)”

“Read the rules BEFORE the implementation”

“Continuously keep track of all deliverables to have it easier at the end for the final report”

“Organize a joint final conference with another Cofund, organized by the fellows “

“Good web-site important, with helpdesk for applicants”

“Recruitment/Evaluation takes TIME! Plan enough TIME!”

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“Can you make a sort of ‘ERC Cofund’ without the mobility rule?”

## “Please Please me”

### Recommendations to the EC

“Please keep the coordinators’ briefings at the beginning of the projects.”

“Sometimes the program seems so far from a researcher’s reality”

- **Priorities:** Outreach and structuring effects versus the career development of the fellow  
Mobility or Excellence → **Keep it simple and focus on research**
- **Financial Issues:** Correction of the living allowance with the country correction coefficient (Unit Costs are appreciated)
- **Recruitment:** Allow for the involvement of the PI early on in the recruitment process
- **Reportings:** A standardization of expected Milestones and Deliverables
- **Non-academic involvement:** Not only via Secondments, but also via other means
- **Other:** Relative freedom once the program has been approved

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## “Ob-la-di Ob-la-da” Any Other Business

“It’s a good funding instrument!”

- **Timely dimension:**

some liked the 2 years postdoc period, some would have preferred it even longer

- **Flexibility:**

a good and efficient way to support both training and research as the funding can be used with some flexibility

- **Beneficial for researchers and host institutions:**

«Merry host makes merry guests»

A good brand with high visibility

“So many people want to have the MSCA certificate, this is a good thing!”

## “The End” Conclusions

- **COFUND likes People – People like COFUND**
- Many of the previously faced **challenges** have been successfully faced with the H2020 rules and simplifications
- **Structuring Effects** can be observed, but take their time (IT, HR, L&F)
- **People and Time:** Communicate well with everyone involved, plan enough time to keep everything on track
- **Keep it simple and keep the priorities clear**
- Methodological: Enlarge the sample of interviewees for the next time
- Overall the survey allowed me to “take the temperature” and allowed the coordinators ‘to let off steam’

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“ With a little help from my friends” & “I am the walrus”

Thanks to all my interview partners  
and REA for providing me with the data

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