

ERC Consolidator grant RHEA: the story of my application

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Background

1. PhD in biological sciences (V.U.B.)
2. Postdoc at Harvard University (BAEF and Fulbright fellowship)
3. Postdoc Marie-Curie fellowship in Montpellier
⇒ 4 year postdoc (2003-2007)
4. **Assistant Professor** in Sept 2007 at the University of Namur (UNamur)
⇒ Head of the Laboratory of Evolutionary Genetics and Ecology
⇒ Applied in **2008** for a GIS IBISA grant for a **long-term (sequencing) project on an important scientific question** (I invested all my resources in this project)
5. Professor in Sept 2009 at UNamur
6. Full Professor in Sept 2017 at UNamur



Milestones towards ERC CoG submission

2009

Consolidated my CV
postdoc period:
2 publications in
high impact journals

2009

Start of the genome
sequencing project

2013

Publication in
Nature (IF: 38)
as last author

2014

Consolidating CV
with last author papers
Many great ideas
ARC grant obtained

ERC?

2015

MIS FNRS grant
obtained
Sept: 1st infosession **ERC**
⇒ Strategy of application
⇒ Discuss with ERC grantees

2015

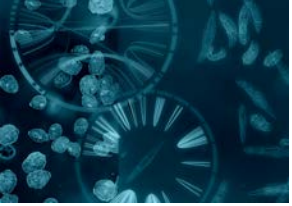
Sabbatical Q2:
write several
ERC drafts with
different ideas

2016

Publication in
Current Biology
(IF: 38)
as last author
⇒ **Consolidated CV**

Application deadline:
February 2016

Strategy:
Submit ERC in 2016!



CV & original ideas

1. My **CV** had some high-impact journals and first and last author papers
⇒ I did not had a very high H-index or google scholar index
2. I have a unique biological system within my research group, international recognition, expertise and databases, **original ideas**
3. Some ERC grantees and international colleagues at conferences encouraged me to apply
4. I obtained some projects of succesful ERC CoG grantees
⇒ I decided to give it a try
⇒ **Nothing to loose, everything to win**
⇒ **High competition forced me to give the best I can**



Writing process

1. I had different **original ideas** but also different ongoing projects (ARC and MIS FNRS)
 - ⇒ Why an ERC?
 - ⇒ Used my sabbatical to do a literature study on some new topics
2. I wrote distinct preliminary ERC projects
3. I decided to write a project closest to the ongoing research in my group but **integrating all the different aspects to answer the general question** and I **added some high risk/high gain ideas**
 - ⇒ **don't go too far away from your main expertise, be coherent but original, innovative and add high risk/high gain scenarios**
4. Be fully dedicated to the writing

Writing process

Febr => June 2015

Sept – Oct 2015

Nov => Febr 2016

Develop all my ideas
=> write some ERC
draft proposals

Consolidated the
outline of my ERC
proposal

Full dedication to **the
writing of my ERC**

ERC project writing (**B1 + B2**):

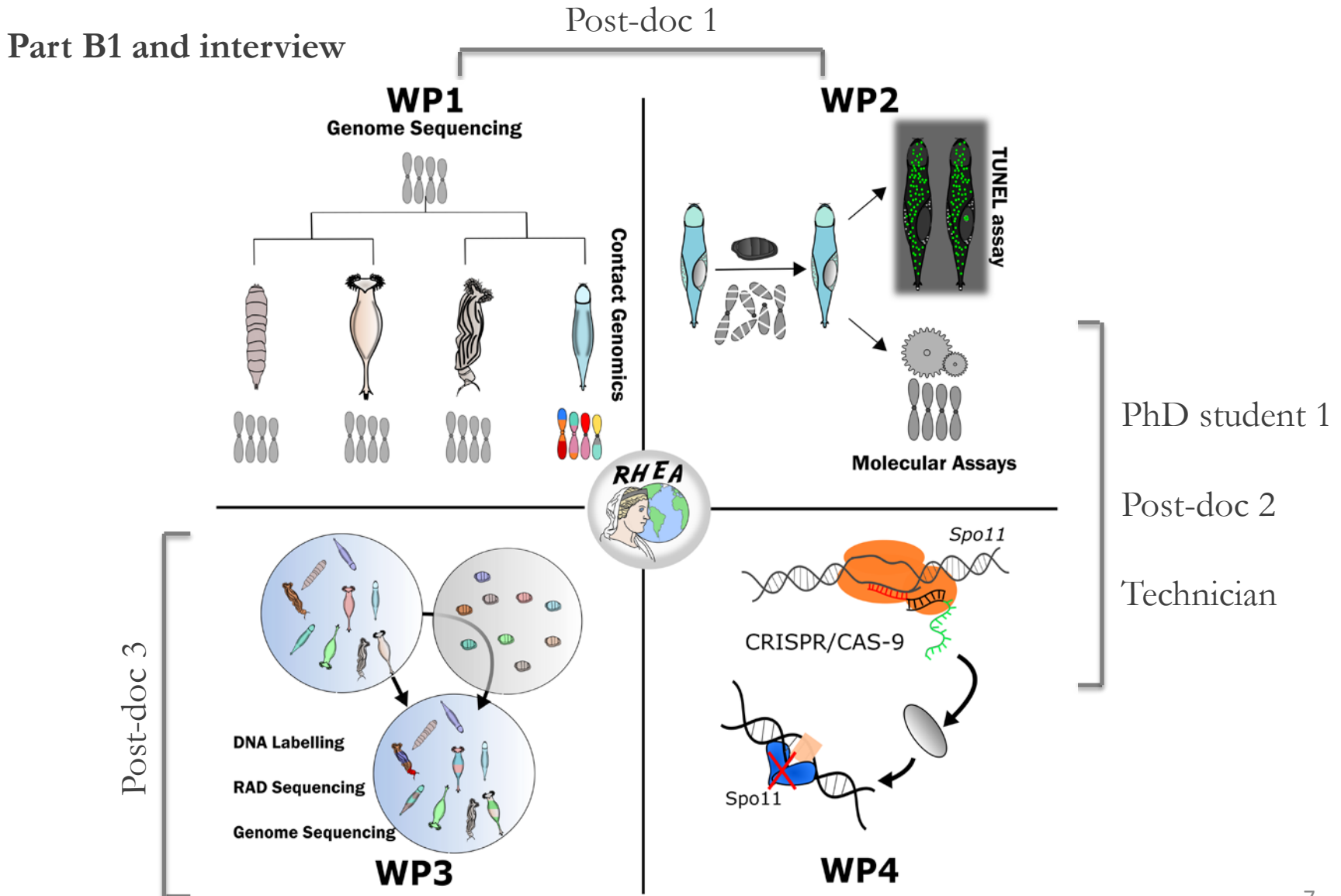
- Started with the B1, wrote the B2, re-wrote the B1
- **Zero** redundancy in B1
- Mention all ongoing grants in B1
- CV of B1: mention your **MAIN accomplishments**
- Make **overview figures** in B1 and B2
- I always add figures to summarize the experimental design of each WP
- **Main questions clearly outlined**

- Take time to think about your **ERC team and budget**

- Involve your team/collaborators during the writing process (frequent discussions)

- External top scientists have to read and critically comment your proposal

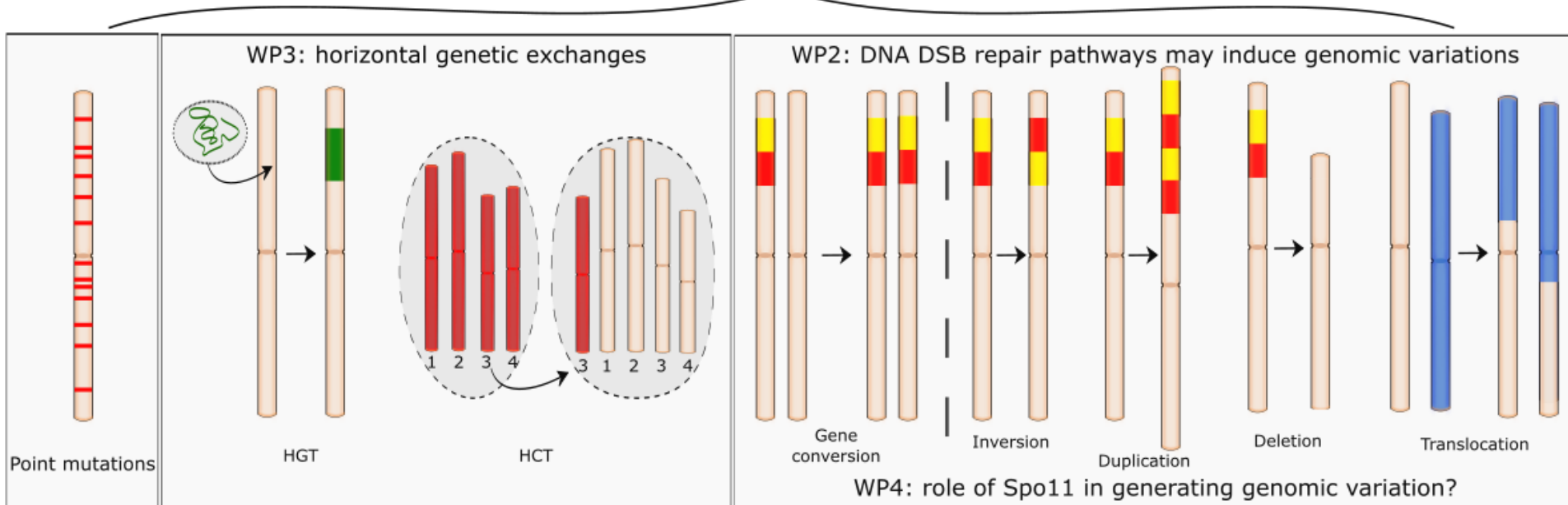
Figures of the RHEA project



Figures of the RHEA project

Part B2

WP1: comparative genomics



Figures of the RHEA project

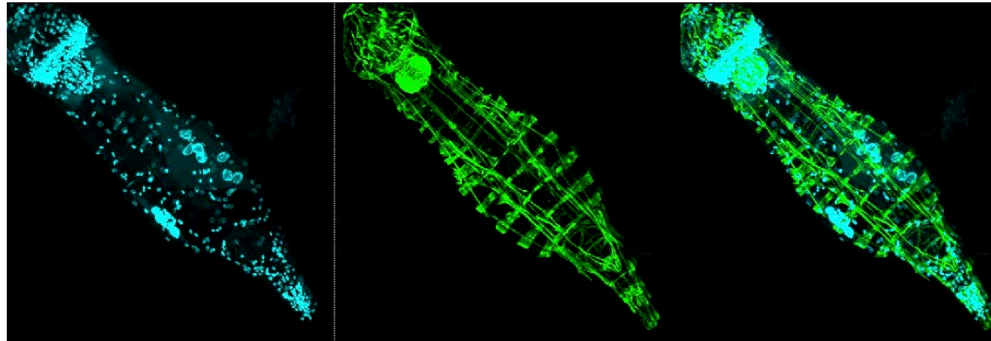
Interview

Asexual
evolution

HGT

Desiccation

Bdelloid rotifers: another gift from Nature?

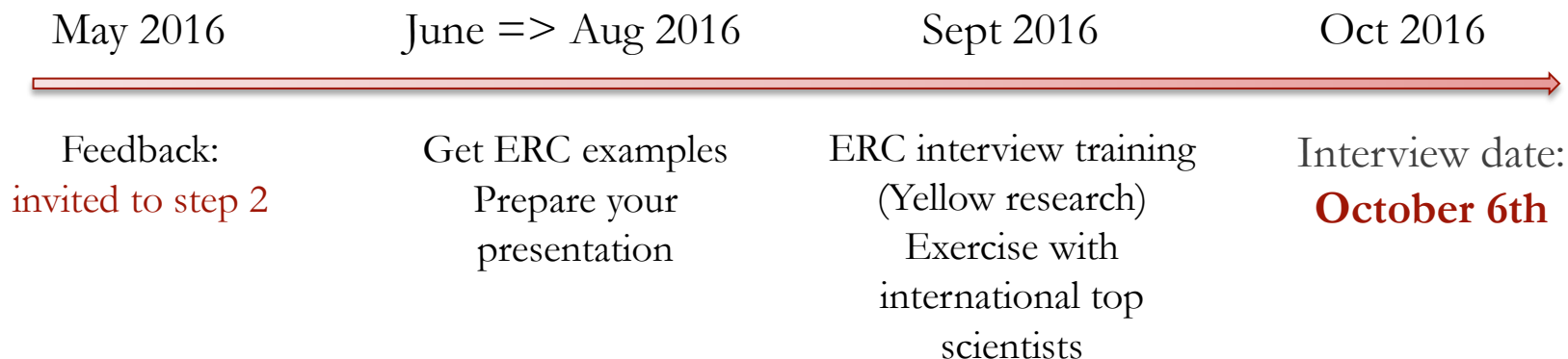


DNA repair

Genome
breakage

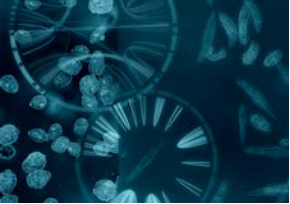


Milestones towards ERC interview



ERC interview LS8:

- Concise and clear – **10min** maximum
- 6 slides introduction, including my main publication results
- **1 slide with the main questions**
- **1 slide overview figure of all the WPs**
- 3 slides: main experiments of the project
- **1 slide: why innovative**
- **1 slide: overview figure with ERC team**
- Write a text accompanying ppt
- Prepare back-up slides
- **Exercise often with specialists and non-specialists**



ERC

1. It is a **fascinating process** with long-term thinking
2. You can “**recycle**” each **WP** in a futur project if not funded
3. The **reviewer feedback** is great: very helpful and 8 in total + panel comment