



Report on  
the CERC3 Workshop on  
**Water Soluble Polymers and their Hydrogels**  
Vaalbeek, Belgium, February 27<sup>th</sup> – March 2<sup>nd</sup>

The CERC3 workshop was held in Vaalbeek, Belgium, from 27 February up to 2 March 2002 and was organized by prof. F. Du Prez ( University of Ghent ). On behalf of CERC3, prof. H. Reynaers ( Catholic University of Leuven ), assisted to the full meeting and supported part of the practical organization. The workshop was attended by **28** young scientists ( **3** young scientists cancelled their announced participation prior to the start of the meeting.) Ages were between 27 and 35. **9** European countries participated and *the organizer is grateful to the contributing science foundations that they sent their best people!* Participation was as follows: France(6), UK(4), Germany(6), The Netherlands (3), Belgium (3), Finland(2), Sweden(2), Ireland (1), Switzerland(1). At the level of the administration, response of the CERC3 members to the call for nominations was rather prompt.

### Facilities

The workshop was organized according to the main purposes of the CERC3 meetings. In order to facilitate contacts and scientific concentration, the workshop took place in the European Centre La Foresta, situated in a rather isolated, wooded area near the town of Leuven and was housed in an abbey of Franciscan monks. The conference was confined to one room suited for the oral presentation of all the talks which were mostly supported by a Power Point presentation. Each participant had to provide additionally a poster showing the details of his oral presentation; during the whole meeting all the posters were continuously available in the conference room on boards arranged around the room. This was done to improve continuous contact with the central theme of the meeting as seen from the different subtopics. Consequently there were intensive scientific discussions during the different coffee breaks( in the same room ) in front of the posters. Many of the posters presented were models of clarity supporting the oral presentations of the contributors.

To improve personal contacts socializing was organized by making available an evening meeting room offering refreshments, coffee, Belgian beers, etc.....Moreover, on Friday afternoon the scientific session was stopped at 16h30 and followed by a guided visit to the historical center of the city of Leuven . Conference dinner was in a restaurant in front of the historical town hall.

### Theme

It is interesting to note that the CERC3 Workshop on Water Soluble Polymers and Their Hydrogels attracted a strongly interdisciplinary group of young scientists involving chemists, physicists ( both experimental and theoretical ), physical chemists, etc... . Depending on future activities of CERC3 this approach merits attention as more and more interesting science moves along borderlines!

The contributed topics were arranged in subgroups:

- supramolecular structures and their properties;
- intelligent gels;
- polyelectrolyte-surfactant or -colloid interactions and the role of counter ions;
- gel based drug delivery systems;
- polymer synthesis and chemically modified polysaccharide systems;
- polymers and polyelectrolytes at interfaces or thin layers;
- structure-properties relations in different types of block copolymers;-theoretical approaches of polyelectrolyte theory as reflected to experimentally accessible parameters.

Each subtopic allowed for three contributions. With the orally communicated science, it was then easy to continue discussion at the nearby posters. Debate often continued during lunch break and after the closing sessions.

### **Overall remarks**

The group of young scientists met the *optimal size* for close interaction and for discussions preparing future partnerships.

All participants were strongly involved and attended all lectures and poster discussions.

Full credit was given to the participants: the most prominent young scientists were selected as session leaders. Each session was followed by numerous questions. Interference by the organizer and the CERS3 adviser was kept at minimum to assure a truly young chemists meeting. The discussions were vivid and polite.

The workshop was rather academic and one should consider the participation of young industrial scientists to bridge the gap between science and applied science.

Follow-up meetings will surely be welcome because of the increasing interest in the fields of natural and synthetic, chemically modified polymers.

The young chemist workshop was strongly interdisciplinary and this pathway should be further explored.

The careful selection by the European Councils is highly appreciated.

The Young Chemists Workshops should be continued in any way because of their success as a forum for future progress and excellent science in creating an European research area.

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