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A trip to Brussels lead to an EU application

Assistant professor Gloria Gomez from the University of Southern Denmark submitted in April 2015 her first application for Horizon 2020. A trip to Brussels back in 2013 was decisive for the project.



It was a moment to remember when Gloria Gomez finally submitted her application to the European Commission in April 2015. Prior to the submission she had been through an intense year and half process of preparations:

- I was very tired, when we finally submitted the application. The writing process was very intense, and you use a lot of energy.

Gloria works in the Department of Technology and Innovation of the university. She is originally from Colombia, and worked in the US, Australia, and New Zealand before applying for her position at SDU and moving to Denmark.

Her applied research in design informs innovative educational practices through early product development. The aim of her EU research project, FULCRUM, is to develop Bridging Design Prototypes of smart learning technologies that will enable educational activities during the transition into early algebra. 5- to 8-year olds,

teachers and/or caregivers in informal and formal settings will incorporate these prototypes into real learning activities while the FULCRUM partners use them for observation. The main goal is to engage young children's minds with algebraic thinking early in their education.

Two tracks: Networking and funding

Right from the beginning of her employment at the university Gloria was looking at opportunities for external funding for her research and creating a network. She was put in contact with the research support team and with Christian Walther Bruun who works as a consultant for the university at the South Denmark European Office in Brussels.

It was through the research support team that Gloria first heard about Design Days, an annual design event held in Brussels. To expand her network she decided to participate in 2013, after discussing the idea with Christian Walther Bruun:

- Christian asked me: Would you like to present at the Design Days? Christian is always looking for opportunities for us to do something that showcases our work. I said: Let's go for it.

Design Days was, however, already fully booked, but Gloria was able to join the Creative and Cultural Industries event running in parallel and organised by the Lombardy region. Here she met David Crombie from the University of the Arts Utrecht (HKU):

- I gave a 10-minute talk at the event, and at some point David heard what I had to say regarding the issue of getting funding as a designer. A good conversation over lunch was followed by an email with an invitation to undertake a research visit to HKU, which I accepted.

Gloria and David discussed her research idea on early algebra, design, and Bridging Design Prototypes. They decided to seek funding from the Horizon 2020 programme:

- I was new to Europe and he knew more than me, and when he was recommending it, I was listening to him.

The process begins

Gloria returned to Christian Walther Bruun who suggested she apply for EUopStart, which is a national Danish grant that researchers can use for the preparation and writing process of a Horizon 2020 application:

- We got the funding, and that kick-started the process. I was able to hold two partner meetings in the South Denmark House in Brussels, reimburse travelling costs of partners, and go to Amsterdam for a week, where David and I did some writing and discussed the application.

Gloria wrote most of the application herself, but it was important for her to have David assisting with the writing, as he is highly experienced with the application writing process.

- Once you decide to be a coordinator of an EU-project, it becomes your "baby". Even though you have partners, they will only be available for a limited time.

Gloria has now become more experienced herself, and she has learned how one as a coordinator creates a consortium, writes an application, and negotiates with partners.

- You must be prepared to share, because in an EU consortium you do not have control of everything. You only control your little bit which makes you important for that consortium.

The application has not been evaluated yet, but even if it should be rejected, the work is not wasted. Gloria Gomez has already been looking into other opportunities for funding. The process itself has advanced her research and has expanded her network.

- I had to do it, because I did not know that many people in Denmark or elsewhere in the EU and I needed some local connections, because my connections mainly were from the US, New Zealand and Australia where I had worked before.

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