

Dutch-Russian scientific collaboration, 1992-2008

2500 researchers, 400 projects, 5 centres of excellence

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Foreword NWO

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In 1992, when as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union the many existing institutional and personal collaborations between researchers in the Netherlands and Russia came under threat, a Dutch-Russian cooperation in the area of scientific research was started at a governmental level. This official cooperation provided financial support to Russian researchers. However, maintaining the contact with the outstanding scientists in Russia was most certainly in the interest of Dutch science as well. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 1993, a Mixed Committee determined specific priority areas, and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) were given the responsibility of implementing the cooperation programme. Research proposals jointly submitted by Dutch and Russian researchers were competitively subjected to a peer review.

Now, after 16 years of cooperation and 4 Memoranda of Understanding between the two countries, we can rightfully state that the cooperation has been extremely successful. Two and a half thousand of scientists have been involved in several hundred projects, cooperating Centres of Excellence have been established, joint publications have appeared in top scientific journals, and participating research groups have entered international research consortia. A recently conducted limited survey among 134 project leaders predominantly from the period 2004-2007, revealed that the majority of the 88 respondents are now participating in other international programmes and that almost two-thirds had continued the cooperation once the bilateral project had finished. We can fairly describe the current position of Russian science as 'up and running'. In view of these developments and the various opportunities presently available for multilateral cooperation, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the principal financier of the cooperation programme, has stated that now is the right time to draw the bilateral cooperation to a close. With this publication NWO wants to look back at the Dutch-Russian cooperative programme, which over the course of many years has provided a firm foundation for sustainable partnerships in the future. The researchers interviewed in this publication provide a unique insight into the past and the future of scientific cooperation between the Netherlands and Russia.

Charles Buys

Vice president NWO,

Chair Mixed Committee

Scientific Cooperation Netherlands-Russian Federation



Foreword RFBR

The bilateral cooperation between the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) started when the Memorandum of Understanding for the scientific cooperation between NWO and RFBR was signed. The main aims of the cooperation were the execution of the joint calls for research projects in fundamental science, the attainment of synergy and added value for both parties in this cooperation, and the formation of research networks in the cooperation.

For the joint calls, the Dutch-Russian Mixed Committee would choose topics each year that covered practically all fundamental fields of science. From 2004 onwards, the scientists involved in the RFBR-NWO cooperation had the opportunity to apply for grants for joint research projects and for Centres of Excellence.

The cooperation in the joint NWO-RFBR projects has improved the competitiveness of Russian research and has led to achievements of international standing. The aim of the programme was to establish structural long-term collaborative relationships in the fields of science and technology that were mutually beneficial to both countries, to further the joint participation of Dutch and Russian scientists and research groups in international scientific networks, and to provide the scientists with opportunities to advance their careers in an international perspective.

NWO and RFBR created an efficient system for finding partners, peer review and even for the funding of the joint research projects. Like NWO, RFBR regards scientific quality to be the main selection criterion. The joint projects call allowed scientists from both countries to exchange opinions on new steps and approaches in building the cooperation. The international level of the results presented by the project's participants confirms one main conclusion: the RFBR-NWO programme played an important role in the establishment and continuation of the long-term collaborations between Dutch and Russian scientists. The aim of this programme was therefore realised.

Vladimir Kovalev

Director International Relations Department RFBR



Dutch-Russian cooperation in figures

The programme was set up in 1992 and the last call for proposals was in 2006. The last project shall be completed on 31 March 2014.

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Thanks to the programme more than 2500 Russian and Dutch scientists could cooperate. Up to 94 researchers worked on a project and for each project an average of 4 institutes were involved. In total, the programme funded more than 400 projects.

Up until 2002, NWO provided all of the funding for the projects and since 2002 the RFBR has funded 10% of the project costs. NWO has contributed a total of 37 million euro in funding throughout the entire course of the programme.

For each call, NWO and RFBR together determined the priority areas under which the applicants could submit a proposal for a joint research project. The applicants for other types of grant, such as the centres of excellence, the fellowships and the innovation grants were free to choose the subject of their research.

The last awards within the Russia programme were for the centres of excellence. Five such centres have been started to date, each with a budget of 500,000 euro.

In 2008, NWO sent a questionnaire to 134 project leaders of research projects funded within the framework of the Russia programme. Some 63% of the respondents indicated that they have continued the cooperation after the conclusion of the NWO/RFBR research project. Moreover, 60% of the respondents indicated that the Russia programme has enabled them to extend the cooperation to other research groups in Russia, the Netherlands or elsewhere in the world.

Priority areas for the joint research projects since 1992

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2006	Polar research Neuroinformatics combined with neurobiology of cognitive processes
2005	Internationalisation of law Nanosciences: nanophotonics, nanofluidics, nanomedicine, microreactors ICT and the humanities Infectious diseases and vaccines
2004	Geobiology Interdisciplinary mathematics Cultural heritage
2003	Computational sciences Plasma physics
2002	Catalysis Genomics Economics
2001	Risk analysis, industrial safety Arts and culture
2000	Alternative sources of energy Global change and biodiversity Molecular physics, synchrotron radiation, Bose-Einstein condensation Physics of polymers and nanocomposites
1999	Neuromedicine Mathematics and informatics New materials
1998	Agricultural research Physical chemistry Human sciences
1997	Global change Biological research

1996 Novel materials
Engineering safety
1995 Basic research
Agricultural and food research
Environmental research
1994 Environmental research
Management of science
Basic research
1993/1992 Basic research, open call

The start of the cooperation between the Netherlands and Russia

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Kees Le Pair, former director of Technology Foundation STW

'At the end of the 1980s a number of researchers from Technology Foundation STW were already working with colleagues from Eastern Europe and our programme officers were always closely involved in those projects. We therefore became familiar with the funding problems and other issues that confronted researchers in the former Eastern Bloc after the fall of the Iron Curtain. In certain cases their problems were to the detriment of our own acquisition of knowledge. Moreover, we noticed that by our standards funding the research groups concerned would be a relatively cheap option. So we made informal approaches to NWO about this and then one thing led to another.

NWO formed a committee with several subcommittees. The sub-committee I was a member of was given the task of visiting a large number of institutes in the Ukraine. We had to find out if efforts to support the researchers there would indeed be worthwhile. In addition we investigated how any possible support could best be given. The latter was a delicate but most essential task, as it became apparent that there were a lot of party bosses and other 'government consumers' who were out to get their share of any Western investments. We were fortunate to have a Russian interpreter, Dr L.V. Zoebkova, who saw through the officials' crafty schemes, thanks to her long experience as a researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences. We succeeded in identifying a number of groups who were genuinely outstanding. They emanated a real enthusiasm, commitment and perseverance that you scarcely ever encounter these days in the affluent West. And that despite the miserable conditions in which they worked.

We selected those groups and recommended them for support. Yet as far as we were concerned, the entire campaign was also in our own interest. If it had been a question of development cooperation then our commitment to the venture would have been far less. However, I know that once everything was up and running our own people were very positive about the speed and efficiency with which these research groups in need were helped.'

The future of the cooperation between the Netherlands and Russia

Pavel Kouzmine, Senior officer for science, education and cultural affairs at the Dutch Embassy in Moscow

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'The bilateral Dutch-Russian research programme was highly rated in the evaluations of 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003 and 2007. The Russians were also very positive about the programme. Minister Fursenko repeatedly used it as an example of an effective and efficient instrument, also in comparison to bilateral programmes with other countries. In addition, staff at the Russian Federation's Ministry for Education and Science praised the programme for its clarity and relatively small scale.

The last Memorandum of Understanding expired on 1 January 2008. The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science then informed his Russian counterpart that although he wished to continue stimulating the cooperation, he could no longer make government funds available for this. The Russian Ministry of Education and Science is currently working on a draft Memorandum of Understanding to breathe new life into the cooperation. Russian partners are keen to continue the cooperation with the Netherlands due to the high quality of the projects and the challenges that Russia faces. The Dutch institutes are also interested in a formal framework for cooperation, even though here the financial responsibilities are often in the hands of individual institutes.

Despite the global financial crisis Russia is continuing to make substantial investments in its national research and innovation programmes. President Medvedev is determined that Russia shall become a world leader in the areas of technology and innovation in the near future. And to further these ambitions the Russian government is clearly encouraging international cooperation in scientific research. Unlike the Netherlands, other countries are continuing their bilateral programmes with Russia. The intensive participation of Russia in the EU FP7 programme is being effectively supplemented by bilateral programmes with Germany, France, the UK and other EU Member States.'



Salomon Kroonenberg, TU Delft

What are your experiences of the Russia programme?

Salomon: 'I have acquired a wealth of experiences. The contact with Russia had already started round about the time the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. In 1991 I wanted to take a group of Dutch soil science students on a trip to Russia, to see where the discipline of soil science started. We went on a field trip for Russian geography students given by Moscow State University. In 1993 professor Kasimov embarked upon our first research project. Together we experienced the attempted coup in 1991 and we saw the tanks rolling down the streets. During the siege of the Russian parliament building in 1993 Kasimov was with us in the Netherlands, and on Black Thursday in 1998 when the value of the rouble collapsed and we lost three-quarters of our projects, I was in Moscow. Yet despite all of these changes the cooperation has always been the same; only the external circumstances have altered.'

Michail: 'The cooperation between Russian and Dutch institutions began in 1990 during a visit professor Kroonenberg made to Moscow. I was involved in the Dutch-Russian cooperation from the outset. In 1990 my scientific leader, professor Kasimov, gave me the task of organising a visit to Moscow State University by two Dutch students from Wageningen University. In the following year I made my first visit to the Netherlands together with two colleagues from Moscow State University.'

Did you need Russia?

Salomon: 'Absolutely. Of course first of all because the Caspian Sea is our research object. It is the world's largest inland sea and the rapid changes in the sea level there reveal at an accelerated rate what could happen along the Dutch coast if the sea level here were to rise as well. The local networks in particular proved to be invaluable. We have visited some weird and wonderful locations for our research. For example, an old dilapidated fish factory in Dagestan is not something you would find via the Internet.'

Michail Lychagin, Moscow State University

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Did Russia need the Netherlands?

Salomon: 'That was indeed the case. Especially when we first embarked on the project, as then the research was completely dependent on Dutch, Russian and European funding. Now, unfortunately, the NWO-Russia programme and INTAS (an EU programme) have drawn to a close. Although more funds are being made available by oil companies who are interested in sea level changes, a large number of unanswered questions still remain. Fortunately one of my staff is continuing the cooperation. And if I were not retiring I could have continued my research as well for the time being.'

Michail: 'Joint study of the coastal areas by different specialists from Russian and Dutch institutions gave us an opportunity to acquire a new view on natural phenomena. However, more important still was the training of young scientists during the realisation of the project. The project also allowed the cooperation between Russian and Dutch researchers to be strengthened. Joint studies present many opportunities: new methods of field research, data analysis, a new view on the natural processes, and the mutual generation of new ideas. The financial support we received for the studies was also important.'

What was it like to work in an international cooperation like this?

Michail: 'We enjoyed very good communication with Dutch researchers, especially during periods of fieldwork. We have travelled a lot. All of the projects dealt with the Caspian Sea problems. Although they are a considerable environmental problem, sea-level changes in the Caspian Sea also offer numerous opportunities to scientific research. The Caspian coasts are a physical laboratory for what might happen along oceanic coasts as a result of sea level rises triggered by global warming. My tasks in the cooperation included the management of projects, the organisation of meetings, workshops and fieldwork, participation in these organised activities, the collection, analysis and treatment of field data, and the preparation of scientific papers and presentations for conferences.'

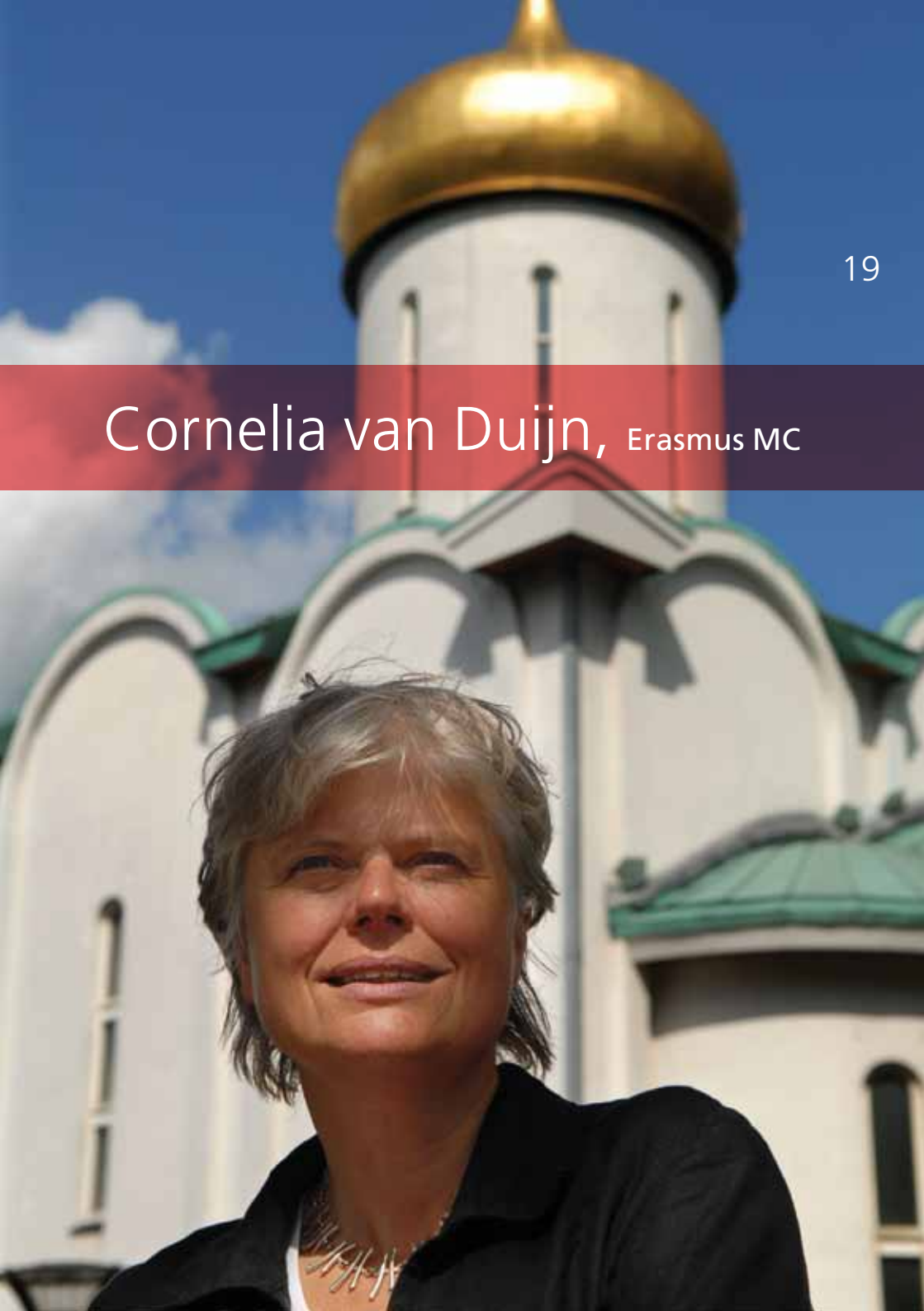
How useful was this cooperation?

Michail: 'Important outcomes of the cooperation are the application of advanced methods in coastal zone research, for example field studies using a ground-penetrating radar system, an analysis of mass balance in coastal processes, 3-D numerical simulation of barrier systems, AMS dating, and much more. We have acquired a completely new perspective on the rate and correlation of coastal and geochemical processes. Right from the outset the cooperation was characterised by a good mutual understanding, which ultimately led to fruitful results in all of the activities undertaken.'

Do you still visit Russia?

Salomon: 'Come what may the cooperation shall continue, even if the form changes. For example, I was recently awarded an honorary professorship at Moscow State University. So I will once again be able to give lectures there. In Russian of course!'

Cornelia van Duijn, Erasmus MC



Yurii, you're a Russian researcher working in the Netherlands. How did you end up here?

Yurii: 'I spent some time in Italy, and there I met Lodewijk Sandkuijl – a great Dutch statistical geneticist, and a fantastic person. He introduced me to Cornelia. I moved to the Netherlands and have been working here ever since. But of course I still had contact with my Russian colleagues. When I heard about the cooperation programme, I immediately wanted to start working with my former colleagues. I didn't need to convince them. They knew me and trusted me and vice versa. I think it would be hard to start a cooperation with people you don't already know, as you really have to trust each other then. Actually, the only person I needed to convince was Cornelia. Luckily, she trusted me.'

Was Cornelia right to trust you?

Yurii: 'I think so. We received two grants from this programme: The first in 2004, for high performance computing in genetic epidemiology and the second in 2007, for the genetics of cognitive function. The first project was very successful, even though we were still in the process of establishing the cooperation. With the second project, we could immediately work at full speed and after 18 months we had achieved as much as what we had done by the end of the first project. The projects led to about ten publications, some of them in very important journals.'

We've managed to seamlessly combine high performance computing with genetics and the cognitive sciences. And we certainly gained a lot from the cooperation. Not only do we have a huge amount of data, but together we also have the expertise in statistics and computing to process this. Indeed, in our current project we even have too much data to process and so we are already looking for new opportunities.'

Yurii Aulchenko, Erasmus MC



So why Russia?

Cornelia: 'For the knowledge and the 'number crunchers'. Before we started cooperating in NWO's Russia programme we already had some cautious contacts. A number of Russian researchers then asked us if we wanted to cooperate with them in this programme. That was of course a fantastic opportunity for us. Regrettably, the number of real 'number crunchers' is dwindling in the Netherlands, whereas in Russia there is an enormous pool of good mathematicians and statisticians to choose from. For one of our two projects we developed a program to analyse genealogies so that we could also establish the origin of certain characteristics. We had already acquired considerable experience with human genealogies but in Russia they had developed expertise in genealogical analyses of arctic foxes and mice, due to work on the breeding of foxes. We therefore complement each other's skills.'

Was that also the case for your other project?

Cornelia: 'For that project we wanted to identify the genes responsible for human cognition, and underlying diseases such as Alzheimer's. Allowing study subjects to perform cognitive tasks is one thing but relating this data to more than 2 million genetic variations requires considerable calculating power. We jointly developed a program to make that possible. The server for this is located in Russia and is also maintained there. They analyse the data we supply but in return we use our expertise to interpret the data collected by them.'

What is it like, cooperating with foreign researchers?

Cornelia: 'Right from the start we made agreements to prevent brain drain. Therefore the researchers regularly come to the Netherlands but continue to be based in Russia and I have also been to Russia several times. Furthermore, besides carrying out research together our aim is to improve the infrastructure in Russia. At present our server is located behind a shining new door in an otherwise very drab corridor.'

Yurii: 'I usually spend the first hour of my day answering e-mails. That's part of the job. But as a statistical geneticist I spend most of my time processing the data and thinking of better ways to do so. We have teleconferences with our Russian colleagues about once every two weeks. Considering we are thousands of kilometres and five hours away from each other, it has been surprisingly easy to keep everything in sync.'

What does the future hold?

Cornelia: 'We have carried out a lot of work over the past few years. The server with our program is not only used by us but also by researchers from other European countries. We will do everything possible to maintain the contact. An increasing amount of initiative is emerging from Russia, also from other research groups. So however you look at it, it would be a real shame if we lost this Russian expertise.'

Tony Donné, FOM Institute for Plasma
Physics Rijnhuizen



What exactly do you do within the Russia programme?

Tony: 'I am active in plasma physics. We want to develop nuclear fusion, how the Sun obtains energy, as an energy source on Earth. Yet in order to do that we need to be able to keep the plasma – the fuel of a fusion reactor, which is a several hundred million degrees hot – under control. That requires a long-term plan. I have been working with Russian researchers since the 1980s. Back then the Russians were the leading lights in my research field and we had built a device to measure these high temperatures. We wanted to test that on an authoritative machine of the Russians, the tokamak. Now we are a lot further down the road and the Netherlands is playing a far greater role. Yet we are still trying to find ways to keep the plasma more tightly under control.'

Ksenia: 'Together with our Dutch colleagues we investigate plasma physics in order to heat plasma up to thermonuclear temperatures. We work with specific devices called tokamaks, machines that produce a magnetic field to confine a plasma. The international experimental reactor ITER is now being constructed in France, based on these devices. However, the basic physics of plasma processes is still not fully understood.'

We jointly investigated the physical explanation of a very interesting and important phenomenon: the confinement of energy in certain areas, or zones, of the plasma. We proposed an explanation for this process. We also successfully investigated the phenomenon of plasma pressure profile conservation. We hope that our results will make an important contribution to the future of ITER. We also value the relationships we have built up with Dutch colleagues as a result of participating in NWO's Russia programme.'

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Ksenia Razumova, Kurchatov Institute

Why this cooperation?

Tony: 'To put it bluntly with the help of the Russians our research is far cheaper. The Russians are outstanding theoreticians but have less funds available for large equipment or experimental research. The potential is unimaginable. We were working here with about 20 people on various subjects and then via the cooperation almost 100 Russian researchers joined us. This has significantly increased our research capacity and has enabled us to exert a far greater impact in our research field.'

Ksenia: 'Experimentalists are always looking for ways to expand their research by using another experimental device (tokamaks TEXTOR and RTP in addition to our T-10) and are keen to hear the opinions of new colleagues. I was visiting a conference in Maastricht in 1999, and Tony Donn  suggested that I could try to collaborate with him by means of an NWO grant. I became the leader of the two NWO projects for the group at the Kurchatov Institute. We had the opportunity to carefully compare the results obtained using three tokamaks of different sizes and diagnostic possibilities. Dutch colleagues also helped us to improve our Thomson scattering diagnostic. We had very fruitful discussions and I really liked this productive cooperation. We worked in a friendly climate, received help from our colleagues, and always saw our chief Tony Donn  taking care of all our needs and interests.'

Has a lot changed since you started cooperating together?

Tony: 'Modern-day communication devices make a world of difference of course. I can still remember when we sent a free spectrometer to Russia at the end of the 1990s. Several months passed before it reached the researchers, and to make matters worse we even received an invoice from Russian customs because the device had been in their stores for so long. That has all changed. Now you can briefly chat via skype or hold a video conference; everything proceeds far more smoothly. And on top of that there is now more research funding available in Russia. It is no longer the case that we have the money and they the knowledge. Consequently, the current cooperation within the Centre of Excellence on Fusion Physics and Technology is more balanced.'

What makes Russia unique?

Tony: 'In Russia they do not appear to have a legal retirement age and they doggedly carry on working. I had already worked with Ksenia in my previous two projects. She was born in 1931 and helped to invent the tokamak. Her stories are incredible. She really does enrich our work.'

Ksenia: 'Older people have to keep working out of necessity, as there is still too little money for young researchers. At the Kurchatov Institute we have practically no younger staff. The mean age in our division is 56 years. Older scientists can continue to work because they have a pension. As for me, I cannot imagine my life without scientific research. To work with a highly intelligent Dutch scientist was not only a pleasure; it was very useful. Together we analysed many previous results and in doing so we were able to describe new important phenomena. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of our contacts with Tony Donn , Dick Hogeweij and others.'

Daan Brugman, Utrecht University

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How did your Dutch-Russian project start?

Andrei: 'When we started, Russian developmental psychology researchers were some of the leading lights in the field. The Dutch were the first to recognise this and to take an interest in the Russian methods. My first international publication in 1969 was not published in English, but in Dutch. My department has been in close contact with Utrecht University since 1992. We have had two joined projects funded, and we also received EU funding. Good personal relationships between the partners are vitally important. Even though we started out from completely different backgrounds, we now have a very good relationship. However, this does not mean that we do not see each other's mistakes, or do not comment on these. We are still honest with each other. In fact, we could always discuss everything very openly.'

Daan: 'Together with my Russian colleagues I investigated the moral development of young people and the moral school climate. Our research was almost exclusively carried out in Russia. We only visited Russian schools and we set up interventions in which young people talked with each other about how you should behave in difficult social situations. I would have liked to have done that in the Netherlands but unfortunately that was not possible. I therefore visited Russia a lot to see how the research was progressing and I provided a lot of advice regarding the correct use of the instruments for measuring the moral school climate and the moral development. As a project leader one of your key tasks is carefully managing the research. That was particularly important in this project, as it involved so many colleagues.'

What is the difference between the Netherlands and Russia?

Daan: 'What struck me during the research is just how differently Russian adolescents behave at school. When I came into a class there I was completely taken by surprise. Russian adolescents are very curious and are really looking to acquire knowledge. You no longer find that in Dutch high schools. Yet come what may I find Russia a fascinating country. If you look at morality, the awareness of good and evil, then you cannot ignore Russian literature. I regard that as Dostoyevsky's legacy.'

A portrait of Andrei Podolskij, a middle-aged man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a black tuxedo jacket, a white dress shirt, and a white bow tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a wood-paneled room with several busts on pedestals and a dark, ornate chair with a red cushion.

Andrei Podolskij, Moscow State University

How important was the Russia programme?

Andrei: First of all, it was incredibly useful. We found that the internal psychological instrumentation schoolchildren have is very naive. They simply did not know how to evaluate the moral atmosphere at their schools and could not judge what was happening around them. We have managed to change that. We have presented our results at many international conferences and have produced some highly ranked publications. Yet the processes underlying our cooperation are just as interesting. I think I could now write a book on how to work with Dutch researchers. I have been invited to assume two professorships in the Netherlands and so I am definitely used to working with Dutch researchers. I am disappointed that this cooperation is coming to an end as I have always enjoyed it. But Daan and I are still thinking about new possibilities.

Daan: 'Back then I devoted nearly all of my research time to work within this programme. In my discipline you need international partnerships like these. The Netherlands is simply just too small. I really enjoy working with colleagues from whom you can learn a lot and who are perhaps a step ahead of you. Yet at the same time you must be able to make your own contribution. I already knew my colleagues from the Dutch-Russian programme from previous collaborations. Yet in this programme I had the opportunity to truly follow my own line of research. I learned a lot but could also contribute a lot as well.'

Andrei: 'International cooperation is absolutely essential. Science is not confined to geographical borders. It is a global activity. Especially with a science like psychology, where there are no exact laws like those in physics, it is very easy to remain limited to your own paradigm and your own way of thinking. So you have to keep talking to other scholars so as not to get stuck in your own little world. I really broadened my horizons during this programme and I think that my Dutch colleagues did as well.'

Daan: 'I still occasionally see the Russian researchers at an international congress and then we catch up with each other. At present my contacts are mainly in the US and Canada. The psychology of moral development is a small world. However, I would like to resume the contact with my Russian colleagues.'

Cecilia Odé, University of Amsterdam



How did your cooperation with Russia start?

Cecilia: 'I was approached by my Russian colleague, who was informed of the Dutch Russian programme by the RFBR. My colleagues wanted to build a website about the phonetics of Russian dialects. I know a lot about phonetics but far less about Russian dialects and so I was immediately enthusiastic about the prospect of us working together.'

Sergey: 'In the first project we did together with Cecilia Odé and other Dutch researchers, I was only involved as a junior researcher and didn't play a key role. I was much more involved in our second project. We had heard about the cooperation programme and wanted to start up a new project. We immediately thought of Cecilia Odé because of her considerable knowledge of phonetics and because the University of Amsterdam had the kind of software we needed to realise our goal: building a website about Russian Dialectal Phonetics.'

How did the cooperation work out?

Cecilia: 'My main task was coordinating the research and the cooperation. I was staggered by the sheer amount of organisation involved. The Russian researchers came to Amsterdam, for example, to learn how to work with our software. Although the software is free of charge, users need to undergo a thorough training programme to master its use. I regularly made trips to Moscow for meetings about the website and to give lectures. As a researcher in Slavonic studies I make frequent trips to Russia of course. All of the organisational matters and the frequent trips is what makes the work so much fun.'

Sergey: 'The researchers in Amsterdam basically provided the software, and we adapted it and collected all the information needed to fill the website. We needed texts and recordings. About half of the material was already available, but the other half had to be collected and adapted for use on the site. The Russian dialects are rapidly becoming extinct because people are being encouraged to speak standard Russian. By recording and publishing the dialects, we can at least preserve them.'

A portrait of a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and dark patterned tie. He is standing in front of a whiteboard with some faint mathematical diagrams. The whiteboard contains a diagram with a curved line, a vertical line with a horizontal tick, and some other markings.

Sergey Kniazev, Moscow State University

How important is it to cooperate with researchers from different countries, like the Netherlands?

Sergey: 'For young researchers in particular it's crucial. The Russian scientific system offers fewer opportunities to young researchers than systems in the West. Some of our young researchers have frequently visited the Netherlands. Besides enriching their knowledge they have also become acquainted with a different research culture. Upon returning to Russia they bring some of that mentality with them and so slowly but surely the Russian scientific system is starting to change. Although the programme is drawing to a close, we are still in touch with the Dutch researchers as there is a wealth of information that still needs to go online.'

Cecilia: 'The website (<http://dialect.philol.msu.ru>) is now freely accessible to everyone. As well as an atlas of the dialects, the site includes various descriptions of the dialects. For example as you read or listen to a text, images appear on your screen that explain the pronunciation and intonation of the words. Various interactive exercises are available as well. This site is a particularly valuable resource for Slavic researchers in the Netherlands and the Russia programme provided a superb framework for cooperation in this project. Without the programme I do not think that we would have developed such an intensive contact.'

Will that contact continue once the programme has finished?

Cecilia: 'I hope so. During the programme we had weekly contact with each other and that won't change overnight. One of the young researchers has now obtained a PhD studentship at Moscow State University and so I will be involved in his research again.'

Dutch-Russian research locations in the Netherlands



Dutch-Russian research locations in Russia





Krasnoyarsk

Irkutsk

Ulan-Ude

Yakutsk

Vladivostok

Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy

