

Russian-Speaking Scientists in France: Collaboration with Russia and Path-Dependency Effect

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Previous Studies of Russian-French Research Collaborations

- Bibliometric analysis (co-authorship patterns and impact of publications)
- Disciplinary studies by historians and sociologists (biology and medicine, math, IT – including Diaspora)
- Mutual perceptions (Russian-French but among managers)

Design of the Study

- Selection of respondents: the snowball method; wide disciplinary representation
- 39 face-to-face interviews (15 Russians and 24 French, out of which 11 – Diaspora)
- Duration of survey: September 2016-May 2017
- **Diaspora:** middle-aged or older; all with work experience in Russian / Soviet scientific organizations.

Development of Collaboration: Diaspora's Influence

- Generally linkages are stable when supported through official Russian-French instruments (i.e. calls for joint grants).
- **Diaspora – never interrupted collaboration with Russian colleagues:**

"I always continued to collaborate with Russia, and especially intensive it was in the 90-s when there were special grants for countries of the Former Soviet Union, like INTAS, for example" (Diaspora physicist, #2)

"I preserved all my linkages with Russia, and I tried the new form of teaching of Russian students from Russian universities. It is individual work with a small group." (Diaspora astrophysicist, #3)

- **Some French started to collaborate with Russians due to Diaspora:**

'After the breakup of the Soviet Union many Russians left to France and United States. I first started to work with Russians in France' (French physicist, #2)



Comparison of Students

- Russian respondents: French students are weaker or at best equal to Russian students. Russian students regarded as having “more initiative” and “independent-thinkers”.
- French respondents: students are similar, but Russians are shy, ask few questions, although may work long hours
- **Diaspora: praised mostly Russian students** whom Diaspora regards as a benchmark. They seem to be “Russians in France”:

“There are good French students, from Ecoles, not worse than Russian ones. Ecoles – this is the level of best Russian universities in their better times” (Diaspora physicists, #5)

“Russian graduate students from Moscow state university are much stronger than the French ones” (Diaspora chemist, #6)



Obstacles to Cooperation: Shared by All

- Funding
- Customs clearance (samples transfer)
- Visas
- Lack of proficiency in English (*Russia-specific problem*)

Obstacles to Cooperation: Russia-Specific (1)

- **Declining quality of research (French view):**

“in the 90-s it was possible to start collaboration with many Russian organizations, and at the present time you should know for sure, with whom you are dealing” (French physicist, #7)

- **Pressure to publish and its outcomes (French view):**

“Now all Russians want to be co-authors of publications. Instead of 2-3 coauthors we have 15-16, and most of them are from Russia” (French archeologist, #8)

“For Russians number of articles is more important than their quality. It is a reporting indicator for grants. Scientific level of an article is of secondary importance.” (French Big Data specialist, #4)



Obstacles to Cooperation: Russia-Specific (2)

- **Older-age scientists on administrative positions (French and Diaspora view):**

"In Russia, there are many aged science administrators, just look at the age of academicians" (Diaspora physicist, #2)

- **Lack of transparency (French and Diaspora views):**

*"Some are cautious in traveling to Russia because of instability and lack of transparency in political regime. **Diaspora researchers are least afraid at this point**"* (French biophysicist, #1)

- **Unfair treatment of Russians in collaboration (Diaspora view):**

*"**There is a factor of exploitation of the Russian side.** For example, in Russia specialists in bioinformatics are good and it is better to use them, then French ones. They are cheaper and French tend to solve routine scientific tasks"* (Diaspora biologist, #8)



Influence of Sanctions

- **Russian and French respondents:** Sanctions is not a problem in their particular project.
But: foreign affairs are worsening and science diplomacy becomes more important
- Diaspora: mixed but more politicized views; think that scientific cooperation can become a "soft power"

Conclusions

- Russian-speaking scientists remain mostly non-assimilated. They speak as Russians rather than French. They often criticize French science and educational system.
- Diaspora researchers were the most judgmental when discussing the motives of collaboration, obstacles, and quality of student training. Such criticism is not a factor of age or a year of their exit from Russia.
- At the same time Diaspora can be considered as a driving force for cooperation. All of them have continuing collaborations and links with Russia in various forms; they introduced French colleagues to Russian science teams. They consider influence of sanctions insignificant and are serious about keeping the cooperation going.