

Russian-Speaking Researchers Abroad: Do They Want to Cooperate with Russia?

Irina Dezhina,

Ph.D., Head of Research Group on Science and Industrial Policy,

Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology

i.dezhina@skoltech.ru

Content

- Previous studies
- Government approach
- Measuring success of past initiatives
- Survey of Diaspora: respondents and their experience
- Pros and cons of collaborating with Russia
- Possible next steps

Previous Studies on Russian-Speaking Researchers Abroad

- How many have moved abroad, disciplinary and demographic profile (scale of brain drain, including external versus internal brain drain) – O.Ikonnikov (1993), Nekipelova, Gokhberg et al. (1994), Kitova, Kuznetsova, Kuznetsov (1995), Nekipelova (1998), Dezhina (2002)
- Size of Russian research Diaspora abroad – Egerev (1998, 2000)
- Motivations to return – Ledeneva, Tyuryukanova (1999), Dezhina (2010), Egerev (2011)
- Moods and intentions within research Diaspora, relationships with Russia – Popov, Tvorogova et al (2011), Dezhina (2010, 2013), Asheulova, Dushina (2014)

Fragmented information about size and composition of Russian-speaking research Diaspora; separate studies of motivations

Russian Government Approach

- **Goals** of collaboration with Diaspora:
 - Involve them in expert evaluation of proposals and projects to make reviews more objective
 - Conduct joint research projects to make outcomes more visible and of higher quality
 - Involve Diaspora in creation of new institutional units (labs, technology transfer offices, etc.)

Initially idea was to bring Diaspora back to Russian permanently

Later focus shifted to mutually beneficial collaboration

Key Government Initiatives

- **2009 – current** – Diaspora participate as consultants in research projects (Rosnano, Ministry of Education and Science - MoES, Russian Science Foundation)
- **2009 - 2013** –research projects led by Diaspora (MoES)
- **2010 – current** – creation of new labs at Russian universities by world leading researchers (MoES)
- **2014 – current** – support for creation of new interdisciplinary labs chaired by RASA members (Russian-Speaking Academic Science Association)

Research Projects Led by Diaspora: Goals and Conditions

Goals:

- Sustainable and effective interactions with Russian researchers working abroad temporarily or permanently,
- Integrate Diaspora members into Russian science,
- Employ their experience, knowledge and skills for development of Russian science, education, and high technologies.

Conditions:

- 1.7 billion RUR for 2009-2013,
- Diaspora should spend at least 2 months per year in Russia, during 2 years

Research Projects Led by Diaspora: Assessing Results

- Impact of invited scholars (**based on self-assessment**): **“idea generators”**, better training of graduate students, introduction of new research techniques to Russian scholars.
- Impact of invited scholars (**based on opinion of Russian scientists**): **introduction of new research techniques**
- Rough estimate of results: average citations per publication within this project was 7.7 whereas a similar indicator for Russia as a whole is 5.46 (data from HSE)

Creation of New Labs in Russian Universities by World Leading Researchers

- 160 new labs are established. Financing – up to 150 million RUR for 3 years (since 2012 – up to 90 million RUR for 3 years and co-financing is required)
- **35.6% of labs are chaired by Diaspora members**
- Result: for 2010-2014, 2845 articles published in journals indexed in Web of Science. No data on their citations and distribution by fields.
- Qualitative results: research culture has changed, Western ethical standards introduced, new research directions emerged.

Creation of New Labs: Criticism from Diaspora

- First reactions were skeptical. Later attitudes have changed to more positive.
- Major criticism: bureaucracy, way money are spent, and qualification level of Russian researchers.

«I have to admit that in the University of San Diego alone we have five times more experts on bioinformatics than there are in whole of Russia. This is not only my opinion but also an opinion of leading Russian experts with whom I have talked about it” (translation from Russian)

- Created labs are usually valued by Diaspora and thus the common claim is to guarantee their financing beyond promised 3-5 years.

Creation of New Labs: Anecdotal Evidence of Attitudes in Russia

- No surveys were conducted to find out attitudes to Diaspora's activities within Russian research community. This attitude may be judged based on interviews of Russian scholars in press and opinion blogs.
- Criticism is more common than positive opinions.
- **Major comments:**
 - Diaspora is too expensive (high salary)
 - Its input is highly questionable
 - They left the country in difficult times and are back when Russia got money to pay them

It is not an easy relationship

Russian-Speaking Research Diaspora as a Soft Power

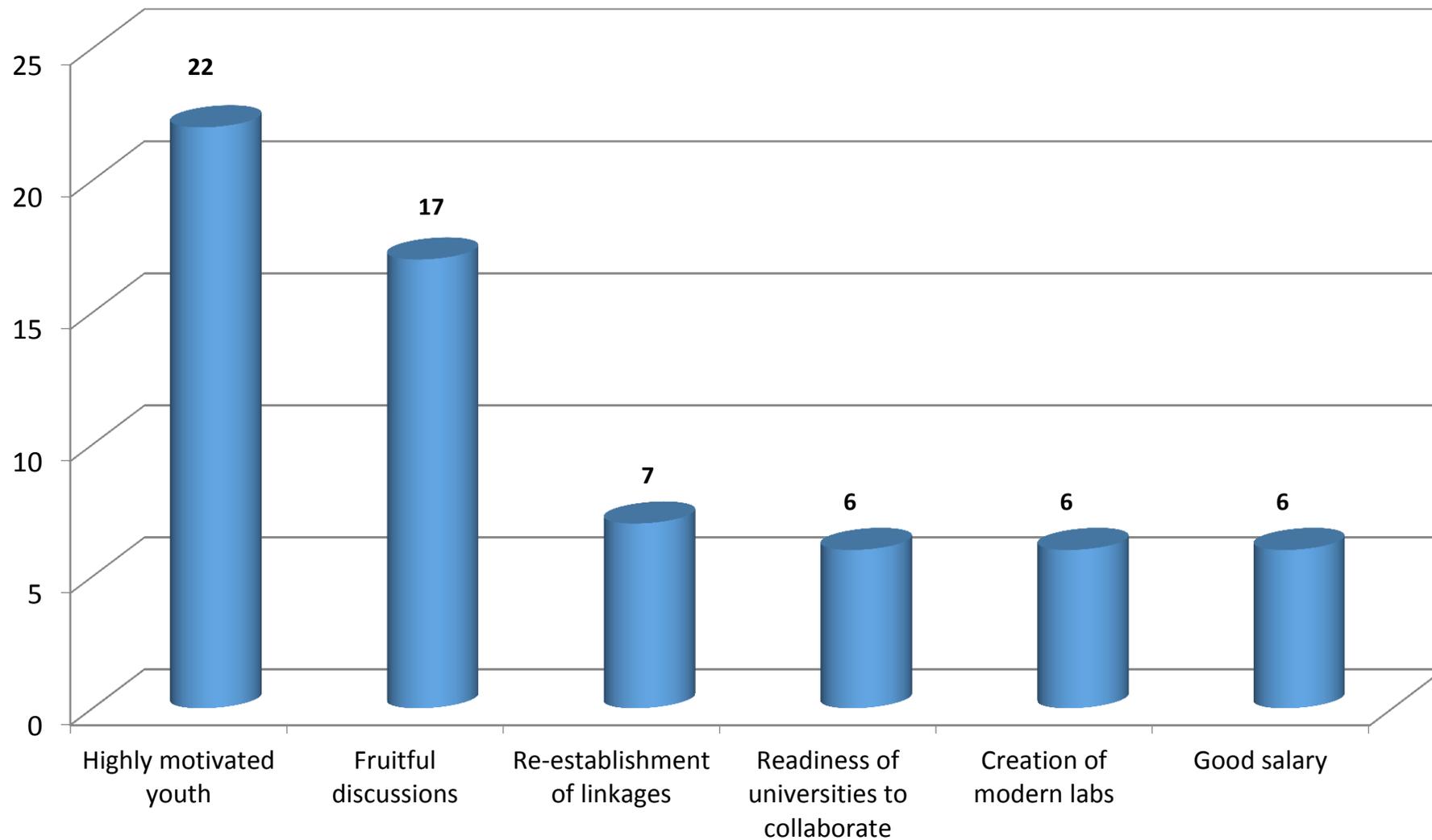
February-March 2015 survey of 150 respondents:

Some characteristics:

- 97.3% left country >10 years ago
- 87.4% - from natural sciences, 8.6% - social sciences and humanities, 4% - engineering
- 32% USA, 12.7% Germany, 8.7% France, 18% other European countries
- 72% in universities, 50% professors

Positive Aspects of Collaboration with Russia

(most frequent answers)



What Is Research Diaspora Ready to Do in Russia?

Type of Activity	Number of respondents
Teaching	69
Joint research projects (including international)	63
Training of graduate students	22
Expert work	17
Reviewing articles, books	13
Organizing conferences/workshops in Russia	10

What Is Research Diaspora Ready to Do Without Compensation? (top 5 most frequent answers)

Type of Activity	Number of respondents
Training of graduate students	97
Reviewing of grant applications	89
Short-term teaching	88
Participation in discussions concerning Russia's strategic development in science	88
Participation in editorial boards of Russian scientific journals	83

Major Obstacles for Cooperation

- Bureaucracy
 - organization of work,
 - reporting procedures,
 - material (infrastructural) support of research
- Lack of financing
- Inefficient system of funding research

What Have We Learned from the Survey?

- Diaspora is active and ready to collaborate on different occasions and issues but not to return back permanently
- They have various ideas on what Russia should do in order to improve situation in science (but not in tech transfer)
- They are lacking information on what is happening in Russian science and how various mechanisms work

What May be Done Together with Diaspora?

According to surveyed respondents, the most cited potential activities include:

- Establishing research labs (including research networks)
- Exchange programs and visits
- Lecturing and virtual teaching
- Training of graduate students in labs of Diaspora (under discussion now)