

Development of cooperation between agricultural science and research institutions in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia

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Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, for long centuries being near the Baltic Sea were friendly living together and never standing against each other, fought with the aliens from elsewhere if they were attempting to their freedom. Often they are called with one name - the Baltic Countries. It was of such historical periods when they weren't called the countries but carried the name of territories, regions or province. With great joy today we remember the Baltic way when people built 600 km length circuit connecting the three countries named "Baltic Way" firmly saying the whole world that we want to be free and self-build our future. This year is famous for us with various anniversaries and the jubilee: the recent mentioning of twenty years of unique phenomenon - the Baltic Way, Lithuania celebrates the millennium of the mentioning of it's name, Lithuanian University of Agriculture turns to 85 years old, and today Latvia University of Agriculture points out a worthy 70-year anniversary. This is a big celebration not only for all your University staff, students, graduates maintaining the honourable and beautiful traditions, but also for Latvia because University's graduates are spread all the country and working in agriculture and other strategic state economy spheres. It is also a big celebration for us - your neighbours. We welcome your work which commemorates the work done together and the pleasant moments spent together...

I would like to mention a few moments of our cooperation, which have been in the past and where I had directly participated. The increased cooperation began in the Soviet period. It took place among agrarian universities (academies at that period) of three Baltic countries, and was from a more massive scale. Regular meetings took place between related departments but the staffs of Faculties of Economics gathered in one place at the same time. The meetings of departments were held annually or biennially. Meetings were helpful in various aspects: methodological, scientific, communication, personal networking and even political.

I am a hydraulic engineer, in accordance with European classification attached to the trend of Environmental Engineering and Landscape Architecture. So we communicated at the Hydraulic departments' level. Cooperation between the departments of other specialties was a bit different but they were minor. The names of the departments were differ, but rather well met to the assigned subjects (they were coordinated from a centre in Moscow and was allowed only very minor deviations taking into account regional conditions), so the division of the methodological and scientific experience went very businesslike. During the Soviet period the intensive work took place towards the extending of material base, equipping of laboratories and the discussions during the meetings mainly contained the problems of design, construction and operation of research equipment and experience of daily work. The results were obvious learned from experience accumulated by neighbours and therefore turned to better equipping of home laboratories. Some tasks were performed by one party, some - by the other and the benefits were not one-sided. Communication was a win-win.

The benefits from communication and personal relations in the meaning of cooperation development were of the same importance as methodical or scientific one. We perfectly knew our counterparts in Latvia and Estonia, the meetings brought us closer together, and we made friends and have become a family of the international hydraulic specialists. The confidence in each other gradually gained, and colleagues of our three countries realised having unanimous opinion to one very important question - approach to the so called "strong centre" in Moscow. "Strong Centre" was very unpopular because it's dun and niggling regulation not only in the learning process, but in general was very unwelcome. It often became the object of criticism, perhaps more accurate to say ridicules jokes and the object of personal interviews at the receptions. Since none of us fall to the reach of KGB it can be argued that staff of our Hydraulic departments didn't include the agents

of Soviet intelligence services. Certainly, we didn't speak about the Ribbentrop - Molotov Pact and the secret protocols during the first meetings but later this issue has become topical. So the dawn of the Renaissance, when our countries decisively started to seek for independence and joined the live chain from Vilnius to Riga and Tallinn, we all rushed to joint it and felt handshake of our colleagues in the Latvia and Estonia.

A number of changes took place and many things have changed in our cooperation during the last twenty years that slide past after the Baltic Way. It was even a period of braked communication between some departments but willingness to cooperate never flagged. Some departments, such as Building Construction, continuing contacts for more than 30 years. Decrease in the intensity of cooperation resulted in a variety of reasons beyond our control but constructive and concrete cooperation of different nature has started again. During the Soviet period departments and faculties were mostly cooperated under private initiative. After Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became independent states, the cooperation has risen to the inter-university level and accumulated experience at the departmental level. It led to the emergence of inter-university cooperation as after restitution of Baltic states independence the rectors of universities became the same members that from Soviet period meetings - Voldemārs Striķis, Juris Skujāns, RIP Peteris Bušmanis from Latvia, Rimantas Urbonas from Lithuania, RIP Henn Elmet, Mait Klaasen from Estonia.

Development of inter-university cooperation was held in conjunction with the development of international relations in Western Europe and especially the Nordic countries. In 1995 the Nordic agricultural and veterinary university network NOVA rectors meeting was held at Lithuanian Agricultural Academy (University) and was attended by all rectors of universities of similar profile in the Baltic countries. At the meeting NOVA rectors decided to welcome universities of Baltic countries to the network and the joint cooperation network get a name NOVA - BA. Our high school in Lithuania was still academy while Latvian and Estonian agricultural academies several years ago had become universities and them direction have been attractive for us. Unfortunately, the period of name change of high school's have been passed and stopped at that period in Lithuania, so we were referring to your example when proving to our authorities and Seimas that Lithuania needs Agricultural University. NOVA chairman Bent Schmidt Nielsen, the rector of Danish Veterinary and Agricultural University - KVL, signed a formal letter stating that the Lithuanian Agricultural Academy is a university level school. For that time the study process at our Academy has been restructured under a Western model and the scientific work was sufficiently intensive, international relations were under active development, so the rest was just bureaucratic barriers for having the final result. They have been successfully overcome at the same year 1995.

NOVA meeting in Lithuania in 1995 was a result of the preparatory work done before. Even in 1989 the majority of Nordic scientists maintained contacts with scientists from Baltic "sisters". Professor Marten Carlsson, the architect of NOVA - BA strategy, stressed the Baltic "sisters" name in the edition published on the occasion of BOVA decade. The first time representatives of Baltic countries participated in NOVA meeting in Denmark in 1991 under KVL invitation. NOVA meeting held in 1993 took decision to intensify cooperation with the Baltic countries and the working group was formed to prepare a plan of cooperation. It should be noted that NOVA - BA start was given with the consent and active support by all NOVA University Rectors. International departments of partner institutions were actively working during the period of NOVA - BA construction. In particular, actively and enthusiastically worked NOVA secretary Astrid Holm-Olsen from Denmark, Lars Sjöflot from Norway, Markku Nygren from Finland, Monika Bengsont from Sweden and others. Of course, the most active part from the Baltic "sisters" side were people at international departments - Henn Tuherm, Ruta Zaleckyte, Antanas Maziliauskas, Minvydas Liegus, Ruta Skinkyte, Hardi Tullus, Aret Vooremaa, Kylli Korgessar.

Under support of the Nordic countries one more step forward was quickly done - the Baltic agricultural and veterinary universities cooperation network BOVA was founded. It took place in Tartu 1996 at NOVA - BA Rectors' meeting. The fact of one coincidence has left in my memory. On the day of the discussions on how should be called the Baltic cooperation network we were taken by bus named Bova. I can't remember how much we were affected by these characters, but it was a coincidence and our cooperation network was named BOVA. This event was fixed in photo. The next cooperation stage crystallized

at two levels. The most intensive part was and still lasting at BOVA framework and linked to maintaining tight relations with NOVA. In the initial phase of NOVA - BA activity and from 1996 NOVA - BOVA activities were supported by Nordic Council of Ministers, later – by Wallenberg Foundation. NOVA - BOVA activities were very successful in various academic fields, particularly in study development, education of young researchers, communication, and website information. Expanded joint activities have formed general understanding of partner institutions that BOVA is a necessity. So now, although no longer supporting external funds, cooperation is maintained by all the universities jointly. Overall, I'm mentioned here only a very small part of the work being done, and only few NOVA - BOVA enthusiasts. NOVA - BOVA activities touched hundreds of people, has trained a number of excellent scientists, got the international experience, has helped to organize the world's recognized and widely cited scientific publications publishing.

On the occasion of this beautiful 70 - th anniversary we are proud by having such great neighbours - Latvia University of Agriculture. We together did so much important work during the whole period of existence, and now have friendly relations, good mutual understanding and goodwill. I wish LLU leaders, faculties, professors, and students the best luck, good health, patience and optimism. Long live the LLU!

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