

Cooperation of the European School of Social Innovation ESSI and the Social Research Center of TU Dortmund University with the Vologda Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Science

My first contact with the Research Center was in the late 1990s. Becoming partners of a proposal for the Sixth European Research Framework Program a fruitful, reliable and successful cooperation between the Social Research Centre sfs with the former Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of RAS started (working together with Ilia Kuzmin and Svetlana Terebova). Although, as usual, two first proposals were not funded, we finally were very successful with the EU funded large scale project SI-DRIVE. With 24 partners from all over the world and the world leading experts of Social Innovation together in one research project, we covered 30 countries from all five continents, exploring and implementing a new innovation concept by integrating Social Innovation as a Driving Force of Social Change.



Starting with SI-DRIVE, the Vologda Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Science (VoISC RAS) represented by Aleksandra Shabunova became an anchor point for the spread of Social Innovation in Russia, but also for cooperation around the world. Within the European School for Social Innovation (ESSI) (www.essi-net.eu) we institutionalised our cooperation as funding members and our further activities for fostering Social Innovation.

Our cooperation was strengthened by mutual visits and conferences. The Vologda Research Centre presented itself and its research at the main Social Innovation conferences in Europe (SI-LIVE Lisbon 2014, SI-DRIVE 2015 Vienna and 2017 Brussels, and at the ESSI Conference 2019 with about 1.000 participants from all over the world) and visited TU-Dortmund in 2014. In addition, it was a great honor to be invited to Vologda twice to present SI-DRIVE and the European School of Social Innovation (ESSI) at important conferences, events and visits organised over several days. I enjoyed the great Russian hospitality and was engaged in high-level scientific discussions, practical examples and visits of social innovation in the area. Becoming not only scientific partners but also friends was building a reliable and fruitful cooperation in the past, now and in the future. Being member of the editorial board of the journal "Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast", I had the opportunity to publish some of our main research results. A student of the Vologda Research Centre (Ilia Kuzmin) got a fellowship stipendium for six months at our Social Research Centre of TU Dortmund, working on and discussing the theses of his PhD. We did and will further integrate VoIRC in relevant applications for European Union funding if possible, both within TU Dortmund and ESSI activities.

My first visit in September 2012 (together with my colleague Dmitri Domanski) was characterised by a fruitful exchange and discussion about the new innovation paradigm highlighting the importance of Social Innovation and enriching a hitherto pure technological innovation perspective. Innovative structures to improve lifelong learning within a social innovation process was on the agenda as well as general possibilities for cooperation and project acquisition. Several years later, I can now say that this meeting was an important starting point for our cooperation, just before the success story of SI-DRIVE began.

During my second visit in September 2018 we looked back at four years of exciting and successful project activities, setting new inputs on social innovation all over the world. Due to the successful participation of VoIRC in SI-DRIVE I could experience progressive concepts and approaches for social innovations as part of the regional development in the Vologda region (e.g. within the Research Educational Center getting an impression of pupils' opinion on social innovation, new working environments at the Playrix company). The meetings with policy makers and representatives (e.g. the meeting with Vologda's deputy mayor V.G. Tsepa and others) impressed me because it became evident to what extent Social Innovation was already on the political agenda! Visiting the Cherepovets State University this was underlined by integrated Social Innovation in research and education leading to a regional ecosystem of policy, research and education, economy and civil society.

As the managing director of the European School for Social Innovation (ESSI) I am honored to have VoIRC RAS as an important research and innovation partner on our side. As an institutional member and with its individual members VoIRC RAS gives new and relevant inputs to the further development of ESSI (e.g. engaging in combining Social Innovation with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations).

One of our key publications in recent years, the Atlas of Social Innovation, started with its first volume based on the results of SI-DRIVE, giving an overview about new trends in Social Innovation. VoIRC RAS was one of the pioneers, exploring the Russian situation with an article "Social Innovation in Russia: Easier Said than Done" (Vladimir Il'in et al. 2018). The printed version was complemented by the worldwide digital mapping of social innovation (www.socialinnovationatlas.net).



However, beside the scientific and practical research influences I was really affected by the Russian hospitality and culture. I still have in mind the experience and pictures visiting the beautiful city and landscape, esp. inspired by the Vologda Open Air Museum (Semenkovo).

I wish the Vologda Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Science a very fruitful anniversary celebrating 30 years of excellence science. We are looking forward to an ongoing successful cooperation – with research and implementation of Social Innovation to develop new practices for a better future in a global world.

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