



Max Planck – Cuba Symposium

Frontiers of Science



Opening Speech: H.E. Thomas Karl Neisinger, Ambassador of Germany in Cuba.

I am delighted that this year of anniversaries (Alexander von Humboldt's 250th birthday, 500 years Havana) marks the beginning of the Max Planck Society holding a symposium in Havana for the first time after the event has already acquired a certain tradition in the region. We believe that the academic-scientific cooperation is one of the most dynamic areas of the bilateral relations between Germany and Cuba.

I would like to thank the University of Havana for being the partner of this event, as it is an essential factor for the success of the science and research collaboration.

The symposium happening today and tomorrow connects well to the international colloquium on "transatlantic knowledge networks - since Humboldt until today", which took place in Havana only a few days ago and also highlighted the great interest of a strengthened collaboration from both parties - despite the lack of a cultural agreement between Cuba and Germany.

"Frontiers of Science", according to my understanding, is about the interdependence of the sciences and the interconnections within scientific research.

In view of the many current scientific as well as political challenges, this type of event is more necessary than ever. The Max-Planck Society has extensive international experience and it is our pleasure to have such a great number of Max-Planck-Directors, including the Nobel laureate Prof. Klaus von Klitzing, represented here. Max-Planck Society is one of the leading research-institutions worldwide. Its hallmark is the high international quality, efficiency and productivity of its research services. The 84 Max Planck Institutes (MPI) contribute significantly to the most cited 10% of global publications. And the MPG is highly internationalized: more than half of all employees are foreigners, 60% of the more than 5,000 doctoral students, 85% of postdocs and almost 40% of the MPI directors come from other countries.

Latin America is a region for the MP Society where not all potential for cooperation has yet been seized. Today only 650 of the 9.000 PhD students, postdocs and visiting scholars come from Latin America. Of the 4.000 international projects only 150 are taking place with Latin America. Optimizing this, is the task of the Liaison office for Latin America based in Buenos Aires. It is about the potential in the training of highly qualified professionals - scientists. And it is also about the joint research in transnational and inter-institutional projects.

The relations between Max Planck Institutes and Cuba have hardly been developed so far. The number of visiting scholars from Cuba is less than 10. Currently there is only one cooperation project with Cuba, in the field of the history of science. This shows the size of the potential that exists in scientific cooperation with Cuba. However, in some subject areas



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there are, after all, personal contacts with Cuban scientists. These form the basis for the initiative of Mx Planck to organize this historic first symposium in Cuba together with the University of Habana.

In order to increase the potential of cooperation, better framework conditions, a framework agreement is needed. Initial discussions with MES and CITMA have revealed a great deal of interest in such an agreement as I have heard. The framework agreement makes sense if efficient mechanisms to increase the number of young Cuban researchers in Max Planck Institutes through jointly financed cooperation projects are defined and implemented. It would be wonderful if we could establish the first Max Planck Partner Group in Cuba in the next few years.

The big question of this Symposium is: through a focus on which topics can a long-term cooperation offer additional value for partners in Cuba as well as for the Max-Planck Institutes? Where is cooperation possible, where can personnel resources and know-how be exchanged, and where can new solutions be jointly developed?

This symposium is hopefully going to offer some answers or at least be the foundation towards answers.

It is thus of crucial importance that the speakers from the Max-Planck-Institutes are able to engage in a true exchange with their colleagues and Cuban scientists – about their work and about the opportunity to work quicker and more efficient through collaboration.

The range of topics is impressive and shows the high expectations from both sides towards future joint projects. The Cuban research institutes, which Max Planck Directors will be visiting, show not only the high density, but also the quality of this field. CUB is rightly proud of their achievements and their significance, for example in the areas of pharmaceutical or biotechnology.

Also the intensity of exchange and the density of lectures highlight the high willingness and need for dialogue. A wonderful sign especially in a time where a lot speak increasingly about borders and isolation.

While the richness of events and commitments is high, I advise you, dear guests from Germany, to take some time to discover the wonderful UNESCO world heritage city Habana, which is in extensive preparation for its 500-year anniversary.

You should take the time for private encounters with the Cuban people, whose warmth and culture of welcoming is exemplary. And I am quite sure this goes for your contacts with your Cuban counterparts as well.