

New Year's Speech 9-1-2020

When I was preparing for today, I asked myself: should I bring to mind the highlights of the past year? The new and successful projects? The awards? The new people that chose to come to work at CWI? But our regular update meetings do celebrate our successes in the nicest possible way, and very close to the moment they occur. So I will use this speech to address a few topics closely connected with CWI in the new year.

Exactly a year ago in my new year's speech, I speculated about the report of the committee that had reviewed the whole of the Dutch national research institutes, the portfolio evaluation committee, that was about to be published. And indeed, the report confirmed that CWI does meet all conditions that a national research institute should meet. CWI -and the other national institutes- provide major added value to the Dutch research landscape. Obviously, we were very happy with this outcome.

More interesting were the recommendations the report gave for the coming years. The main advice was, and is, that CWI should increase its national role as a facilitator and driving force in research ('aanjagen', in Dutch). Specifically cyber security, big data and artificial intelligence were mentioned as areas of great importance to research and to society, where several initiatives and national agendas are being developed.

A further recommendation of the portfolio report addresses the desirability of CWI's interdisciplinary and connecting role. The report advises CWI to actively connect with research in the digital social sciences and the digital humanities in the Netherlands, in this way enhancing CWI's added value to the Dutch research landscape.

The first recommendation we took as a support for our strategic plan 2019-2024, and we are continuing our research in these areas, bearing in mind our roles as a national institute. Regarding the recommendation concerning digital humanities, we are now in the process of talks with other institutes how we can best collaborate. Jacco van Ossenbruggens' group is closely involved. And to reflect this development as well as for the sake of external recognizability, the name of the research group Information Access will change to Human-Centered Data Analytics.

The publication of portfolio report and its recommendations to CWI did not go unnoticed. Some people in computer science made it known to the NWO and KNAW boards that the report did not do justice to the whole of the field of computer science at Dutch universities. They felt that the report perhaps awarded too big a role to CWI. In a way this perception in the field was useful to us. Among other things it led us to step up our contacts and talks with university colleagues.

You may remember that a couple of months ago I announced my retirement in 2020. I also announced it to the NWO board and before drafting the profile of a new director for CWI, the board decided to conduct a survey of the field of mathematics and computer science in the Netherlands. To my mind at least partly triggered by the unrest in some parts of computer science that I mentioned.

The report of Frits Vaandrager, who worked at CWI in the past and is conducting this survey, is expected to be delivered to the NWO Board in a few weeks. For what it is worth, on the

basis of several informal contacts, I personally feel less worried about its contents than I was when I first heard about the survey. But we will have to wait a little longer and see

Before I come to the end of this New Year's speech, let me make two short remarks on the ongoing process of the transition of the NWO organisation: in one of the recent update meetings I already mentioned that a new position is being created, a director of the whole of the institute organisation. Another development is the project of developing a new financial system for the whole of NWO-I. The project team for this is being housed here at CWI, on the third floor.

This New Year's speech will be my last one as the director of our institute. And to mark my retirement there will be a symposium on October first, to which you are all invited. Please consider this as a save-the-date.

So, in a few months, I will step down as director. But what I would like to stress today is that in the meantime I am fully committed to do all I can for CWI and its future. And I strongly feel CWI has a great future ahead, thanks to the unique strength and the unique character of CWI, the synergy of mathematics and computer science.

I wish all of you a happy New Year, and let us toast to a great 2020!