

New Year Speech 2022 by Ton de Kok

On 16 December I provided information on the state of the affairs of CWI, providing both an assessment and an outlook on the future. The last month not much changed. My vision on things is anyhow rather stable. Call it conservative, but the power of abstraction is that you often see similarity. Many people think the world is changing faster and faster, but having worked with industry for many years, building models of their demand processes, production processes, distribution processes, and planning processes, things that relate to atoms and masses, still obey the laws of physics and chemistry, and show the same characteristics as I observed 30 years ago. What colours our perspective on the dynamics of the world is the movement of electrons that enable the transfer of bits and bytes in the form of emails, tweets, and webpages. But many of us still need carbon molecules that enable to write formulas and sentences on paper.

Having said this, the digital society poses great challenges, and the new government is aware of this and intends to spend money on research to meet these challenges. Just as relevant is the intention of the government to spend more money on curiosity-driven research. Obviously, this is as an opportunity for CWI, while at the same time realizing, that it is not yet clear how we can route part of this money to CWI in the form of structural funding. I will discuss this with NWO-I and directly with Marcel Levi. It is clear that this money will also be routed along the competitive routes of NWO and I am sure we will be successful there.

In my Christmas speech I mentioned that I would present CWI's vision to the board of NWO on 22 December. The outcome of this presentation is support of the board for our vision. We can move on with our plans to focus our research on Algorithms, Data and Intelligent Systems, Cryptology and Security, and Quantum Computing. We can move on with our plans to strengthen ties with universities and making CWI the prime meeting place for Mathematicians and Computer Scientists. On 20 April Marcel Levi, Chairman of NWO, will visit CWI, and we intend to hand over our strategic plan for the coming years. From now on the word "vision" will be replaced by "strategy", as we are going to make things more concrete.

On 11 February, we effectively close our 75th anniversary year, despite the fact that we postponed the Van Wijngaarden Award Soiree to end of this year. In some sense we go back to normal, doing our research, writing and submitting our proposals, mostly together with others, supporting CWI researchers with financial services, HR services, ICT services, and catering and cleaning. But really back to normal depends on the next phases in the pandemic. We have to hope for the best.

Looking back on 2021, a particular phenomenon struck me: during the pandemic CWI employees that devoted many years to the success of CWI, disappeared more or less unnoticed. Close colleagues may or may not have said goodbye during a small scale informal drink or dinner. But the rest of CWI was unaware of someone leaving after more than 30 years of service to the institute. Therefore I would like to mention, on this occasion, the names of the people that spend a substantial number of years at CWI, but started jobs elsewhere or retired. I do not mention names of PhD students and postdocs. And I mention the names in the order of leaving in 2021:

Kees Oosterlee, Jacco van Ossenbruggen, Hans Hidskes, Nikhil Bansal, Svetlana Dubinkina, Fons Kuijk, Wouter Mettrop, Michael Guravage, Martin Kersten and Jan Rutten.

I would like to thank all of them for their dedication to CWI.

I would like to close with looking forward again. End of this year we have the CWI lectures. Every year we think about a relevant and interesting subject. Last year's theme was Decision making under uncertainty. The theme was not my decision, but I secretly considered it a present, having spend 40 years of research on this subject. The theme of this year has not been decided yet, but it will be a present again. A present to someone who has made invaluable contributions in many different roles to the success of CWI over the last three decades. It is my pleasure that the theme of the CWI lectures will be a present to the first female CWI Fellow, Monique Laurent.

Also for Monique we had a small scale celebration with a bunch of flowers early November, and we hoped that we could make this announcement with another bunch of flowers. I would like to bring a virtual toast to Monique and to the success of CWI in 2022.

Ton de Kok