

First Joint Meeting between CNRS and MPG in Neurosciences

Report and Proposal for Future Actions

The first joint meeting of a CNRS and a MPG delegation in neurosciences took place on February 24-25th 2009 at the headquarters of the CNRS in Paris. Organized by **Klaus-Armin Nave** (MPG coordinator) and **Martin Giurfa** (CNRS coordinator), the meeting was attended by 9 German and 9 French neuroscientists (principle investigators) who had previously responded to the call that circulated among German and French neuroscience laboratories in 2008. The meeting was held in the presence of **Bernard Bioulac**, Adjunct Scientific Director of the Institute for Biological Sciences of the CNRS, and of **Anne-Marie Brass**, CNRS European Affairs Officer.

The meeting was set up as a small scientific conference in the broader field of neuroscience, with the goal to explore the possibility of initiating joint research projects between CNRS and MPG groups. Neuroscience was covered from the cellular to the systems level.

During the one and half day meeting, all participants delivered high-level scientific talks, showing impressive progress and state-of-the art techniques in different fields of neuroscience, including neural development, the role of glial cells in axon survival, signal transduction and the organization of sensory cortical networks, circadian rhythms, visual, olfactory and auditory perception, learning and memory and behavioral and neurohormonal aspects of birdsong. The talks focused on vertebrate and invertebrate models and provided different viewpoints, ranging from molecular neurobiology and chronobiology to neuropsychiatry and neuroethology. All participants agreed that the conferences comprised a highly attractive overview of neuroscience research, and that the scientific level of the presentations was excellent (see attached program).

The meeting was inspired by a common philosophy of all participants that a joint MPG/CNRS initiative would not only promote European neuroscience research, but provide an "added value" for both research organisations. It was discussed that this goal would be reached most effectively, if it were possible to support the transfer of specific know-how and technical expertise between laboratories that engage in complementary rather than identical research activities.

Such a bi-directional knowledge transfer should be most easily achieved by defining joint projects that link two (or more) laboratories of the CNRS and the MPG. These collaborative projects would be ideally pursued by selected individuals who have gained experience in their respective fields in one laboratory, before moving to the other country and the hosting lab to pursue a related (CNRS/MPG-funded) project. The following steps should be taken:

1. Neuroscience Network: In the short-term, the creation of an informal "CNRS/MPG neuroscience network", linking interested laboratories, i.e. those attending the 1. Paris meeting plus other interested groups, was seen as the primary instrument to promote cooperation. These contacts have already been established. A second meeting is envisioned to take place in Berlin in 2010.

2. Know-how Transfer: In the mid-term/long-term, a "CNRS/MPG postdoctoral program" was seen as a major goal. This should allow experienced postdocs (or recently finished PhD scientist), who have worked in a CNRS/MPG laboratory, to move for 1 or more years to the

partner laboratory of the other institution. Since the transfer of know-how and technique is a central element, this program would not necessarily require a joint research project between labs.

3. Joint Research Projects: As an additional instrument, it has been suggested that *PhD fellowships* could fulfil a bridging function in the context of joint research. This requires that the PhD students are co-supervised by two principle investigators from the CNRS and the MPG, and the student spends time in both laboratories to pursue a joint project (1-2 years in each lab).

Concerns:

The central idea of this initiative is to promote exchange through motivated MPG and CNRS researchers, bringing in person their experience from one system to the other. Thus, an important aspect is to avoid, or at least reduce, existing administrative bureaucracy that inhibits the motivation of scientists to participate in such a joint program.

Specifically, institutional solutions must be found to equate postdoctoral salaries in both institutions to guarantee the success of this enterprise.

Steering committee

At the end of the meeting all participants enthusiastically agreed to continue this interaction, choosing a more structured organization. To this end, the main coordinators were reaffirmed from both the German and the French sides, and the following "steering committee" was nominated:

MPG	CNRS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Klaus Armin Nave (<i>coordinator</i> ; cellular neuroscience, Goettingen) • Andreas Schaefer (integrative neuroscience, Heidelberg) • Manfred Gahr (neuroethology, Seewiesen) • Carsten Wotjak (neuropsychiatry, Muenchen) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Giurfa (<i>coordinator</i>; neuroethology, Toulouse) • Jacques Mallet (cellular neuroscience, Paris) • Simon Thorpe (integrative neuroscience, Toulouse) • Barbara Tillmann (neuropsychology, Lyon)

To include additional CNRS/MPG laboratories in future activities, a questionnaire will be sent to the participants in order to identify potential partners absent from the Paris meeting.

A letter of intent will be then submitted to the presidents of both institutions, delineating the next steps and proposing a "CNRS/MPG postdoctoral program" for the neurosciences.

April 6, 2009

Martin Giurfa
CNRS

Klaus-Armin Nave
MPG