

Peace Research and the Connection between University and Society: a Case from Enschede

contribution by Jan Schaake to the panel session 'Institutionalisation of Peace Research' of the 'Past, Present and Future of Peace Research' conference on December 11 and 12, 2014, in Groningen

[PPT1]

The paper I am presenting has been prepared together with Egbert van Hattem of the Science Shop at the University of Twente; an office of the university with the aim of connection university researchers to certain groups in society; to connect university research to societal issues.

When speaking on peace research and 'the connection between university and society' and putting the 'case of Enschede' central, it might be a good start to sketch the societal environment of the University of Twente. Its connection with the city of Enschede and the wider Dutch region of Twente.

[PPT2]

Twente is located in the eastern part of the Netherlands (on the north-east axis it is quiet in the center, and you could call it 'the Middle East' of the Netherlands) and it is a rather industrialized region; especially in comparison with the more rural region surrounding it both in the Netherlands as well as in Germany. It used to be a center of textile industry but nowadays a main sector is the manufacturing of both large and fine machinery.

[PPT3]

Among these companies, there are some working mainly in the defense sector. Thales is the largest defense company within the Netherlands, specialized in all the electronic systems supporting weaponry like radar, sonar, communication, command & control systems and drone technology. All what is needed for modern warfare.

Urenco is a British-German-Dutch company to enrich uranium. It's share of the world market for enriched uranium is nowadays about 30%. Of course it only enriches uranium for nuclear plants, but its technology is also very feasible for nuclear weapons and through espionage by the Father of the Pakistan Atomic Bomb, Abdel Qadir Khan, the origins of not only the Pakistan bomb, but also of the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs have their basis in Almelo. Moreover, through its spin off and daughter

company Aeronamic, Urenco is also active in the field of the development and production of the Joint Strike Fighter.

A third company to be highlighted in this regard is one of the few surviving textile companies, Ten Cate. It survived by shifting its focus to special products and is nowadays a world leader in manufacturing special security materials as bulletproof vests with the U.S. Army as one of its largest clients.

This are only the three biggest ones. There are a lot more of them. Most of them very innovative and high tech specialized. Most of them a very interesting partner for the University of Twente that was established exactly 50 years ago in this region as a technological university and is still dominated by the technological faculties as electronic engineering, computer science, constructive technology, chemical engineering, etc.

[PPT4]

And so, just one day before the start of this peace research conference, a construction technology student's conference on defense technology took part in one of the building of the University of Twente. Actually, I have to confess this picture was not taken at that occasion. There was such an exhibition in the room next to the conference room, but it was only accessible for conference participants. I was able to have a glimpse confirming that I'm not lying about an exhibition taking place, but it was impossible to make the proof photographically available. There were also too many military uniforms.

Maybe there is nothing wrong with it. Although I'm sure that it was impossible an event like this taking place in the seventies or eighties of last century. During these high days of the peace movement, there was even regulation within the University of Twente that contracted research was not allowed when it was not clear on beforehand the results of this research were not to be used for a military purposes. That is a very strong demand!

Nowadays the regional defense industry has no problem to be connect to the University of Twente as it is also an innovative and high tech partner for the university.

[PPT5]

So, what about the regional peace movement in Twente. There are two very closely interlinked local peace groups, one working mainly in Enschede, the other one in Hengelo and Almelo. The latter, VEDAN, mainly organizing protests against Thales and Urenco; the first one, Enschede voor Vrede, has a broader peace agenda also working with many migrants in the region, having their roots in the real Middle East, especially Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

And what about their connections to the University of Twente?

[PPT6]

They are poor. At least not as natural as the connection between the university and the regional high tech industry.

[PPT7]

Even in recent peace research literature, the connection between peace research and the “peace practice” or even “peace activism” – although the latter is already called a “historical relationship” – is emphasized as one of the key characteristics of peace research.

So again: what about it?

First, let's go into these “historal relationships”. Two of them are being discussed in our paper.

[PPT8]

The first one is the “Center for Studies of Science, Technology and Society” – also called “the Boerderij” established in the time of that also the Urenco factory in Almelo was built with all the societal discussions on nuclear energy and proliferation around it. The Boerderij was a result of a movement of young scientists in that time who were worried about the role science and technology played in the development of new weapons: nuclear arms, but also chemical and biological weapons used for instance in the Vietnam War.

The Boerderij was also staffed with young scientist coming from this movement of critical scientists who were very motivated to assist the societal antinuclear and peace movement with their counter expertise on new technological developments. Soon after its establishment it played a major role in informing action groups, NGO's, the public, but also politicians on certain risks of new technological developments that were not that prominently presented by the researchers and developers in the field. Even before the espionage affair of Abdul Qadir Khan at Urenco became widely known, the Boerderij warned against the serious risk the new ultracentrifuge technology used for uranium enrichment by Urenco for the proliferation of nuclear arms.

In a recent study on the Boerderij's activities it was mentioned that gradually these activities shifted from analysing the possible consequences of new technological developments and providing this information to societal groups and politicians towards analysing the way choices were made within certain fields of scientific research and sharing these results with the international academic world. When there was a discussion in the late '80's at the University of Twente about the development of a new and even

more proliferation-sensitive technology for uranium enrichment, the Boerderij's main contribution was not providing information about this new technology, but analysing the discussion itself that went on and providing recommendations afterwards on implementing the university's social responsibility.

[PPT9]

A second example from the past are the University Peace Days. These sprang from societal movements and were promoted by Nobel Prize Laureates both of Peace as well as of different Sciences. In this context a first symposium took place at the University of Twente in 1983 and the local group in Hengelo promoting the conversion of Thales from military to civilian production urged the University board to make the University Peace Days become institutional.

A University Peace Days committee was established with members from university staff, students and former board members. The organized central and decentral activities to stimulated the discussions among university staff, students and citizens on the possible consequences of scientific research for issues of war and peace. After the fall of the Berlin Wall also other societal issues as the environment and privacy were added. It lasted until the end of last century, as was the case at most other universities. In the Netherlands only Groningen and Utrecht still have University Peace Days.

[PPT10]

About two years ago the Science Shop at the University of Twente and the local peace group "Enschede voor Vrede" started a new connection between academic research and peace activism. In the annual "Peace Week" the nationwide theme of it is translated into a subject that is dealt with at the University of Twente. Two years ago the theme was "conflict over natural resources" which we translated into the development of new materials and sustainable energy; last year's theme "Peace Activism" was translated into "Activism 2.0" on the role of social media in the Taksim and Maidan Square uprisings and this year the theme "Disarmament" was translated to the military and civilian use of drones technology.

[PPT11]

It's always hard, to say something definite on the present, let alone the future. However we expect that this cooperation between a local peace group and the Science Shop that is aimed to connect societal groups with researchers within the University might provide a connection between the two that will last longer. Moreover, although we are here in a panel session on the institutionalization of Peace Research, we think our model is light and cheap and easy to copy. On the other hand, it might become stronger in the future.