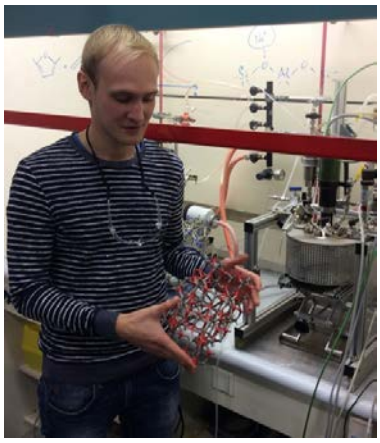
Project: Catalytic biomass conversion by porous oxides

"In this project we aim to investigate reaction mechanisms and structure-activity relations underlying the biomass transformation processes on porous oxides. We develop theory of catalytic biomass conversion by studying well-defined systems."

Evgeny Uslamin (TU/e)



Can you do a short presentation about you?

My name is Evgeny Uslamin. Originally, I am from a small town in Tyumen region, Russia. I have graduated as a physical chemist at Novosibirsk State University. Currently I am working on my PhD project at Inorganic Materials Group of Technical University of Eindhoven under supervision of Evgeny Pidko and Emiel Hensen.

How is living in The Netherlands as a foreigner?

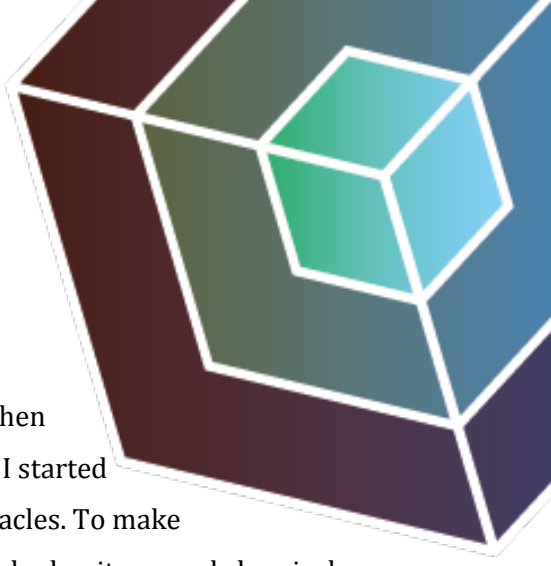
When I just moved to the Netherlands many things seemed unusual and sometimes even weird to me. For example, the weather. When I arrived here at the beginning of January, it felt like spring to me: no snow at all, no ice skating (in Russia, The Netherlands is famous for its ice skating tradition), green grass everywhere. It was the longest spring I have ever experienced. Eventually it didn't take me long time to get used to everything and now I find that it is very convenient to work and to live here. Although there are several things which still confuse me from time to time. For example: food, Dutch meetings and an incredible amount of noise that can be produced by only a few Dutch girls having a chat on the street or in public transport.

Would you advice a friend to come to the Netherlands?

I certainly would.

How/why did you finish in Eindhoven?

After finishing my study, I have passed exams and received a PhD position in Russia. However, I was curious how is it to work in science in other countries, and I also wanted to get some international experience. I started looking for a PhD position abroad. What attracted me to IMC group of TU/e is a high level of publications and interesting research topics. Besides that, I got quite nice feedback from some friends of mine who had already been working there. After my interview with Emiel Hensen I was already sure about my decision.



How did you become interested in science?

As a child, I was interested in many different things. My favorite subjects were medicine, biology, physics, history and even paleontology. I would read almost every book or encyclopedia I could find. And then I still remember a day when I found somewhere an old textbook on chemistry. Of course I started to read it and discovered a completely new world full of miracles. To make a long story short, I should just say that in one year I already had quite a good chemical lab at home.

Did you know right away that you wanted to be a research scientist?

At a certain point, I had to make a choice between medicine and chemistry, and I choose chemistry. Was it the right choice? Of course, it was! (Although I spend at average one day each year regretting that.)

What is the most exciting thing about your research?

The most exciting thing about my research is that it is flexible and allows me to use many different approaches and experimental techniques. That makes it challenging, but at the same time it allows me to come up with my own ideas and bring them to life.

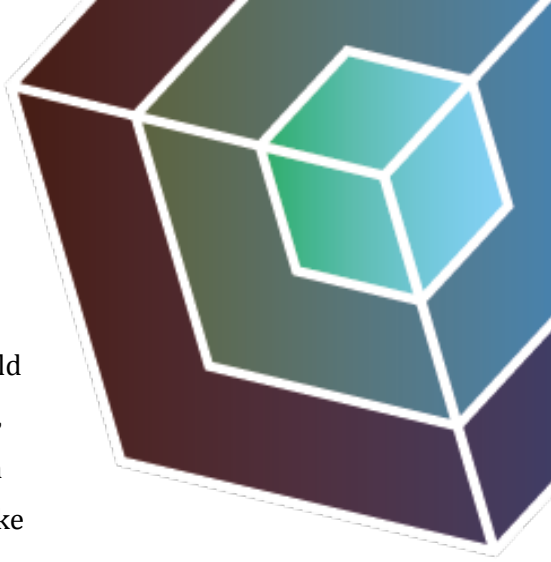
What is your biggest motivation?

It is a difficult question. I can think of a few aspects. First, the possibility to contribute to our knowledge about the world. Second, scientific work gives a certain degree of freedom and helps to satisfy your curiosity. Third, being a scientist means to get an opportunity to experience feelings as Newton, Maxwell, Planck, Bohr, Darwin, Mendeleev, Einstein, Landau and many other great people had experienced when they made a step beyond the known and introduced something completely new in our understanding.

Finally, to be a scientist in my view means to be able to see the beauty and infinite complexity of the world around us. Normal people have only five feelings. I am sure science adds to them not only a new sense but an entire new dimension (in case of mathematicians, it can be even more!).

How do you see yourself fitting in the MCEC project?

It happens that working on their own projects people get so passionate and focused that they don't pay attention to what is happening around. The main role of MCEC therefore is to help you to look at your project from different perspectives. Another important thing is to exchange knowledge between different fields. I am glad to be a part of such a nice and diverse scientific community.



If you had a time machine and 2 beers, with which scientist would you like to meet?

That is quite a difficult question for me, since there are so many great scientists I would like to talk with. I think, I would meet with Dmitry Mendeleev. Since I speak none of German, French or ancient Greek, that at least would solve a problem with a language barrier. However, I think I would have to take some vodka with me instead of beer.

Which is the most memorable "Eureka" moment in your life (not necessarily connected to science)?

I don't recall in memory any particular moment. It happens to me from time to time when for instance after many experiments done the last one allows me to bring everything together and see overall picture or when doing some measurements, I see that new data points appear where they should.

Which scientific term/phenomena you think is the most misused by media?

In my opinion, almost every scientific phenomenon is misused in a certain extent in media. The proper way to make a connection between the scientific community and society is still to be found.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

As a PhD student, I am questioning the existence of such things as spare time. However, besides my work I am interested in traditional martial arts (some of them I have been practicing for quite some time already), drawing, literature, some parts of physics and biology.

Is science the answer of everything? (#14)

Science is one of the ways to understand the universe. And it is only one in my view that can give any reliable answers.

However, a question "Can science give an answer for q.14 from this list?" seems a bit suspicious and confusing.

What do you want to do after finishing your PhD?

~~I want to become an artist.~~ I would like to continue in academia working on interesting and inspiring research topic.