

Science is part of our future La science est partie de notre avenir

Opening Address by Dieter Imboden, President of the National Research Council on the occasion of the Prize Ceremony of the National Latsis Prize 2007 to Prof. Giuliano Bonoli, on 10 January 2008

Nous célébrons aujourd'hui le 24^{ème} lauréat du Prix Latsis national. La Fondation Latsis a décidé que le Conseil national de la recherche du Fonds national suisse devait désigner le Prix Latsis national. Les trois divisions du Conseil national de la recherche, dédiées aux disciplines scientifiques, se partagent cette tâche chacune à son tour. Pour le Prix Latsis 2007, c'était au tour de la Division des sciences humaines et sociales.

La communauté scientifique helvétique peut être fière des nombreux jeunes chercheurs et chercheuses excellents qui travaillent dans notre pays. Le FNS sait qu'il existe un grand potentiel - qu'il soit en germe ou déjà en activité. Il l'a remarqué dans le cadre de l'encouragement de personnes et particulièrement avec les professeurs boursiers. Le lauréat que nous honorons aujourd'hui, Giuliano Bonoli, de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes en Administration Publique (IDHEAP) fait partie de ces jeunes talents. Il travaille sur le sujet des investissements de la politique sociale. Je laisse le soin à mon collègue Franz Schultheis et ensuite au lauréat d'expliquer eux-mêmes ce que sont les investissements sociaux et pour quelle raison une distinction a été dévolue à ce domaine aujourd'hui.

Je saisis l'occasion de partager avec vous quelques idées sur la situation de la recherche en Suisse. Lors de la dernière remise du prix, en janvier 2007, j'avais évoqué les attentes de la société envers la science et la responsabilité de la science envers la société. A ce moment-là, le Parlement suisse était sur le point de traiter le Message sur la Formation, la recherche et l'innovation, ce Message qui fixe entre autres l'enveloppe financière du FNS pour les quatre ans à venir. Depuis, le Parlement a approuvé ce Message sans lui faire subir des coupes budgétaires. Il a même augmenté de 100 millions de francs le montant en faveur de l'overhead. Tout en gardant à l'esprit qu'il peut y avoir des réductions de dernière minute lors des discussions annuelles sur le budget, le FNS va obtenir pour les quatre prochaines années plus de 2.6 milliards de francs (il s'agissait d'environ 1.9 milliards pour la période 2004-2007).

Aussi réjouissantes que paraissent les décisions du Parlement, elles ne doivent pas masquer que les attentes de la société par rapport à la science - et par là même les attentes liées aux ressources dont il est question - sont diamétralement opposées. Elles reposent aussi parfois sur des notions très arbitraires par rapport à ce que la recherche scientifique peut ou ne peut pas. Il

n'existe que de rares cas où la société comprend intégralement ce que le chercheur tente d'accomplir.

Les uns considèrent la science comme une sorte de magie, qui va trouver la solution à tous nos problèmes sociaux. Il leur semble que, par exemple, la menace émanant de la diminution des énergies disponibles et du changement de climat, pourrait être combattue grâce aux méthodes scientifiques uniquement, sans pour autant que l'homme ait à abandonner les habitudes qui lui sont chères. Les autres voient un rapport direct entre la science, la création de postes de travail et la croissance économique. D'autres encore se représentent la science comme la racine de tous les maux et critiquent toutes les nouveautés scientifiques comme la technologie génétique, la nanotechnologie ou encore la radiotéléphonie. Pour ces derniers, la recherche sert avant tout à contrôler les effets potentiellement négatifs de la science. Ils revendiquent le risque zéro et en même temps le maintien du bien-être.

Toutes ces attentes péremptoires sont finalement dangereuses pour la science. Cela vaut en particulier pour le dernier point évoqué.

Let me exemplify this point with a personal experience: Some years ago I was asked to join the Council of a new foundation created by a Swiss bank for customers who want to donate part or all of their money to specific societal areas such as charity and economic development of poor countries, social aid, art, sport, research and others. The Foundation Council was composed by persons with different background so that all these sectors would be represented. The Foundation was (and still is) a tremendous success. In Switzerland and elsewhere, there exists a considerable number of rich people who want to do something useful and good, but not all these donors want to go through the legal process of creating their own foundation (such as the Lassis foundation). The foundation I am talking about offers sort of a legal framework within which different ideas and intentions can be pursued.

However, to my great surprise, during the first several years since the foundation is active most of the donations were targeted at social issues or development aid, that is, they were aimed at 'healing' the negative effects of modern society and its advanced technology. Of course, on one hand it is extremely positive that donors bear in mind the poor and the weak. On the other hand, this also means that donors think less of the future and of the possibility that their money could trigger innovative ideas which would eventually improve the state of our planet and the people living on it.

Does this attitude reflect the priorities of modern society? – To heal the wounds of the past rather than improving our future? – The preferences are not alike on all countries. We know, for instance, that in the US there is a tremendous amount of private money flowing into universities and research. Also in Switzerland the situation has been different in the past. Between 1850 and 1950 science and technological development were of the highest priority in our country. That was the time when Switzerland was at the forefront of development in many areas. Every invention was considered as a step forward, away from poverty.

We all know that things develop in cycles and swing back and forward between extremes. The uncritical belief into technological progress was dangerous and asked for its tribute. The negative sides were suppressed for too long, until environmental problems, the shortage of some resources, climate change, and others could no longer be overlooked and the concept of sustainability became the new paradigm. But now we run the danger of overreaction again. Look-

ing at the mistakes of the past is needed, but believing into the future is necessary, as well. A society which only cures the past and preserves the present, a society without any visions for the future, has given up itself. Therefore, institutions like the Latsis Prize are extremely important, not only because of the financial support of research, but also because of the message which it sends to society: Science is part of our future.

Yet, there is still another important element to the Latsis Prize: By restricting the prize to scientists who are less than 40 years old (still a young age for scientists, since it takes a long time until one reaches the forefront of research) it addresses the most vulnerable time period in the life of scientists, i.e. these years when the future in academia is often uncertain and the temptation to leave research for a well paid, secure job is greatest. The SNSF shares this view with the donator of the Latsis Prize. In fact, for the SNSF the support of young scientists became continuously more important during the last 10 years, not only through the special instrument targeted to directly support young people (the nearly 180 SNF professors, for instance), but also through project funding where more than 75% of the persons supported by the project money are younger than 35 years. Starting with this year, the SNSF has added yet another instrument to support young scientists called *Ambizione*. This program is targeted at scientists who intend to make their first step into independence by designing a research project of their own while still remaining in the research group of their former professor. An important element of *Ambizione*: It includes the salary of the applicant.

Now it is time to come back to the reason which has brought us here, today. With great pleasure I have noted in the Curriculum of today's laureate that in his career he has profited from SNSF grant for advanced researcher during his time at the University of Bath in the UK. Maybe, his concept on social investment about which we are going to here more soon, could be extended to the world of science and art. I am convinced that the goals of organizations which set prizes (like the Latsis Foundation) or give grants to scientists (like the SNSF) can be interpreted as a social investment, that is as an investment which ultimately serves the community – not only by feeding the economy with innovative ideas, but also by supporting essential components of our culture. Obviously, this kind of social investment has not reached its ultimate limit.

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