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A Message from the Presidency, January 2024

- News - General news -



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Before looking forward, it's worth reflecting on the path we've traveled to fully understand the direction we've chosen and to carefully guide our steps ahead.

I clearly remember the pivotal moment when Thomas decided to step down from the OSI leadership, and we set up our new “co-management” structure. We understood that we couldn't afford to leave things drifting, so we held a kind of general assembly with rounds of discussions. What we did not want was a traditional management system for a business, association, or NGO.

So, based on the collaborative management system that had been in place for several years, we decided to strengthen it with checks and balances inspired by Swiss governance. This led to the creation of COMEX as the supreme body and CODIR as the operational management body, connecting with teams operating independently in collaborative groups on the ground. This setup seemed the best way to incorporate the necessary vertical structure at the leadership level to stay on course with our objectives, while preserving the horizontal approach historically established for the practical, hands-on work.

Our learning curve came with its challenges and mistakes, but gradually we learned to master our new system, and our teams became stable. Building on this momentum, we also realized the value of defining directions to help set clear objectives. Our analyses led us to define three main strategic directions starting in 2021:

1. Expansion into German-speaking countries, establishing a real presence and sources of participants.
2. Further increasing collaboration with more academic institutions.
3. Implementing a quality management system (ISO) that aligns with our internal regulations and procedures already in place on the intranet.

Where Do We Stand Today in Relation to These Directions?

With several German-speaking colleagues, we have initiated outreach and development efforts in Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland. Progress is advancing steadily and well. In addition to numerous meetings and exchanges throughout 2022 and 2023, we were able to be present and contribute time and support to several collective events in these regions within the scientific community. More meetings are already scheduled for 2024.

Regarding collaboration with academic institutions, the outlook is even more promising. With OSI management having freed Thomas from numerous responsibilities, he has been able to engage with public bodies currently developing the format of Participatory Scientific Research. Several new collaborations are on the horizon for OSI with engineering schools, advanced institutions, laboratories, and universities in Switzerland (EPFL, Museums, UNIGE, HES...) as well as in France (CNAM, INRAE...), the United States, and even further afield.

On the other hand, the quality management system project was initiated but halted due to a lack of time and funding. Since this is not about defining procedures—which have been in place for several years—but rather adapting them to a quality management format, it is less urgent. Nonetheless, it remains a priority for us, as we expect it to foster harmonious and standardized development across our teams.

And here we are, dealing with the lack of time and funding... We had suspected that we would eventually have to grapple with this issue. OSI's rapid growth has, unfortunately, only accelerated the problem. We're no longer just anticipating it—it's glaringly obvious now! This means we need to adjust our strategies: for our COMEX team, fundraising has now become the number one priority. This project is well underway, but we're still in deep waters without a clear beacon on the horizon.

To improve our revenue, we cannot raise the amount of contributions from participants and their sponsors, as these are optimized to ensure accessibility across all population groups, thanks to our social funds. Securing philanthropic or public contributions has therefore become an absolute necessity, as the consequences of insufficient funding are numerous:

- new projects unable to be launched or even explored,
- modest remuneration for our collaborators in relation to the high quality of services we expect and which they provide so generously,
- the desire to secure even more resources to further enhance our operational safety and educational quality,
- and the quality management system project (ISO) remains on hold.

We could extend this list endlessly, but there's no need, as we are fully aware of our ongoing projects. This is in addition to the daily work that we must continue without wavering.

And this daily management, which Anne, who preceded me as President in 2023, refined despite all the challenges she faced. Our organization runs well, and the mistake would have been to take our eyes off daily operations and focus only on the difficulties ahead. I thank Anne wholeheartedly, as she enables us to tackle new challenges by returning to the role of Vice President this year, keeping her careful eye on management, smooth operations, and the preservation of our achievements.

With this context in place, I look forward to updating you on our progress with fundraising in about four months. Until then, good work.

See you soon!

Dr. Christa Muth, Prof. HES

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