

Switzerland moves on!

At the initiative of civil society, Switzerland has launched the first stage of its reflection on guidelines for measuring and improving quality of life “beyond GDP”. On June 4 and 5, the “Information Technology Commission” of the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences (SATW-ICT) and the Fondation du Devenir (FfD), an associate Partner of the Global Project on “Measuring the Progress of Societies” for over a year, brought together fifty people from different backgrounds, ages and Cantons for 24 hours of intense brainstorming at the castle of Münchenwiler (near Bern). The atmosphere of this historic building, which dates from the eleventh century and is the former priory of Cluny, gave energy to the discussions relating to the quality of life in Switzerland by the year 2029 and how to measure progress from now until then. Although the conclusions remain to be validated by the group, some basic ideas emerged from the meeting.

In the Swiss context, five pillars establish qualitative progress:

1. sustainability, stability and security of living;
2. strong social cohesion and integration of all, taking into account diversity in all its forms;
3. better access to shared public goods and services essential to quality of life and well-being of the persons (health, food, information, art and culture, education and training);
4. a better balance between personal life, work and social commitment;
5. personal development through creativity and spirituality, as preferred by each individual.

Priorities and the role of Swiss values

To take this project forward, several main lines of action are to be encouraged:

1. social and technological innovation in a spirit of solutions of common interest;
2. taking care of people and promoting human capital by providing appropriate responses to individual needs throughout the cycle of life;
3. enhancing the existential experience and personal skills in the approach to all matters dealing with the individual and the community;
4. creating conditions for a participative governance of goods, services and public spaces;
5. reassessing public policies with an emphasis on the community life at the local level;
6. setting strict standards to protect the public interest in all areas by integrating incentives that reward good practice rather than focus on enforcement and penalties.

The great linguistic, cultural and political diversity of Switzerland, its decentralized political system, a well-established culture of consensus, good management of the natural capital of the country and the excellent level of human capital, coupled with a tradition of openness to the international, give to Switzerland advantages to initiate a qualitative approach to the progress grounded in the values of respect, civic awareness and personal ethics.

Measuring the progress of the Swiss society

In the near term, it is important first to enhance whatever data exists and to give free access to the data via Information and Communications Technology (ICT). It is also important to generate new systematic and reliable data on different scales in order to measure and/or assess the social utility of a good or a service (the welfare, the cohesion and the know-how will contribute to monitor qualitative

progress). In the medium term, new approaches are essential to analyses of the life cycle, the intergenerational transfers and the metabolism of resources and to establish balance sheets by sector. In the long term, a new era will likely emerge with the development of "living stat", i.e. freely-compiled statistics by Internet surfers and citizens, to complement the data produced by official sources. This was recognised as the way forward, although the issue of data quality assurance needs to be carefully addressed!