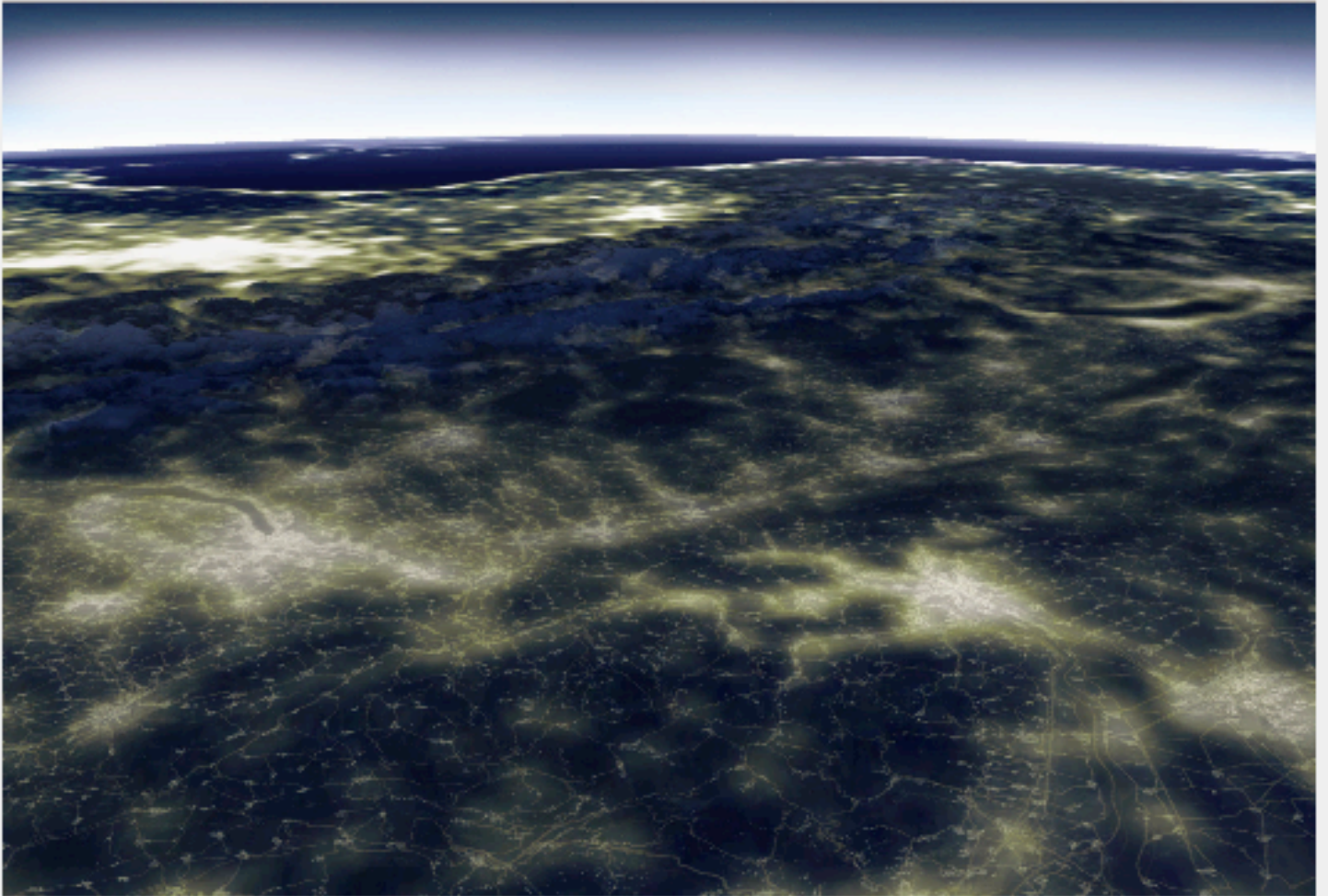


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**From Tradition to Competition:  
Challenges and Opportunities for a  
Research University**

9 Theses

October 2009

# Summary<sup>1</sup>

In Switzerland, the Federal Government and the Cantons share the responsibility for the tertiary sector. The Constitution of Switzerland grants the Federal Government the right to run its own universities. Of the 12 Ph.D. granting institutions, all public, 10 are Cantonal and 2 are Federal.

An intricate system developed over time for sharing the financial burden among all the Cantons and the Federal Government. Until recently, the private sector contributed no more than 10 percent of the overall expenditures of academic institutions, reflecting the fact that all levels of education as well as basic research were part of a public good and therefore needed to be funded by the taxpayer.

Therefore, the scientists were until recently civil servants with a life-long guarantee of employment. Scientists were living in their ivory towers and there was a strict separation between basic and applied research. The latter was considered to be inferior and to be dealt with by industry.

For several decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century this mode was highly successful as the universities were adequately funded and the success of a scientist was measured solely by her/his scientific achievements published in top peer-reviewed journals. The complete freedom of teaching and research was upheld.

Because of dramatic advancements, academic and corporate science have grown much closer, the innovation gap has shrunk and time to market is increasingly the limiting factor for a successful technology based company. Proximity to a university can therefore become crucial.

At the same time, science has become a global playfield with many powerhouses emerging in the East and South challenging the standing of the traditional institutions in Europe and Northern America. As never before, universities are searching for the best experts and talents worldwide and must compete in a fast changing landscape.

The exponentially growing cost for research and higher education, the global fight for the best talents and a decreasing half-life of knowledge and know-how, have applied great stress to the well calibrated Swiss system. The problems have been recognized and reforms have been discussed but the federalistic system, often with a narrow national/traditional view, does not seem to be able to grasp the urgency of the situation and respond adequately. A dangerous, gradual decline may be the consequence.

This paper tries to address some of the issues and proposes possible solutions in form of 9 theses. None of the challenges may be overcome individually. They should rather be jointly addressed in seeking successful long-term solutions.

The titles of the 9 theses are as follows:

1. Swiss Universities – Unity in Diversity
2. Excellency – the Ultimate Objective
3. Universities Competing for Market Position
4. Education, Research and Innovation made in Switzerland – A Traditional Brand Becomes Creative
5. Recognition of Excellency Means Selection
6. Autonomy – More Than Lip Service
7. Vision Without Leadership Remains Merely Academic
8. Application of the Costs by Cause Principle in the Tertiary Sector
9. Private Giving – Active Promotion Instead of Passive Prevention

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<sup>1</sup> The complete study is available in German