

Experiences from a Sino-Swiss research cooperation project

Prof. Claudio R. Boër
swissnex Shanghai and SUPSI-ICIMSI

Cooperation between Swiss and Chinese universities as well as between Swiss and Chinese companies has been going on for long time and in many cases also successfully. But most of the companies that are successful mainly are from a pure commercial point of view. As soon as there is a need to have common development that include a deeper understanding of science and technology, then, particularly for the SMEs has been very difficult to establish the right contact and find the right partner mainly due to cultural and language differences.

In 2002, CTI – the Commission for Technology and Innovation - launched a feasibility study to understand the needs for a more structured support program for Swiss SMEs and universities (particularly the UAS) to cooperate with Chinese partners. The study was successful and a full program CTI-China was launched and it lasted until the end of 2007 with very good results. At present swissnex Shanghai has taken over the follow up of some projects still running after 2007 and one of them is presented as an example to illustrate the motivations, the experiences, the role and the potential that swissnex can have in supporting these projects.

The project HydroNET is also considered a pilot project in the area of sustainability where Switzerland has much to contribute with its research institutes and companies. The project deals with wastewater treatment and an innovative technology developed together by a small Swiss engineering company KWI, EAWAG and SUPSI. The Chinese partners are potential users of the technology and potential co-developer and distributor for the huge Chinese market. The Chinese partners receive support from the Dongguan city government and the Guangdong provincial government. This pilot project shows what are the difficulties to overcome and the interaction among the several partners and institutions. Furthermore it is shown how a pilot project can be the frontrunner for a larger top-down cooperation program in the area of sustainable development between China and Switzerland that will include fundamental research, applied research, education and industry.

Prof. Dr. Claudio R. Boër

holds a Laurea in Mechanical Engineering from Politecnico of Torino and a Master and Ph.D. from Waterloo and Carleton University in Canada. He has been working for 16 years in Swiss industry and develops state of the art R&D in Metal Forming, Machine Tools CAD, CAM and CIM. He has taught Flexible Manufacturing as well as Robotic applications. Project Leader of EC research in the area of Mass Customization (MC) for shoe design and manufacturing (and published a book), Mr. Boër is now extending the MC paradigm concept to sustainability. He is Chairman of the IMS (Intelligent Manufacturing System) program and Vice-Director for R&D at the swissnex (Swiss Outpost for Research, Education, Innovation and Culture) in Shanghai.