

(archives) The Labex OSE after one year: interview of Pr. Geoffard

Interview with P-Y Geoffard, OSE Scientific director from 2011 to 2013

1. How did the project start?

The academic starting point was quite simple: in order to shake up and go beyond what exists, how do we identify and organise the great potential of researchers within PSE and our links with other institutions? Our idea really was to put together all the researchers who wanted to define the project using a «bottom up» approach. The preparatory work done within thematic working groups that met several times allowed us to identify the fields and topics that looked the most promising and the most inspiring.



The work of synthesising and prioritising, for which around ten people were responsible, allowed us to confirm the shape of the OSE, combining methodological approaches and thematic groupings, after which the editing of the project application firmed up its content.

2. What are the first stages of the OSE?

The first steps have already been taken, with the IPP, the training of economics and social science teachers (in partnership with the APSES) and journalists (along with the CELSA).

The members of each of the five thematic fields will then, in 2011-12, launch their thematic workshops. A central element is thus that in this starting period, the OSE is a project in which the intellectual material is flexible. Rather than the classic form of seminars in which colleagues exchange ideas about their own work, these workshops aim to bring people up to date with existing knowledge and open questions, then to focus attention on some specific topics.

The goal is to identify the cutting edge of research, the possible directions for future reasearch and to determine collectively the directions that seem the most likely to attract young researchers and PhD candidates, and also to determine the directions we do not wish to take.

This collective dynamic does not appear often in our profession: we put ourselves ahead of and across academic production here, which is essential if we are to overcome the effects of entrenched constraints and obstacles. For example, one of the theme groups chose to focus its efforts on social protection. This subject is especially suited to analyses that borrow methods from different disciplines (juridical, sociological, economic, demographic), and the cross-disciplinary approach has a temporal dimension – the trends for institutions of social protection; historical analysis is at the heart of the business enterprise.

3. How is the success of a programme such as this measured?

The state, the funder of the OSE, has fixed a moment – the fourth year in a total of ten – at which the scholarly aspects, and the development and distribution of research will be assessed. But a significant part of the programme up to that point is «virtual», in the sense that its disturbance of existing methodologies and standard processes, and its new thematic divisions (tied to the its opening towards other social sciences) are aimed at creating breaches and new research dynamics.

Paradoxically, we must make more frameworks in order to be more creative – be more proactive in order to continue to be surprised. Indeed, it is the originality and the exploration of new fields and mechanisms that will be the main indicators of success. See you in a few years!