

FOREWORD

When I was a child, growing up in South America, I often went camping in the wild and hence had direct access to the wondrous Southern sky; the Southern Cross was all mine at the time. Little did I know then that the study of the sky would take such a huge importance in my life, and that in the end astronomy and astrophysics would in many ways become my country and my religion. I have lived in several different countries, and when asked my nationality, I am always very tempted to reply: astronomer.

I started as a theorist, and my only dream in my youth was to spend nights thinking and calculating, with paper and pencil, and to have the impression by dawn that I had understood something new. So at the time astronomy was seen or dreamt by me as a solitary endeavour, with periodic encounters with my wise adviser and professors; it is this model that I adopted when doing my PhD work.

My generation has lived through many revolutions of all kinds. Those in astronomy, I believe, remain particularly remarkable, and I am a true product of them. Now, I elect to live and work in large organizations, and to share my endeavours with many people. And I relish the series of André Heck on *Organizations and Strategies in Astronomy*, which help us recover our memories, reconstitute our own story, and read with glee about our neighbouring or far-away colleagues.

Astronomy, fortunately, still remains a discipline where the interested practitioner can still, if he or she really wishes, try to maintain a broad view of what is happening, even though the pace of discoveries has become so incredibly fast. Also, as shown in this volume by the article by Pearce among others, there is room still in our field for the individual researcher to exist and leave his mark; of course, this is particularly true for those who are the most gifted, but more modest astronomers can still make an identifiable contribution. And I am not necessarily thinking of new discoveries recognized, *e.g.* by the number of citations, but by the intimate knowledge by the scientist that a given advance is due to his own spark of genius, understanding and/or luck. In astronomy, this can still co-exist with orga-

nizations, even the large organizations which have proven to be mandatory if astronomers want, collectively, to carry out their most ambitious projects.

The other key word these days, and André clearly is a precursor here, is strategy. We are all intent on developing strategic plans, road maps, and the like. Now, what is strategy? Here, I remember that I am French, not only astronomer. Strategy is, as Napoleon well knew, “The science of military command, or the science of projecting campaigns and directing great military movements”. And this requires clear goals. At a particularly strategy focused meeting of the ESO Council, its President, Piet van der Kruit, reminded us of the words of the base-ball player Yogi Berra “If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else”. Goals, plans . . . and adversaries?

Now: one new message heralded these days by politicians and strategy-prone astronomers throughout the world, is: “Astronomers of the world, federate”. Astronomy is of course the most universal of all sciences, but this, alas, is not the only reason for this newly emerging consensus. Sadly, even us, ethereal beings living in heaven, have sometimes to be reminded of the value of money. The other message, the old one, remains, almost subliminal these days: “Astronomers of the world, compete! ” For, what is more exciting and stimulating, than to try to arrive there before somebody else? Snatch a discovery? We all relish that. The solution may be what, at ESO, we call *friendly competition*. Perhaps a good subject in this series some other time!

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