

Interview with Flavia Schlegel, Executive Director swissnex China / Vice Consul General

Can you outline the mission and aims of swissnex China?

swissnex China is an initiative of the State Secretariat for Education and Research of the Federal Department for Home Affairs and the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs. Our goal is to promote Switzerland's excellence as one of the world's leading countries in the fields of higher education, research and innovation, to connect academia and business and to facilitate cooperation between the two countries. Briefly said: promote – connect – facilitate.

swissnex China will celebrate its third anniversary in August this year. What is your conclusion looking back at the first years?

Wow, already three years passed by (laughing). Over these last three years swissnex China has established itself as a leading institution for Sino-Swiss cooperation in science and higher education. Thanks to the excellent reputation of the Swiss academic and research institutions, as well as the excellent product "Switzerland", we were able to find promising Chinese partners to build up and widen a strong network here in China.

The majority of our sponsors and mandates are interested in long-lasting collaborations with us. I am proud to say that we have built a bridge between the two countries.

Furthermore we have realized that swissnex China cannot easily be compared one to one with the other swissnex outposts for example in the USA, due to different circumstances here in China.

What do you mean with "different circumstances in China"?

First of all, we have to work in a completely different political as well as cultural environment. By acting and bridging between the two countries we often need to find ways to combine the very different western and Chinese culture. Besides that, the business environment is very competitive and demanding here. The Chinese rhythm and business rules are different to the conventions we are used to in the western world.

Also is the political situation challenging us in our communication. As the Chinese government is controlling the internet tightly we are limited in the use of online communication. Most western social media are blocked or censored here and we are limited to the Chinese social media platforms. And in the end we are the only swissnex outpost which needs to communicate in two languages; the Chinese language is essential to address our Chinese partners and friends.

How essential do you consider collaboration between countries and their institutes in the development of innovative, knowledge-based economies?

For me this is very important since the challenges we face are global and can only be solved with joint forces. Global exchange of ideas is paramount to



swissnex China's mission

promote 推广

to create and to promote awareness of Swiss excellence in science, technology, innovation and culture in China and of Chinese opportunities in Switzerland.

connect 连接

to establish a solid, long-lasting network of cooperation between scholars of both countries serving as a base for bottom-up initiatives in the future.

facilitate 协助

to facilitate Sino-Swiss cooperation, with tailor made events to assure most rewarding outcome.

swissnex China is an initiative of the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) of the Federal Department of Home Affairs and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Similar institutions are located in Boston, San Francisco, Singapore and Bangalore.

*For more information visit the website:
www.swissnexchina.org*

develop innovation. Switzerland as Europe's most innovative country has a long history of international cooperation and exchange. The high number of foreign professors and students reflects Switzerland's international approach of further developing an innovation and knowledge-based economy. Switzerland's spending on research and development as a percentage of GDP is amongst the highest within the OECD. Looking at globalization of research, development and innovation processes, the collaboration between countries and their institutes has been growing significantly within the last few years. E.g. climate change, environmental standards (by renewable energies), the fight of epidemics, have to be tackled internationally and by transparent cooperation between countries.

What do you think Switzerland has to offer its counterparts in this international exchange?

In Switzerland business and academic research are operating very closely and are worldwide strongly connected. Further, we offer excellent infrastructure, academic research and business R&D. Switzerland is one of the most competitive economies in the world, hosts various headquarters of international companies and organizations and offers a high quality schooling and higher education system. The success of this model is also shown by international innovation rankings where Switzerland regularly acts in the top five.

Can you provide details of the governmental program for Sino-Swiss research projects which is coordinated by swissnex China?

The Sino-Swiss Science and Technology Cooperation (SSSTC) program aims at encouraging and strengthening academic cooperation. The program is a Joint Venture of the Chinese and Swiss government, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH) functions as the leading house of the program, while swissnex China represents SSSTC in China. The program intends to foster and encourage bottom-up initiatives to build up multi-level research cooperation between institutions, research groups as well as individuals. The program has so far successfully chosen 25 joint research projects in the domains of environmental sciences, life sciences, medicine and material sciences. Further it aims at increasing the visibility of Swiss universities and research institutions in China through faculty and student exchange, as well as encouraging long term institutional cooperation between Swiss and Chinese education and research institutions.

Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, Head of Federal Department of Home Affairs visited China this April. What was the key outcome of this visit?

Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter and the Chinese Minister for Science and Technology Wan Gang



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signed a Joint Statement to further underline the mutual interest to deepen the scientific partnership between the two countries and to continue the SSSTC program. The signing demonstrates the intention on the part of Switzerland and China to continue the gradual development of their cooperation. This is a very positive sign for the future collaboration between the two countries.

What challenges do you see for swissnex China in the upcoming years?

The fact that Switzerland is Europe's innovation leader and one of the leading countries in the world is not known to most people in China. Besides being a popular holiday destination we have to promote Switzerland's excellence in the field of science and innovation. This affects especially Chinese business and academic people. They should automatically consider Switzerland as strong alternative when they decide to work, research or study abroad.

And last but not least we need to continue establishing relations and networks, which is a long-term endeavour. The outcome of our activities can only be seen in the long-term and we need to be patient to fully see the results. A further ongoing challenge is the bridging between the two worlds while keeping a strong identity.

Overall I am very much looking forward to further sharing knowledge and strengthening the network for innovation between Switzerland and China.

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