A Short Memoir by the Swiss National Group Chair, Dr. Philippe Menêtrey

When I took over the presidency of the Swiss Group of IABSE in 2014, the Association was under pressure. On one hand, there was the preparation of the 2015 Geneva conference with visions on new methods to hold conferences, to stimulate dialogues and exchanges. On the other hand, there was the departure of the executive director, which led to some uncertainties temporarily.

The best way that I could react during this period, as Chair of the Swiss Group, was to actively participate in the international events of IABSE to find the most appropriate reactions.

On the other hand, we also started organizing visits to construction sites and completed projects in and around Switzerland, along with the engineers of the projects, as a learning expedition for our members and participants.

So, in 2015, the Swiss Group visited the construction of the plant of Nant de Drance in Vallais, the rehabilitation of the Chillon Viaduct by Jean-Claude Piguet, and the A9 viaduct. In 2016, one single day in the canton of Grisons allowed us to visit the Punt Val Mudiaa, Zvegalbrücke Zignau, Vorderheinbrücke Danis, Rheinbrücke Tavanasa with the explanations of Jürg Conset, the Rheinbrücke Illun West, the Lavoisierbrücke, the Rheinbrücke Reinach and the Rheinbrücke Tamins, with a vibrant speech by Professor Christian Menn. The same year and for the first time ever, the Swiss group went to Germany to visit the Hochmoselbrücke construction site.

Then, in 2017, visits to the Leman region was organized with the CEVA stations, the movable walkway of the Jet d’eau pier, the Säli pavilion by Heinz Isler, my house, the rehabilitation of the Paudézé bridges, and the bridges over the Foa and the Arlaf EPFL. In 2018, the group went to the Italian part of Switzerland to see the Viadotto Lugano-Bellinzona for AlpTransit, the Calanca arch bridge by Christian Menn and the Calanca arch Sella bridge. In 2019, multiple ancient timber bridges in the Toggenburg were visited, as well as the bridge under construction over the Thur.

Thereafter, during the pandemic, visits took a pause, which we picked up again in 2022 with a two-day visit in Torino to see the Fiat Lingotto factory, the Palazzo del Lavoro, and the Automotive Museum by Pier Luigi Nervi.

Despite a very interesting program, these visits attracted only a few participants, which could seem somewhat disappointing. Nevertheless, when surveying the participants after every visit, all were convinced of the value and relevance of such visits. I can only recommend carrying on with these visits since there is still much to discover.

The Swiss group of the IABSE took care of the next generation by organizing the YES conferences in 2016, 2018 and this year in October, 2022. It also tackled the task of obtaining recognition for its masters, by preparing Jürg Conset’s application for the "IABSE International Award of Merit in Structural Engineering", which he was awarded in 2021.

After all these years, as Chair of the Swiss group of IABSE, I remain convinced of the important role that the Association plays in creating links between universities and practicing engineers. Today, universities are becoming very theoretical, and are drifting away from the practice of the profession that is structural and construction engineering. The students confirm this phenomenon, and the success of the mandatory internships are direct proof of it. Thus, it is with a message of encouragement that I recommend carrying on with the activities of the IABSE with conferences, IABSE Commissions and Task Groups (TGs), Association was used for remote working and finally changes in the supply of resources with the energy and raw material shortages linked to the war in Ukraine. And despite every thing, the human spirit evolves, adapts, and finds solutions, this challenge must accompany and help IABSE and all members grow in their respective professional as well as personal lives. And last but not least, I would like also to thank all members of the Swiss National Group and IABSE Secretariat for their support during this period.

Philippe Menêtrey
Chair, Swiss National Group (2015-2022)