



## COSMOS HUMBOLDT MULTIVERSITY CONFERENCE

# Tenerife - Island of Knowledge

By Sabine Virgin

Cosmos Humboldt Multiversity, established in Tenerife for the last six years, sees itself as a think tank for finding new solutions for current problems.

Following the example of Alexander von Humboldt and his brother Wilhelm, the project follows the principles of multidisciplinary exchange: a successful concept that is regarded as trend-setting for the 21st century.

This is evidenced by the varied programme which has been arranged in recent years by the organisation's founder Prof. Günter Koch. So far it has consisted of more than 30 events with participants from around 20 different countries and was implemented mainly in cooperation with the University of La Laguna (ULL). In the case of its latest conference, with the theme 'Island of Knowledge', the ULL was again involved, this time in cooperation with the Astrophysical Institute of the



The organisers and guest speakers of the conference

Canary Islands (IAC) which hosted the event.

### Why Tenerife?

In his opening presentation, Prof. Günter Koch summarised the advantages of transforming Tenerife into an 'island of knowledge'. In addition to tourism, Tenerife already has an extensive network of promising investments and sectors of varied disciplines. These include

the Astrophysical Institute of the Canary Islands, the Centre for Biomedical Research and the Institute of Tropical Medicine, the D-Alix Supercomputer, the Centre for Renewable Energies (ITER), the Science Museum in La Laguna and the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) in Santa Cruz. This enumeration alone shows how much potential already exists on the island in order to think outside the box in a multidisciplinary way. In addition, there are the two technology parks that are in the process of being set up, with the aim of attracting new companies.

From a geographical point of view, Tenerife's good connections with 160 direct flights via two airports, the internationally operating port and the strategic location between three continents make Tenerife ideal. Incentives for companies include tax breaks and Euro-

pean jurisdiction, as well as a good quality of life for employees, all factors that can be used to find multi-layered solutions to current problems.

The Astrophysical Institute of the Canary Islands is a good example of a high-quality knowledge centre. It's a breeding ground for learning, via the flow of scientists and trainees from all over the world and through close contacts with political and public bodies both in the Canary Islands and elsewhere, and also through the transfer of scientific knowledge into technology suitable for everyday use, so that the general public also benefits from the research institute.

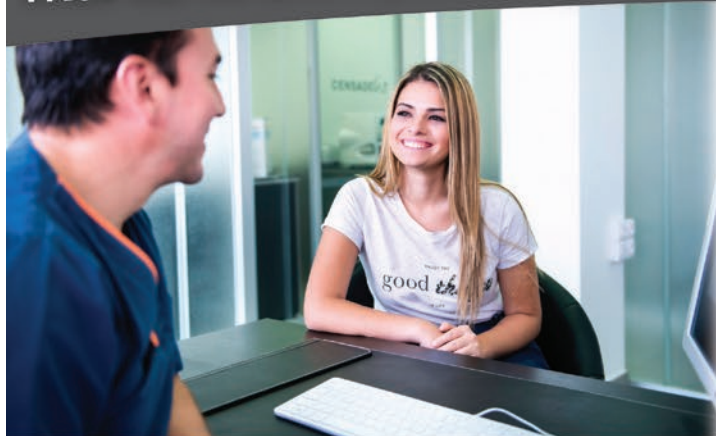
It would be a good thing if politics too were to adopt this concept of 'cross-thinking'. Following the example of Sweden for instance, the only country in the world that currently has a Ministry for the Future at its disposal, where the threads for new future concepts converge. Prof. Koch believes that: "On

Tenerife too, such a control centre could be an important point of connection within the government".

### Current economic situation

Rodrigo Trujillo González, lecturer in applied mathematics and expert in research and internationalisation at ULL, presented some facts to identify present weaknesses. For example, the Canary Islands' gross domestic product (GDP) has risen by about 3.5 per cent since 2014, and further growth of about 2.5 per cent is forecast for 2018. This is a positive trend, but it doesn't impress the population. The Canary Islands are structurally comparable to the Balearic Islands, where GDP growth was 3.8 per cent. However, these are the only comparable values. While unemployment in the Balearic Islands is generally 16.7 per cent, in the Canary Islands it still accounts for almost 22 per cent. Even more serious is the comparison of youth unemploy-

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ment: 21.9 per cent in the Balearic Islands and an alarming 41 per cent here. "The aim must therefore be to create new jobs, not those we had 40 years ago, but those that meet the demands of the 21st century", says the expert.

A key factor for him is that a large part of investment in Spain comes from the public sector. In sound economic concepts, the private entrepreneurial sector is much more active as an investor. The organisation, bureaucratic processes and also the mentality must alter so that those changes

**LEIF EDVINSSON**  
**A man who thinks differently**



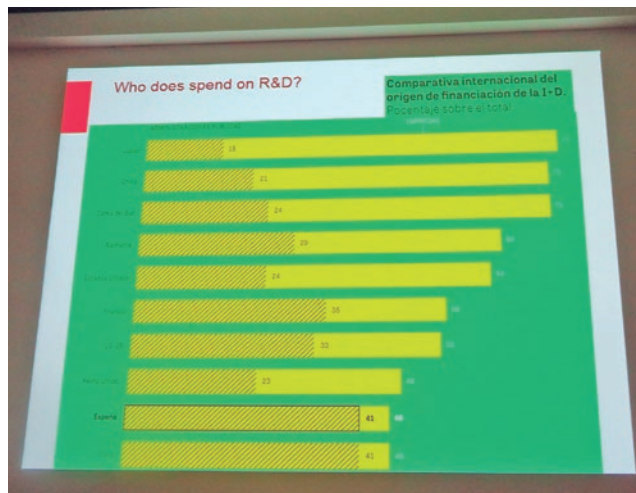
Leif Edvinsson, born in 1946 in Uppsala, started his career with the Swedish insurance company Skandia. There, in the 1990s, he developed his theory of hidden intellectual potential among employees and also developed practical programmes to promote its use. In 1998 he was awarded the 'Brain of the Year' prize and is one of the 50 most influential thinkers in the world. In 2001 he became a professor at the University of Lund and is an advisor to the Swedish government. He is an honorary lecturer and member of various universities around the globe, author of several books and acts as a consultant to renowned companies. ■

can make a breakthrough. First and foremost, he insists that the greatest capital - intangible assets - be used. They are mainly found in human potential. This means that the intellect must be used, and also human relationships and global exchange. To date, the value of human potential has been far too little recognised and promoted and that is exactly what needs to change.

**The hidden potential**

Hidden human potential was the main topic of Swedish guest speaker Leif Edvinsson at the event. As early as 1997 he published the book *Realising Your Company's True Value by Finding Its Hidden Brainpower* with Michael Malone. "The figures that Rodrigo has just presented show the actuality, but they're just numbers. What these statistics do not

the era of knowledge began and, parallel to that, a world era is emerging until 2030/50, in which social intelligence and well-being take centre stage. Disputes should no longer be conducted by military forces but diplomatically, and prosperity must be used to bring about social improvements. "If we make a wrong decision



show is the hidden human intellectual capital that slumbers in all the people who are now out of work", he explains. He would like to set up a Ministry of Human and Intellectual Labour, because the world, and thus our working environment, is changing. The 20th century was characterised by industrialisation. From 1995 to 2020,

today, our children and grandchildren will have to pay for it. Unfortunately, these processes are slow, human potential must be formed and promoted. The result can only usually be seen after about 20 years. Politicians, however, think more short-term. They want to reap the fruits of their labour faster in order to be re-elected. They

often lack the foresight to initiate long-term projects. I think there should be some sort of negative bonus or penalty payments for the future. Politicians and companies who make the wrong decisions should be asked to pay for them", he said. His extraordinary demands and innovative ideas go much fur-

are called for with more shared and interdisciplinary project development instead of one-sided individual routes.

The promotion of human potential also involves constructing new, creative living spaces. "Many important centres for innovation and future planning are based on two important factors that are not accidental; they are close to the water and have an attractive aroma. Water provides oxygen-rich air that encourages thinking; nice scents stimulate the brain within seconds. In this way, something new can be creatively made. Here in Tenerife both are available - use this potential", advises Edvinsson.

Health-promoting urban planning is another concept that

done with the undeveloped areas. Oases of tranquillity, green areas, meeting places - there are so many possibilities to make unused space vibrate and thus improve overall quality of life. Even if more and more people are moving into cities, this does not necessarily mean living in standard boxes in the form of unimaginative high-rise buildings. New architecture with space for green areas and encounters - that's what urban planning in the 21st century should look like.

Tenerife could once again become a laboratory where new ideas are being tried out in a small space. The island could take on a pioneering role for the future with ful-



↑ Around 41 per cent of investments come from the public sector in Spain. The UK, Germany and Japan are just 23, 29 and 15 per cent respectively

← Leif Edvinsson is an innovator who thinks outside the box

→ High youth unemployment is a major problem as well as providing untapped potential

ther. School and education must change, he suggests. Intellectual, social and creative thinking and learning are the values of the future. Entrepreneurship must be encouraged and the bureaucratic hurdles imposed by politics must be reduced.

New collectives emerge through human networks and relationships. Crowd funding for good concepts can be a financing option for projects, separate from public authorities and bank loans. Collective intelligence must be mobilised and the world of work must be revolutionised. Instead of hierarchies, joint idea workshops

the Swedish 'future thinker' brings into play. Urban landscapes must change, become healthier and more imaginative. In Montreal, Canada, for example, there is a district with original elements such as swings and seesaws for adults, and light effects on facades. The motto could be 'lightness of being'. Through playfulness, free spaces are created in which people can switch off and relieve stress. Perspectives should be changed during planning. This means we shouldn't only be planning what is to be built and how, but also just as intensively what's to be

filling and creative work and living spaces, if the hidden, intangible capital is promoted and used. And there is still an additional potential that is taken into account far too little. About six million visitors come to Tenerife every year. Many of them are retired - the so-called 'Silver agers'. They have a lifetime of wisdom and usually have time, money and knowledge that could be used for creative ideas. "You can never hire and pay us. We're free. But you can invite us to play along", says Leif Edvinsson. An invitation that has the potential to be fruitful for all sides. ■

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