

The Colegium de Lyon (Institute of Advanced Studies)

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HISTORY OF science and empirical research tell us that some places and institutions are better than others in providing an environment that is conducive to foster breakthroughs in research and to stimulate scientific and scholarly creativity. These are often places that allow small research groups to thrive in an adequately endowed and intellectually rich environment that is also characterized by flat hierarchies, an enlightened leadership and a sufficiently long temporal horizon. Time is needed and the right kind of place to pursue novel ideas that depart from mainstream investigations, if exciting paths towards new discoveries are to be opened up.

It is also interesting to observe that scientific advances often are accompanied, or even preceded, by innovations in the way in which research is organized. Science-driven institutional innovation therefore confers a comparative advantage to those research institutions that are able to anticipate and/or adapt faster to creating an optimal ‘fit’ between emerging research fields and their novel requirements in terms of research infrastructure, changes in collaboration patterns and, more generally, in shaping the research environment in ways sustainable for frontier research.

It was on this basis, and also in using the model of other Institutes of Advanced Studies (IAS) in the world which have shown their effectiveness that the Collegium de Lyon (CDL) was created in 2008, keeping in mind the two essential characteristics that define an IAS: a complete open-mindedness on the international level and research that is actively interdisciplinary. In making sure that interdisciplinarity was placed at the core of the invitation programs right from the beginning, the CDL considered this to be effectively offering a way to favor the invigoration and diversification of research conducted in a disciplinary framework, while emphasizing the dynamics of each discipline. It also allowed a fresh view to be taken of familiar objects and thereby multiply the angles of approach, while favoring the enrichment of scientific inspiration.

Presentation

At present, the CDL is one of the four French Institutes of Advanced Studies grouped together in the Réseau Français des Instituts d’Etudes Avancées

(RFIEA) which has its headquarters in Lyon. It is a structure which is conceived as an independent centre of research that allows a community of high-level researchers and professors to be offered the possibility for a limited period of six months to one year to be freed of the usual constraints associated with their teaching and/or administration of research, in order to devote themselves entirely to their research work.

As a consequence, no constraints on discipline, specific topic or cultural context are required. The invited residents are completely free to follow the work of their choice, without any predefined research program that would restrict their creativity. The IAS was not intended to be a concentration of scholars invited because they all work on the same topic. Consequently, there are no actual scientific priorities. The approach is completely « bottom-up » with only the best scholars recruited, regardless of their domain of expertise or the topic of their research. The gamble has thus been taken that new research opportunities which are truly innovative and interdisciplinary will emerge from this cohabitation under ideal work conditions, by scholars of the highest standard who are working in different areas and on different topics.

During the last four years, the CDL has welcomed, or will soon have welcomed, 42 residents, of which 24 are senior scholars and 18, young scholars (that is, less than 40 years of age). 132 applications have been submitted since 2008, which gives a success rate of 31%. As the application procedures offer two possibilities – either a 5-month or a 10-month stay – this leads to the following breakdown: 38 % of the applicants chose a period of 5-months while 62% chose the 10-months' stay. Note that research stays of less than 5 months are not accepted at the CDL. The candidates also need to indicate whether they are applying for the Junior (less than 40 years old) or the Senior Program.

Having recalled these principles and objectives, we are now ready to present a first stocktaking of the four initial years of the Collegium. It is doubtlessly too early to give a meaningful scientific overview, even more so, given that the number of residents has been rather limited during the first three years of existence of the IAS (2 in 2008, 6 in 2009, 9 in 2010, but 19 in 2011 and 24 expected in 2012). Nevertheless, one can confirm the predominance of two sectors of research in the applications granted: Linguistics (with a cognitivist bent, but as much formal and generativist as functionalist) and History (Ancient, Medieval and contemporary). The research stays of the first linguists have already led to publications of importance in several of the big international journals. In other cases, notably in Medieval History, several monographs are on the point of being finalized.

Interactions with local research installations have also been extremely fruitful. The accompaniment of the residents by local mentors, an obligatory requirement that has been written into the Charter of the Collegium, doubtlessly explains the good coordination between the work of the scholars and the

research programs being carried out in local research centres. These mentors, selected by the Scientific Committee of the CDL, on the basis of the list finalized by the Executive Committee, have played a decisive role in everything to do with the integration of the residents into the academic and cultural context of the region.

It is certain that several other points, less positive, need to be improved upon. One issue concerns interdisciplinarity. The cognitive linguists have certainly worked in collaboration with the cognitive psychologists or specialists in neurosciences in Lyon outside the Collegium, but within the Collegium, the discussions have remained very much on the level of « Humanities and Social Sciences ». Placing an emphasis on dialogue and cross-disciplinarity, the Collegium de Lyon should be entirely open to other scientific fields than Humanities and Social Sciences, especially with regard to research in complex systems and cognitive sciences, but also in the whole range of material, natural and life sciences.

However, it is true that there have not been any candidates selected purely in the domains of Natural Sciences or Life Sciences. This gap represents a situation that needs to be remedied. Among applications in the pipeline – not yet been examined by the Scientific Committee of the Collegium – some have been solicited in the domain of genetics and theoretical physics. In the future, such candidatures in the domain of what is generally called the ‘hard sciences’ will be similarly encouraged, while the CDL will remain vigilant regarding the principle of recruiting the best candidates, regardless of their domain of research.

The Scientific Committee and the Executive Committee of the CDL could also do well to insist on outlining several priorities. An analysis of the research themes developed since 2008 at the Collegium has led to a dominant theme emerging that could easily be characterized as being the domain of cognitive sciences and complexity, a domain which stands out as being one where disciplinary frontiers have become blurred *par excellence*. This orientation will be maintained.

It is also definitely an issue for us to host more researchers who come from countries known as ‘emerging’ (such as the BRIC countries, i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China) in order to better diversify our sponsorship which has up until now favored candidates from North America or Europe.

How to apply?

There is a permanent call for applications. A total of twenty research positions are available each year and applications can be submitted at any time. The documentation for a candidature includes the CV of the candidate, the three or four publications which she or he believes to be the most significant and the research proposal (between 5 and 10 pages maximum). The selection criteria are transparent: scientific quality of the project, its innovative aspects, the expected results and the expected impact on the research profile for the region.

The selection process is taken charge of by the Scientific Council which meets twice a year. For this purpose, it makes use of assessments which have been requested from external experts. The shortlist of candidates is then submitted to the Administrative Council for their approval. The selection process takes approximately five months from the time of submitting the application to the final decision. The average lapse of time between the final decision and the arrival of a new resident at the the Collegium is in the order of 1.5 months.

The website for downloading the application form: www.collegium-lyon.fr

Government

The CDL is governed for the moment by an Association, which includes :

- An Administrative Council (AC) of 16 founding members (roughly all of the institutions of higher learning and research in the urban confines of Lyon, the University Jean Monnet of Saint-Etienne and the Regional Delegation for Rhône-Auvergne of the CNRS) and two partner members (Ecole nationale supérieure des arts et techniques and Institut Lumière).

The running of this AC, and thus of the Association itself is taken care of by a Bureau, composed of:

Olivier FARON, Director-general of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) of Lyon, President of the AC and of the Association

André TIRAN, President of University of Lyon-2, Secretary of the AC

Gilles POLLET, Director of the Institut d'études politiques of Lyon, Treasurer of the AC.

- A Scientific Council, chaired by Yves GRAFMEYER, comprising 17 other researchers and professors, including 6 foreigners (2 Germans, 1 Belgian, 1 Dane, 1 Greek, 1 Hungarian).

The direction of the Collegium has been taken charge of by Alain PEY-RAUBE, since September 1st 2010, a Senior Research Fellow at the CNRS who is assisted by an executive secretary, Marie-Jeanne BARRIER. This executive team does all in its power to implement the guidelines that have been discussed and the decisions taken by these two councils.

Premises and facilities

Supported by regional and local authorities, the Collegium de Lyon provides access to all the resources and facilities in and around Lyon, one of the most dynamic *métropoles* in research and development in Europe. It is located in the heart of Lyon, close to the main academic centers. Fully-equipped offices, leased for the moment from the ENS of Lyon, have been placed at the disposal of the residents for the entire period of their stay. They are accommodated in a hotel residence near their place of work. The responsibility for leasing these studios or apartments, according to the case, has been taken over entirely by the CDL.

On the horizon for 2013 is a new building of approximately fifteen or so apartments for the IAS which will be constructed on the campus of the ENS, in the framework of the 2007-2013 Agreement between the French government and the region. The planning and the construction will extend over a period of 18 to 24 months maximum. Work areas for the residents (offices and infrastructure) are also planned for the university area of Lyon-2 and Lyon-3, in the Saint-Joseph quarter for 2013. In the meantime, the ENS of Lyon will continue to make available to the IAS the offices necessary for its running.

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Received on 28 Set. 2011 and accepted on 5 Oct. 2011.