

Conseller, President del CSIC, Rectora, Col·legues i Amics:

Molt bon dia a tothom, benvinguts i moltes gràcies per honorar-nos amb la vostra presència avui en aquest acte de celebració de 25 anys de l'Institut d'Anàlisi Econòmica.

Thank you all for joining us in celebrating this 25th anniversary.

Most of all, I want to express my congratulations and wish a happy anniversary to all the people that have been our institute over these 25 years. An important part of the lives of many people have developed within these walls - or the older ones that preceded them. Some have been here for a long time, others not so long. For some of us, the IAE is probably a final professional destination; for others it is as a phase in their lives. The Institute is each and every one of them.

As we recall those who have devoted their time and energy to the Institute, and those who have been hosted here, we realize how much we have given, and how much we have received: Some came here very young and soon took off for a brilliant career elsewhere. Others matured here and are still with us, or on the contrary, are now at other institutions, perhaps far away, but will always remain a part of us in some way or another. And the visitors, who visited us once, and keep coming back, because each time as they go, they leave behind open projects that bring them back over and over. I wish I could acknowledge by name and in detail everyone that has contributed to make our Institute such a great place. But I honestly do not know how to do it briefly, fairly and graciously. Still, let me at least emphasize the crucial contribution of our past directors: the founding fathers, Xavier Calsamiglia and Joan Ma Esteban, and Xavier Vives who followed on their steps. Without their vision, ambition, inspiration and hard work against all odds we would not be here today.

I could go over cold data and impress you - and our authorities - with overwhelming evidence of our great achievements and productivity; number of publications, impact factors, influential policy reports, doctoral dissertations, meetings and workshops. But rather than the figures - which are public in memoirs and web pages - what matters to me today is the life, the vital pulse, the presence of many people who were and are still here, because all the people who have spent time at the Institute have left their mark here, and have taken our own mark with them as well. This is a living place, and so a place of transit and permanence at the same time. To all who have involved their lives at the IAE, giving us their time, efforts and ambitions, support and criticism, thank you very much.

While people are at the foundation of any project - of any research centre - there is also a collective aspect that transcends each of us. So, allow me to briefly frame this celebration in the context of our collective history over the last 25 years.

In the recent decades, the large and active group of economists developed from the initially small cell of the "so called minnesotas" at the Autònoma, has achieved, by means of untold efforts, the construction of an internationally viable community of academic economists in Spain. We have reached milestones at the most demanding international level. This has been attained in an institutional landscape mostly inadequate to our goals, and often openly hostile. Ours is a story of adaptation, of search for the loopholes, struggles against obstacles, imagination, and audacity. Our goals and standards are simply that normal routine in advanced scientific communities: competition as the criterion for recruiting, mobility of ideas and people, rational decisions implemented easily, rather than irrational decisions prevailing by default, at the slightest slip of attention. But more often than not, to be normal is to be heroic, and demands swimming against the current.

The IAE is part of a success story which is measured by the implementation of internationally competitive recruiting, by the promotion of excellent master and doctoral programmes, through the spread of values that guide our researchers to publish more and better articles in the most demanding journals, and also to be present in the public policy debates. Overall, the results we have achieved are well beyond what the most optimists would have foreseen when the IAE took off in 1986.

However, at the cost of spoiling a bit a day that should mostly be celebratory, let me remark that there is still so much that remains to be done!

In fact, our collective agenda has spread among economists – where it is influential but still not majoritarian – but it has had little impact beyond our narrow borders. We economists do things still too “differently” from our colleagues in other disciplines. Doctoral education, which we consider a stage of maturity and growth for the initiative of young people, continues to be in many cases a source of cheap labour... and the first step in the perverse dynamics of inbred recruitment. How many doctoral programmes, in what are considered star sciences, attract foreign students and aspire to irradiate their fruits beyond the local boundaries? What other disciplines have job markets that favour mobility, the renewal of ideas, and competition?

On the other hand, from the institutions that host us we have not been able to achieve much more than a condescending tolerance. Certainly, we have done well enough to obtain “permission” to more or less continue on with our ways of going against the mainstream. They tolerate our recruiting practices, i.e. in the market and with tenure track rules. Sometimes they look the other way, and sometimes they do not.

At the IAE, the struggle for normality has idiosyncratic features, since we enjoy the privilege of being a CSIC institute. We are a small institute in a huge, rigid,

centralized organization run from distant central services in Madrid. Navigating in its intricacies requires patience and skills mostly orthogonal to the competences of "normal" researchers. We owe our survival in this bureaucratic labyrinth mostly to the heroic efforts of our managers over the last 25 years.

As CSIC researchers we do enjoy some important individual benefits. Being in the CSIC has also brought to our community important collective opportunities and advantages as well, especially when the times are good; look at this splendid building. For it, we are very grateful to the taxpayers.

But unfortunately, our organization remains stuck in obsolete rules and procedures that drastically undermine our ability to be competitive in the international market for researchers. Only an example, our Institute has attracted more than a dozen very bright junior researchers under the Cajal Program. Yet, at present only 2 remain in our faculty, the others have left us, they received offers from competitors and we had no tool whatsoever to react.

It has been 25 years, we have achieved many successes, we are here and in good shape, but normality is still a long way to go. Our achievements are a small step toward our greater aspiration, to be among the best, with normal reasonable means to compete, consistent and stable rules and procedures that provide incentives rather than restraints, that allow greater quotas of responsibility, so that we can also make mistakes!

Our experience is that solvent, reliable scientific policies are even more scarce than money. But the dream must go on. Our history, that of the IAE, and that of the economists with whom we share this journey, is a good footing to hope that we will achieve it in the next 25 years.