

Postface

Partners in the Polder is a wide-ranging, ambitious book. I have read it with great interest and am happy to offer some reflections on its subject matter and main ideas.

I regard the life sciences as one of the foundations of the 21st century economy and absolutely essential to building a sustainable society. Sustainability implies improving relationships between people and between people and nature, our ecosystems. Today those relationships are less than healthy. Often, they are destructive and harmful. As we come to better understand life and the processes of life, we must use this knowledge to improve our quality of life, including that of our environment.

We are on the brink of a major transformation: from consuming (and depleting) finite resources to harvesting and renewing the flows of life. We must transcend the fossil phase in the development of our society and make the transition towards a more bio-based economy. Biomass is a tremendous source that can provide for much of what we need. The trick is to harvest it sustainably, use it responsibly and recycle it where possible. A similar transition is taking place in healthcare. There, we will go from cure to prevention. Instead of mainly dealing with disease, we will put more emphasis on optimizing health and vitality, thus enabling everyone to live, enjoy and contribute his or her full potential.

I therefore welcome this initiative. *Partners in the Polder* shows the potential of the life sciences and paints a tantalizing picture of a future where they deliver on their promise. However, it also highlights the challenges to overcome before such a future can become reality. We need to invest time, (creative) energy and money. Not sometime in the far future, but starting today. The financial and economic crisis provides us with an excellent incentive and opportunity to take a major stride towards a sustainable (knowledge) economy. If we miss that train, it will not come by again.

I must confess to a fatherly affection for this public-private partnership that dates back to my role in launching the Netherlands Genomics Initiative in 2002. I have seen the partnership develop from the infant I helped conceive, into the adolescent it is today. Now it must reach maturity and fulfill its social, ecological and economic potential. We have a prominent position in both basic science and PPPs and we cannot afford to let that slip away.

That next step to maturity we should take together, on a nationwide basis. The Netherlands is a small place. Distinctions within it barely show up on the international radar. Together, however, individual “blips” amount to a steady beacon that will draw attention, talent and investment

to the Dutch life sciences. But we should look beyond the life sciences too. Fields like informatics, nanotechnology and the life sciences increasingly depend on each other for success.

I call on everybody, scientists, researchers, business people, policy makers, professionals and citizens, to work together to build a healthy and sustainable future. It may be the most important message to take from this book: that we need each other and should try to understand and help others do their part and be successful. *Partners in the Polder* calls for a long-term approach and policy continuity. Researchers and entrepreneurs in the life sciences operate on timelines of ten to fifteen years and more. Frequent policy changes hamper progress and investment. The sector should recognize, however, that providing continuity and stability over several parliamentary periods would be a formidable achievement and cannot be a one-way street. Politicians and civil servants will rightly want to exert influence and results in the medium and short term, as well. Policy continuity will only be forthcoming if the field understands that and is prepared to be transparent and accountable to the public and its elected representatives. Politicians and civil servants, on the other hand, must realize that without continuity results will be limited, and fall behind what society needs.

No one can do this alone or purely on his or her own terms. The future is a common project that will be shaped by our collective efforts. *Partners in the Polder* has set out a vision for a future enlivened by the life sciences. I would like to see that future come true. I would like to see a truly sustainable society and knowledge economy develop, and I am convinced the life sciences can and must play a major role in bringing it about. I hope researchers, entrepreneurs and all those involved will act to deliver on the promise of the life sciences they have so appealingly described in this book. They deserve our support.

In the preface, the authors quote a proverb: “beginning is easy, continuing hard”. Let me conclude in similar vein: good start, do continue!



Herman Wijffels,
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