

Launch event of SPI Flagships  
18 May 2022

## Speech of Rector Prof. Dr. Christian Leumann

*The spoken word applies*

Dear all,

A very warm welcome to all of you here at the Kuppelraum of the University of Bern. It is my honor to specifically welcome the science policy actors, representatives of the diplomatic missions and the scientists here in the room as well as all our guests that join us online.

The Swiss Polar Institute and with it the newly launched Flagship programs that we are celebrating today, are an important initiative to bring together the Swiss polar science community across borders of institutions, and to make the link to Swiss science diplomacy.

But why should Switzerland engage in polar science at all? We are far away from either of the two poles. The only geographic link that we have in our country is what is often considered as the third pole, the Mountains.

The main reason to engage in polar science everywhere around the globe today is to understand the climate of the past, to foresee the impact of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and based on this to develop models for the climate of the future and to link this to

consequences such as the change in biodiversity, the change of ocean currents and the impact on our society, economy and health.

We meet here today at the University of Bern, where climate science has been pioneered by the physicist Hans Oeschger. Already in the early 1960ies he generated fundamental knowledge for the understanding of the earth system. This is remarkable as at that time climate physics was a tiny niche and most of the physical community was concerned with high energy physics, space physics or the physics of matter.

Already at that time, Oeschger was able to demonstrate that the rising concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are a result of the burning of fossil fuels. And he did this by studying firn and ice which contain physical and chemical information about the environment. These findings are cornerstones of today's climate research.

As a consequence of the rising public interest in the climate sciences and the world class of his research and that of his successors, the NCCR climate, a national center of competence of the Swiss National Science Foundation, was established in the year 2000. Due to the great success of this NCCR, the University of Bern founded the Oeschger Center for Climate Change Research, the OCCR, which is now one of our brightest centers of excellence. While in the first phase the analysis of greenhouse gases from ice-cores and climate modeling were central activities, it has developed over time into a truly transdisciplinary center where researchers from 5 faculties contribute to the common goal of raising awareness of human made climate change and to develop solutions to cope with its consequences.

It is therefore quite logical that the University of Bern is also one of the founding members of the Swiss Polar Institute, together with the EPFL, the ETHZ, the WSL, the University of Lausanne, the University of Zurich and last but not least Frederik Paulsen. The SPI has been recognized as a «Research Institution of national importance» by the Swiss Confederation for the period 2021-2024.

Its main goals are to strengthen Swiss polar science in order to address global challenges; to facilitate access to infrastructures and international polar science initiatives; to create new synergies; to federate the Swiss polar science community and to bring it closer to the Swiss public.

The flagship initiatives are a core element directed towards those goals, and we are therefore happy to celebrate their launch today.

Thank you.