

Health Valley

Benoît Dubuis, Director of the Campus Biotech site and Chairman of BioAlps

In Western Switzerland, the life sciences industry is going through big changes—an opportunity for the players involved to be that much more creative.

News of the closure of the Merck Serono head office left a deep impression, both in terms of the economic and human consequences and the symbolic value of this fatal end. A dramatic glitch, but a glitch nonetheless.

Western Switzerland remains a land of opportunities, of which Serono took full advantage, evolving from a start-up with just a few employees when it arrived in 1980 to several thousand employees before it closed.

Our region continues to use its assets to help develop the industrial sector of life sciences. It has allowed a number of companies, for example Ariad, Shire and Alexion, to experience exceptional growth, thus justifying the huge sums of money invested over the past few years by companies such as UCB (which invested about 300 million Swiss francs in its production site in Bulle). Its assets are the basis of the success of companies including Ferring, Debiopharm, Celgene and many others.

Whether we look at the competitiveness-cost situation or the level of investment, the demand perspectives of our products, the financial situation of industrial companies, the technological level, the level of training or entrepreneurial drive: all of the indicators are positive.

But if I only had to retain one strength, it would be the human factor: these men and women are highly qualified and represent the bedrock of this industrial and entrepreneurial dynamism.

We live in a period of change, and when things change there are opportunities to make things better: better assist clients, better manage resources, develop more effective strategies, better organise the links between economy and research centres, better fill the technology gap. By technology gap, I mean the difference between an existing product and a new product, or between a certain way of working and a new way of working.

Economic opportunities are created when a better product or a better method has not yet been launched. Being the first in an industrial sector or a pioneer in a specific region allows this technology gap to be filled.

It is precisely during these turbulent periods, when people are less adventurous, that there are the greatest number of opportunities. Everyone has to look for ways to get by. And the more people who do hesitate, the better the opportunities are for those who don't./