



Kalevi Korhonen

International Visit

Professor Hoffman in Jyväskylä

For most of us, Agora represents a place for work, study and research. There are the departments, auditoriums and the study rooms. But how is Agora recognized nationwide or internationally? What actually is the idea of Agora in a wider perspective? To some of these questions we get clear and certainly experienced answers from the head of Caesar Research Institute, Prof. Hoffman, who has been a member of Agora Advisory Board since it was established.

Prof. Hoffman has a strong scientific background in international evaluations of the level of study and research. He has been the president of the German Science Council, evaluating different universities in Europe during 1994 and 1995, advising the government about the prospects of universities for research funding and development. This is also how he eventually got involved with the University of Jyväskylä and Agora.

The Agora Advisory Board has nine international members. Its mission is to monitor research and development and give an international context and perspective to the activities and research in Agora. Now for the first time in its existence, The Advisory Board has been invited to Jyväskylä by the University rector Aino Sallinen, who chairs The Advisory Board meetings and by the Agora Steering Committee, to acquaint the

Board with the ongoing research and study areas in Agora and the University of Jyväskylä.

What makes Agora particularly interesting from Prof. Hoffman's point of view is the innovative combination of technology and humanity. The Agora brochure states – perhaps somewhat romantically – the human being should always come first. When asked if such an approach is truly relevant or even possible, Prof. Hoffman says it is not only achievable but also absolutely necessary.

– Combining human beings and technology is a difficult task, and we are by no means ready yet. There are still lot of things to do. Information technology affects human beings, families and society on a very large scale, which is why it is so essential to combine the research and study of these fields.

Prof. Hoffman also sees much importance and demand for a philosophical approach to Information technology.

– IT affects all of us. It penetrates into all areas of science, business and every-day life. Philosophical aspects about the ethic issues, how all this changes the way we think, as well as society in general, will be an interesting and important future research area. Agora can be a great forum for this kind of approach.

Agora is also a big chance for the students. Prof. Hoffman says they have a great opportunity to be involved in the development process by openly and unhesitatingly sharing their opinions and ideas about the future. Bringing all these perspectives together is challenging not only here in Agora but in general, and in this, the students can really play a major role. Agora is not ready yet. Usually people have ideas, but no appropriate place to put them in practise. Here things are a little reversed; we have a great place, but we still need to develop the ideas and put them into practise. Agora should be permanently on the move, searching for ways to develop research and attract innovative multidisciplinary talent. This is what makes the place active and alive.

Prof. Hoffman studied applied mathematics and physics in the sixties. He got his degree from the University of Munich and became a professor in Berlin. At the time, the idea of combining humanities and technology did not seem relevant. Professor Hoffman emphasizes that a strong expertise in one field of science is important still today.

– Innovative ideas must be based on a solid background. Agreed.

Michele Heikkilä