

## **The Heidi legend is a plus for Switzerland A conversation with David Bosshart**

**Over the next few years we will be experiencing more upheavals, chaos and uncertainty, says the renowned trend researcher David Bosshart. Certainty and order will therefore be the big issues, as will the question of what makes humans human.**

**Mr Bosshart, what does the story of Heidi mean to you personally?**

Heidi stands for a legend – a strong story with a kernel which adapts to the circumstances of the time and lends itself flexibly to being retold time and time again. In that respect, the story of Heidi has long been a part of the Swiss identity. It is an advantage for a country like Switzerland to have a legend such as this, as it can be transferred relatively easily with its powerful images.

**“Heidi” also symbolizes values that are even more relevant today than ever (homeland, nature, health etc.). How important are these values for the future?**

That's right. Although it is a question of varying shades now. For some people, Heidi represents closeness to nature, and the desire to return to an untainted and simplified world, while for others the crux is a longing for authenticity and morality. Here, the grandfather represents someone who has stepped off the treadmill, and a role model. But one can also focus on the aspect of homeland in a global and alien world. Or you can concentrate on the poor child who has been passed from pillar to post, and go into questions of education and bringing up children.

**Do you see a trend of getting away from the new and going back to the tried and tested ways?**

No, change is advancing, and 'the new' will continue to be the trademark of the next few years too. We will have to deal increasingly with surprises, and even imponderables. Look at the financial world: returning to tried and tested ways does not simply mean nostalgia – it means placing increasing emphasis on quality and substance. If a countertrend brings yet more 'retro', that is an understandable reaction, but not conservatism for its own sake. That would be fatal, and would mean a retrograde step.

**To what extent will Heidi's image change?**

As I mentioned, the stronger a legend is, the more flexibly it can adapt to the times, and people will be waiting for it with new interpretations. To that extent the legend can bear new retellings.

**Alps, goats and cheese, but also friendship, hope and love are what Heidi represents. What will the future pit against these?**

We are learning that it is better not to think in terms of polarities and static paradigms, but rather in terms of “and also”. The modern world has far more ingredients in it from the old world than we assume. The advance of technology has blinded us to everything that still exists under the surface. In fact, we **are** our past, and there is no future if we don't know where we have come from. In that respect, we carry far more hidden 'oldness' in us than we would like to believe. But we can always make something out of what the past has made of us. To that extent, the past is never fate, but is dependent on a person's creative freewill. Whoever stands up for a tradition – from the latin *tradire* – has to be able to hand the torch on to the next generation, as in a relay race, where the baton is passed on to the next person.

**When we think of tomorrow, what are people looking for, actually?**

You can never say that humans cannot live without a certain thing. Therein lies the greatest challenge for mankind, to find the positive aspects of this continually accelerating change. Nature, and our image of nature, have long been shaped and overlaid by our prosperity and technical achievements – cheap flights and travel, fresh produce from all corners of the globe

available at any time, mobile phones and Google Earth, wellness temples and high-tech medicine. In the coming years we will experience yet more upheavals, chaos and uncertainty in a globalised world. But it helps to keep asking what it is that makes us human. Mankind is in competition on all fronts: as fellow workers with others who are cheaper, more willing and younger. As manpower against technology that is stronger than us. As a social animal competing for recognition and reputation. But on the positive side, history teaches us also that humans are very adaptable when they are faced with a challenge.

**Will tomorrow's generation still be looking for certainty at all?**

It is highly probable that certainty and order will be big issues in tomorrow's world. If people no longer understand what is happening to them, the cry for order becomes louder. That in turn brings us back to the question of freedom.

**Do you believe that a spiritual connection to nature still exists in Switzerland?**

I actually believe that we can only look at things holistically. By that I mean that a human being is body, mind and spirit. For a long time, we have carried an over-emphasis on body and mind to extremes: the body as a high-performance machine which must not grow old, and the mind as a computing machine that should control everything. Only by getting in tune with the spirit can the proper balance be restored. This means that we will also have to rediscover the religious dimension.

**Harry Potter and Heidi: do you see them as having anything in common?**

Harry Potter stands more for fantasy and magic, whereas Heidi is much more down-to-earth and realistic. Certainly, the two series can be categorized as literature on education or development. But the main thing they have in common is rather the fascination that they have engendered in both young and older readers that is irrespective of culture.

*Interview by Jana Riedmüller*