

Acceptance Speech

of EAWWE Scientific Award Winner Dr. Ervin Bossanyi June 19, 2014 in Copenhagen

The Award was presented by Prof. Dr. Jakob Mann, Vice President of EAWWE, during the conference dinner of the Torque Conference 2014.

Many thanks Jakob. I am flattered and honoured to receive this award, and delighted to be here in Denmark, in this country of wind power, to accept it.

As a physicist originally, the fact that it's a scientific award means a lot to me. I started my career in wind energy as a university researcher in 1978, looking at grid integration of wind power. There wasn't really any wind energy to integrate in those days, but the common perception was that wind energy could never be of any use for electricity generation because of its intermittency. It wasn't difficult to demonstrate that wind energy could still play a very useful role in replacing the burning of fossil fuels for electricity generation. In those days I was motivated by concern about the unsustainable use of limited fossil fuel reserves, but now of course climate change has become an even more important driver.

I'm also happy that the award comes from the European Academy of Wind Energy, an institution which combines wind power with education, as these are perhaps the two things which the world most desperately needs in order to have a sustainable future: renewable energy, so that society can continue to function at all in a sustainable way, and education, so that as many as possible of the more than 7 billion people on the planet can truly understand the relevant issues, and so that everyone can co-operate with each other in a massive global project which is now required in order to save our civilisation from the threat of climate change. With education, maybe people won't be hoodwinked by propaganda which claims that wind power doesn't work, or makes loud noises, or smells, or whatever you please; with education, we can learn that we don't need ever more material goods in order to be happy; and with education, people won't allow their efforts to be diverted into spurious ideological conflicts which are thwarting the progress of our civilisation around the world.

In order to achieve this level of co-operation, we should abandon a number of outdated ideas which are no longer helpful in a world which is now heavily constrained by physical limits of population and resources, which are pressing on us from every side.

One thing I believe we need to throw away is the concept of "intellectual property". When I first heard this expression, not so many years ago, I was filled with revulsion at the very idea. But the concept gained ground and quickly spread beyond the private sector, so that it now pervades even our universities, those former bastions of open learning and knowledge, and that makes me sad. I believe that any new learning should be donated to mankind for civilisation to use in the best way it can, and not claimed as property by one individual or organisation, which can probably only make limited use of it anyway. In any case, when you have an idea you are building on a massive foundation of ideas freely contributed by others. You are adding a twig to the vast tree of human knowledge, and by claiming IP rights you are stunting or restricting further development.

So the concept of intellectual property hampers progress, and diverts the attention of engineers. It's also a job creation scheme for lawyers, making wind energy more expensive when one of our principal targets is to make it cheaper. So let's not keep secrets, or try to compete with one another. We need to co-operate with one another as we strive towards the common goal of dealing with climate change.

So if you have a new idea, please don't try claiming IP rights. Even if nothing was ever published on it previously, the idea was probably already discussed many years ago in a university engineering department coffee room somewhere. In the early pioneering days, there were many creative engineers who were inspired by the subject, and often dreamed up all sorts of wacky ideas for harnessing the wind. Time and time again in subsequent years I've seen old ideas reinvented, and patent claims made on them. Actually, many of these ideas were previously published, but only on that old-fashioned stuff called paper, with figures drawn by hand with pen and ink, and internet search engines don't find them. And there are so many nuisance patents, small ideas which are really just common sense, too trivial to publish learned papers on, and probably already in use by people who never even thought of patenting them.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm especially pleased to be here at the Torque from Wind conference. So many other conferences are too commercial, and their publications are little more than advertisements, claims to intellectual property if you like, with the details deliberately withheld to prevent any effective use being made of the information. Personally I always like to publish enough detail to make sure that someone else can take over the work if I happen to be run over by a bus. I find that comforting.

So I hope that into the future, this conference continues to maintain its spirit of openness, sharing and co-operation. Then there's still hope for us all! I'd like once again to thank EAWC for thinking of me, and to all of you for listening, and for all your various contributions to the development of wind energy. I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening and the rest of the conference. Thank you very much!