

## FIRST REACTIONS, December 3, 2009

I was only able to attend the second day's workshops and will have to wait until recordings are made generally available before I can write a sensible account of the proceedings. Had I taken the advance publicity literally, my biggest surprise would have been to see that the décideurs mainly stayed away. I was not surprised, however, because I received several reminders the week before the event, strongly suggesting that the organizers were counting on mathematicians to fill the auditorium. There were few jackets and ties in evidence, and the audience members who asked questions identified themselves either as mathematicians or as mathematics teachers. There was also a substantial group of high school students and a sixth round table, a débat entre lycéen-ne-s et mathématicien-ne-s, was added to the program.

Applications were not in evidence during Wendelin Werner's plenary presentation, and I was told that Etienne Ghys took a similar tack during his presentation the first day. Sociologist Michel Grossetti managed to make subversive observations on Maths et Société; as I should have anticipated, several other panelists spoke at length, though without much depth, about the mathematicians' responsibility for the current financial crisis. The mathematicians attending the round tables asked challenging questions, especially during the ressource stratégique panel. The crucial moment of the two-day meeting may well have come when Yann Delabrière, agrégé de mathématiques and president of the auto parts supplier Faurecia, reacted to one of these questions with something along the lines of "so what you want is an éducation nationale fonctionnarisée". He claimed he was being intentionally provocateur, but it was pretty clear to me that he lost his cool. I can't be sure, though, until I've seen the transcript.

Otherwise the program was much as I had predicted. Some of the arguments I had caricatured in November were stated in practically the same form in December, and during the final panel I even heard the word écosystème. My Paris 7 colleague Josselin Garnier summarized the two days' deliberations, with almost supernatural good cheer, in five points broadly compatible with the Lisbon strategy; nevertheless, point 5 :

*Approfondir la réflexion sur la responsabilité et l'éthique des mathématiciens*

provides an opening that I hope my colleagues will know how to exploit.

Prime Minister François Fillon never did show up, but his message, mainly remarkable because it contained so many words of Greek origin, was read aloud in his absence. Champagne was then served in the Salle Odéon of the Mutualité.