



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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Academia Engelberg: Successful Completion of the 6th Dialogue on Science

Global networking, local actions

Access to clean water is in many regions of the world not a matter of course. Without taking into account the cultural, social and economic aspects of the different regions, problems cannot be solved.

This was shown during the three-day conference of Academia Engelberg held from 10 to 12 October 2007. Roughly 120 participants from the worlds of science, industry, politics and society intensively discussed the problematic issue of free access to fresh water for all individuals. Most notably, over one third of the participants were young scientists from all over the globe who used this unique platform to present their projects and to establish contacts with other scientists.

Public or private good?

A controversial discussion was carried out regarding the issue of whether the right to water belongs to public or to private entities. It became obvious during the conference that general statements cannot be made. The differences between countries, and oftentimes between regions, are tremendous. Therefore, the issue should be tackled individually or as Professor Hans Heinimann put it: "Think globally, act locally".

Potential Conflict of water

The probability of war over water is extremely small, according to the evaluation by professor Thomas Bernauer from the Center for Comparative and International Studies of the ETH Zurich. „Even in the past, water has never sparked armed conflict. At best, it has been the external reason overshadowing the real motives of conflict. In the future, differences regarding both water supply and water pollution will arise among states. There is special potential for conflict in Southeast Asia and Africa. Let us hope that these states can solve their problems through dialogue.”

Is food production threatened?

Climate change, the world's fast growing population and the increasing demand for food are all additional factors concerning the water issue. „By the year 2025, developing countries will show an enormously higher demand for food. The International Food Policy Research Institute Washington (IFPRI) estimates that roughly 70 percent more wheat and 120 percent more meat will be needed. This will also have massive impacts on water consumption“, as Mark W. Rosegrant, IFPRI director, explained. „Therefore, it is of utmost importance that all options to improve production processes in agriculture are used. This includes irrigation (single irrigation), plants (optimizing through genetic technology) and infrastructure (roads, markets) in order to bring products more quickly to the markets.“



Worldwide travelling exhibit

Eight young scientists from YES Alumni from around the world presented their most recent project proposals: A worldwide travelling exhibit to raise water consciousness among young people aged 16 to 18. The roughly 700 Yes Alumni are scattered over 90 different countries. In order to carry out the project in all continents, Yes Alumni will set up committees. These regional committees will establish local committees in their respective regions and organize the exhibit on site. Not only the youths of the region, but also the general public should be encouraged to facilitate access to water for everybody and tackle water pollution through local activities.

Water is our future

Members of the Swiss Study Foundation observed the conference and compared its results with their previously established hypothesis. For them, the following findings were remarkable: The problem is not a lack of water, but the fact that water is not supplied to all regions where people live, and water pollution is an issue that has been ignored up until now especially by developing countries.

Bridge between science and society

Fundamental scientific findings are likely to meet strong reservations and encounter mistrust among the general public. Academia Engelberg (www.academia-engelberg.ch) contributes its share to the creation of a new foundation of trust through interdisciplinary dialogue between the scientific community and the general public. Every autumn, personalities from science, industry, culture, politics and society come together with media representatives in Engelberg, Switzerland. The 7th Dialogue on Science on „Growth – Impasse, Alternatives, Opportunities“ will take place next year from 15 to 17 October 2008. Growing world population, increasing consumption of energy and water will be some of the issues to be discussed.

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Images, this media release and additional information are freely available at www.academia-engelberg.ch -> Welcome -> Media.

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