



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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Academia Engelberg: 5th Dialogue on Science ends

Future energy concerns us all

We need to curb our energy consumption dramatically, energy must be used in a more intelligent and sustainable way, and access to energy has to be secured. These are the essential prerequisites if future generations are to have sufficient energy at their disposal.

“Yesterday they didn’t know what they were doing. Today they know, but they do nothing”, was the view of one participant in the Fifth Dialogue on Science of Academia Engelberg, which ended on Wednesday in Engelberg. Around 120 personalities from the worlds of science, business, politics and society debated the issue of “Rethinking our energy future” for three days in Engelberg.

A dialogue that spans the generations

One third of the conference participants were young scientists from the Swiss *Studienstiftung* foundation and from Youth Encounter on Sustainability (YES). At the invitation of ETHsustainability, about 20 YES members had already addressed specific questions on regional energy situations at the traditional summer camp in Braunwald. Some members of this team now presented results of analyses underpinned at the conference and showed areas for action with regard to the situations prevailing in USA / Canada / Oceania, Middle East, India and Europe. Taking India as an example, Zehra Ali from Pakistan and Mudit Narain from India identified the challenges of the subcontinent. In the year 2000, 35 percent of the total population or 90 percent in rural areas had no access to electricity. Sixty percent of the subsidized kerosene is used for lighting. As a result, 2.5 million people suffer burns every year. Air pollution is acute. The warming of the climate is also an issue in Asia.

A challenge for politics and industry

To bring some influence to bear on the decision makers in politics and industry, the World Business Council for Sustainability Development (WBCSD) steered the discussion onto a less emotional level. “We shall achieve more with facts and well-founded development scenarios”, said Jacqueline Coté from the WBCSD. “But the role of the consumer must not be underestimated.” This was underlined also by Paola Ghillani, from Paola Ghillani & Friends. “Consumers have a huge influence. They can save energy through their own behaviour. But they can also consciously select products which are produced efficiently and with low energy consumption or which consume low levels of energy in use. The best example is the choice between the 3-litre car or a hybrid vehicle.”

**The problem lies in putting ideas into practice**

“Climate change will do more harm to the poor countries which contribute least to the causes of climate change“. This was the conclusion of Børge Brende, Norwegian member of parliament and member of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD). He confirmed that there is a global problem of inefficient use of energy, lack of public awareness with regard to energy savings, too little in the way of financial resources to drive developments in the direction of greater energy efficiency and too much in the way of political indecisiveness. But he sees a silver lining to these clouds in the shape of the leading role which the European Union is playing in the promotion of renewable energy. In summing up, Brende confirmed that that “there is no lack of goodwill or insight, the problem lies in putting the ideas into practice.”

The rethink must start now

Ernst von Weizsäcker, a committed environmental scientist and Dean of the Donald Bren School for Environmental Science and Management of the University of California, USA, called for science to come up with sound analytical findings and future scenarios on the energy problem. These findings should then compel the political decision makers to rethink and to act. But the media are also called on to play their part by constantly keeping the careful use of our energy resources uppermost in the public consciousness. We are all called upon to be more careful with energy resources of future generations. What is needed is an interdisciplinary, social and economic dialogue with all the decision makers, as we experienced over the last three days in Engelberg.

Building bridges for science

Fundamental scientific knowledge not infrequently encounters strong reservations and mistrust in the broader population. Academia Engelberg (www.academia-engelberg.ch) tries to do its part in helping to build bridges by fostering a new basis of trust through dialogue between science and the general public. To this end, leading experts from the worlds of science, business, culture, and politics, as well as the media, meet every autumn in Engelberg, Switzerland. The next Dialogue on Science, this time on the subject of Water, will take place from 10 to 12 October 2007.

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