

Look, Listen, Learn! New Report Shows How Swiss and UK Cities Can Help Each Other



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Cities in the United Kingdom and Switzerland have a lot to learn from each other to achieve urban sustainability, according to experts in a new report “Urban Sustainability: a Contradiction in Terms” published today by the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

London, UK (PRWeb UK) June 17, 2010 -- Cities in the United Kingdom and Switzerland have a lot to learn from each other to achieve urban sustainability, according to experts in a new report “Urban Sustainability: a Contradiction in Terms” published today by the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK.

It highlights that the UK and Switzerland are urbanised to similar levels relative to their population. Both countries face the sustainability challenge of making their dense cities attractive and affordable for all age groups and lifestyles. The two countries are also yet to achieve the right balance of localism and top-down decision making.

Despite this, Switzerland has managed to avoid typical problems facing cities such as informal waste management, smog, crime and gated communities. In particular, urban sustainability experts believe the UK can take soundings on the following areas from Switzerland:

- Sustainability commitment starts at a grassroots level: The attitude to sustainable policies is one of trust and acceptance among the Swiss. For instance, the residents of Zürich pledged to reduce energy consumption to the level of a “2000-watt society” by 2050, equivalent to one third of today’s energy consumption. Switzerland already recycles 50% of its waste, compared to the UK national recycling rate of 34.5%.
- Public transport must be efficient and affordable: Swiss cities benefit from a consistent transport policy. Zürich, for instance, has been following the same transport policy since the mid-70s. Moreover, the UK/US approach has been to require public transport to pay its way, while most of Europe including Switzerland has recognised the wider benefits of efficient and affordable public transport and has found alternative sources of funding.
- Long term solutions require tougher regulation and constitutional commitment: There are calls for tougher regulation on the design and performance of buildings in the UK. The City of Basel in Switzerland, for instance, imposes a legal obligation for all flat-roofed buildings to have green roofs. While residents of the City of Zürich voted by a majority of more than 75% to enshrine the

vision of sustainability in the city constitution.

On the other hand, Swiss cities can learn valuable lessons on how to create aesthetically and artistically appealing cities from the UK. London's experience with road traffic and space management might also inform Swiss cities' policy.

Experts cited in the report propose more live dialogue between policy and decision makers in the two countries. Similar dialogue in the past resulted in the UK+CH green roof partnership, which has been a major influence in bringing green roofs into the mainstream in the UK.

H. E. Mr Alexis P. Lautenberg, Ambassador of Switzerland in the UK, said: "Dialogue is critical: to discuss best practices and look at lessons learned, to build networks and cross-fertilise the discussion, to inspire and to find new innovative approaches towards urban sustainability."

The report is based on dialogue between high-profile individuals from the public sector, private sector and Government including author and philosopher Alain de Botton, Professor Peter Roberts of the Homes and Communities Agency, transport and environment advisor Stephen Joseph OBE and Nick Beglinger, CEO of the Foundation for Global Sustainability.

It also includes contributions from Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, Corine Mauch, the Mayor of Zürich and Moritz Leuenberger, Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications.

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Notes to editors:

The dialogues were conducted in March 2010 between the following:

* Urban well being: Alain de Botton, author and philosopher, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Co-Director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London

* Planning: Professor Peter Roberts, Board Member of the Homes and Communities Agency, the UK Government's national housing and regeneration body, and Professor Kees Christiaanse, urban planner and founder and partner of KCAP

* Transport: Stephen Joseph, Executive Director of Campaign for Better Transport, and Christoph Suter, project leader in the Transport Planning Division of the Civil Engineering Office at the City of Zürich

Building: Ian Taylor, Partner at architect Feilden Clegg Bradley, and Nick Beglinger, Co-Founder & CEO of the Foundation for Global Sustainability (FFGS), as well as President of the Swisscleantech business association

• The report is being launched at a invitation-only conference Sustainable Urban Development – Visions from Switzerland and the UK hosted by the Swiss Embassy in London on 17th June

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