

Switzerland as a global sustainability hub

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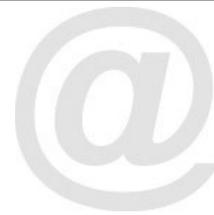
Dr. Katrin Muff, Dean of Business School Lausanne, Bruno Oberle, Director of the Federal Office of the Environment, Jean Laville, Deputy CEO of Swiss Sustainable Finance, Nick Beglinger, President of swisscleantech, Paul Polman CEO of Unilever

Five hundred people from more than 40 countries met in Lausanne at the annual Business-for-Society Forum to discuss positioning Switzerland as a global sustainability hub. This is not the first time such an idea has been promoted. Variations on this theme have been mooted previously by the government, think tanks and universities alike. What makes this proposal interesting is the wide cross-disciplinary participation that the forum secured, and that it went some way to identify what can be realistically achieved by Switzerland, and how.

Generally, opinions on Switzerland's future range from despondency about its banking industry and fast-rising immigration to positive assertions of its deep ecological roots, social values and international reputation. What the forum has brought out is far more useful. It clearly outlines the opportunity that this country has to focus its resources and innovation capabilities on sustainability. It also highlights Switzerland's ability to balance economic, environmental and social needs successfully.

If Switzerland can achieve this, the thinking goes, then not only are there distinct advantages for the country itself, but more importantly, for other economies which would have a model to follow. But attaining this balance will be a stretch. Each year, Switzerland uses nearly twice as many resources as can be replenished in the

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same amount of time.

The question now is whether Business-for-Society can sustain the momentum. To its advantage, however, the forum was hosted by the Business School of Lausanne and involved key panellists such as Bruno Oberle, Director, Federal Environment Office; Nick Beglinger, President of swisscleantech; plus moderator Paul Polman, the CEO of Unilever. Without doubt, such heavy-weight support from business and political circles represent the two most important constituencies, and ones which will not waste their time on initiatives that won't work.