

Bern, 24 June 2011

Open government data gathers momentum in Switzerland

With every available place taken, opendata.ch 2011, the first conference on freely accessible government data in Switzerland, took place at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne today. The more than 150 participants, including parliamentarians, senior administrators and representatives of business, research and the media, discussed the advantages and challenges of open government data in Switzerland and agreed on some of the next key steps.

The opendata.ch 2011 conference was inaugurated by Edith Graf-Litscher, National Councillor and Co-Chair of the Parliamentarian Group for Digital Sustainability, and Andreas Kellerhals, Director of the Swiss Federal Archives. The opening address was given by Nigel Shadbolt, Professor at the University of Southampton and member of the UK's Public Sector Transparency Board. In an inspiring speech he highlighted the far-reaching transformative potential of open government data for people and governments alike, both now and in the future. Other speakers, including Jean-Philippe Amstein, Director of the Federal Office of Topography swisstopo, Hans-Peter Thür, Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner, and Peter Fischer, the Delegate for Federal IT Strategy, echoed Shadbolt's sentiments but also pointed to the challenges for Switzerland in dealing with freely accessible government data. Finally Martin Stoll, chair of the newly created freedom of information organisation [Öffentlichkeitsgesetz.ch](http://oeffentlichkeitsgesetz.ch) and head of the research desk at the *SonntagsZeitung* newspaper, described the shortcomings in current implementation of Switzerland's Freedom of Information Act.

In the afternoon, six different workshops examined the many facets of open government data in greater depth. In the Politics session, parliamentarians and administration representatives discussed creating the conditions necessary to support the release of government data. The Technology workshop looked at specific implementation scenarios and the challenges they pose. The Legal group, which was attended mainly by lawyers, addressed the delicate legal issues associated with open government data. In the Data Journalism workshop, journalists and media representatives learned more about the new trend in researching large volumes of data. The Open Government Data und Business session, moderated by the Bern University of Applied Sciences, focused on the frequent lack of clarity in business models based on freely accessible government information, while the Science workshop considered the new research opportunities that will result from publication of the databases.

The second guest speaker from abroad, Rufus Pollock, Associate of the University of Cambridge and Director of the Open Knowledge Foundation, talked about the international context of the global open government movement and called on conference participants to take bold steps towards obtaining the release of further government data. The closing address was given by National Councillor Christian Wasserfallen, the second Co-Chair of the Parliamentarian Group for Digital Sustainability. He encouraged all participants to take seriously the Swiss open government data manifesto that was launched at the conference, and to play an active part in securing implementation of its demands.

The opendata.ch 2011 conference was jointly organised by the Parliamentarian Group for Digital Sustainability and the Swiss Federal Archives. Administration was coordinated by the Swiss Open Systems User Group [/ch/open](http://ch/open) and the event was sponsored by itopia and Ernst & Young. The Swiss open government data manifesto, the slide presentations and other articles on the conference will be available shortly on the website www.opendata.ch.

Contact opendata.ch 2011 conference

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