



New Directions in Energy Supply

A revolutionary like Zwingli before him: Through his work, climate researcher Reto Knutti actively encourages people to change the way they think. ETH Zurich professor Reto Knutti develops computer models that simulate climate change. To him, delivering the message behind the data is just as important as the data itself.

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Mr Knutti, there are still many people who doubt that climate change is happening. What do you have to say to them?

People are chiefly responsible for global warming. That is a fact. The physical principles have been clear for over a century, and observations leave us in no doubt. The real debate that we should be having is not whether climate change is happening, but how we as a society address these risks, and what steps we intend to take to adapt and reduce emissions.

Climate change is a matter of urgency. “The course must be set,” you say in the video. What specifically needs to be done, and how do we go about it?

If we intend to reach the climate target of a maximum of 2°C, we must achieve virtually zero CO₂ emissions in Switzerland by 2050. That will take a variety of measures – in terms of transportation, buildings, industry, agriculture. And fast. The longer we wait, the more difficult and expensive the solution will become. We have caused the problem, so we have to solve it. We cannot leave it to the next generation.

Is it even possible to influence global development from Switzerland?

If there is a global problem, everyone must contribute to solving it, regardless of their size. And if we in Switzerland, with our expertise, financial means, and political and social system, are unable to show that this transformation is possible, who can? But then there is the innovation factor, too: If we succeed in developing attractive solutions, the world will want to buy or replicate them. And that gives us huge additional leverage.

For centuries, Zurich has been the birthplace of significant ideas and approaches that are relevant to society. What is it that makes Zurich an attractive research location for you?

At the ETH Zurich we have an excellent infrastructure, outstanding international scientists and students, and the freedom to explore new directions. For our work to also find its way into society, it takes open-mindedness and a willingness to put new ideas into practice. This openness toward people and ideas is actively lived in Zurich.

Zurich is an exemplary city on environmental issues. Can it also be a role model when it comes to climate change?

Of course! It is already further than other places, but even in a leading position you cannot afford to stand still. And success is not down to politics or the city council alone, it also depends on the people who live and work here. Everyone can do something. And we are still only at the beginning.

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