



# PolitExchange

Competence Center of the Capital Region Switzerland  
for Governance Study Visits

## Governance – Swiss approaches to a universal issue

Governance issues are universal. The Swiss political system incorporates several interesting governance features: federalism and decentralization, the accommodation of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, instruments of direct democracy, financial equalization, a focus on consensus and compromise – and last but not least, political stability and public services that meet the highest standards. The Swiss system may not be a universal blueprint, but it does offer vast expertise and experience of peaceful approaches toward the accommodation of different interests and managing political conflict. We believe that sharing this can be a source of inspiration for other countries.

## The Swiss governance experience, made tangible by the Capital Region Switzerland

The Capital Region Switzerland ([hauptstadtregion.ch](http://hauptstadtregion.ch)) is an association of cantons, regions and municipalities around Bern, the capital and political center of Switzerland. In 2017 the association founded PolitExchange ([politexchange.ch](http://politexchange.ch)), a competence center for the organization of governance study visits. PolitExchange aims to share the expertise and experience of the Capital Region in political decision making and the practical implementation of those decisions, making these tangible and understandable to international visitors. The Capital Region Switzerland has assigned the management of PolitExchange to Ximpulse ([ximpulse.ch](http://ximpulse.ch)), a consultancy firm with international competence in managing democracy, decentralization and disputes in fragile and conflict-affected areas.



## Study visits by PolitExchange: responsive, practice-oriented and tailor-made

Our study visits make the Swiss experience of various governance issues perceptible through exchanges with the experts that deal with these issues every day. The Capital Region Switzerland enables direct access to political processes and institutions at federal, cantonal, regional and municipal levels. Multilevel governance – the multifaceted interaction and cooperation between the different levels of government – is a key aspect of successful democratic and decentralized governance and conflict management and is often at the forefront of the study agenda.

PolitExchange study visits are tailor-made, responding to the aims and needs of our guests. What topics interest them? What is the purpose of the visit to Switzerland? Should the visit primarily offer technical inspiration for new solutions? Is the delegation composed of members with heterogenous views - does the visit then also concern the building of trust internally? We clarify the expectations of the delegation and adjust the program, the selection of experts and methods accordingly. We inform our experts beforehand about the delegation's expectations and ensure tailor-made exchanges.

Our study visits thus have different focuses: technical issues or political steering of public responsibilities, financial or political aspects, the experiences of the executive or on the parliamentary dimension. We find relevant experts from the Capital Region Switzerland who can share valuable insights from their own practical experiences. Our methods emphasize practice examples and shared reflection: visitors should understand which factors contribute to success and the challenges which affect implementation. This helps the visitors to draw on the Swiss experience for inspiration for their own context.

[www.politexchange.ch](http://www.politexchange.ch)

## Study visits on important governance issues, such as:

**Decentralization and multi-level governance:** The cantons and municipalities of the Capital Region Switzerland open their doors to delegations and show their successes, but also reflect critically on their own constantly evolving challenges.

**Democratic participation:** Although a small space geographically, the Capital Region Switzerland offers a rich diversity of models and examples of political participation, with different mechanisms and processes that give citizens a voice and balance political interests at all three levels of government.

**Approaches to diversity, accommodation of minorities:** The Capital Region Switzerland is bilingual. The Cantons of Freiburg and Bern and the city of Biel/Bienne can offer many concrete examples on these topics.

**Management and mediation of conflicts of interests, e.g. in the context of major infrastructure projects:** The discussion regarding success factors and challenges related to major infrastructure projects is an ongoing topic for local authorities and civil society. From our experience, delegations are often welcome to join in.



**Natural resource management, e.g. water:** The Capital Region Switzerland offers countless possibilities to show the interaction between federal, cantonal and municipal authorities in the management of water, for example while walking along a river or creek and talking to the relevant authorities.

**Governance of the education system, in particular vocational training:** The Capital Region Switzerland enables access to relevant experts and stakeholders, including inter-cantonal conferences responsible for coordination between the cantons.

## Selected comments relating to our study visits

**Tim Enderlin, Regionaldirektor für Laos und die Mekong-Region, DEZA, Vientiane:** «Wir wollten unseren Gesprächspartnern in Laos die Schweizer Perspektive von Governance und der Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft zeigen und ihr Verständnis für unsere Anliegen in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit stärken – mit Hilfe von PolitExchange ist das ausgezeichnet gelungen. Die Delegation aus Laos war auf ihrem kurzen Studienbesuch von der Vielfalt des Programms, vom Reichtum und der Qualität des Austausches beeindruckt und fand die vermittelten Anregungen sehr wertvoll.»



**Meraj Hamayun Khan, Chair of the Women Parliamentary Caucus, Parliamentary Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan:** «These days in Switzerland made me further realise that giving a voice to everyone and a sense of compromise is key for overcoming linguistic and religious differences in a democratic way.»

**Artan Shkempi, Director of the Agency of Territorial and Administrative Reform, Ministry of Local Affairs, Albania:** «The exchange visit to Switzerland was a unique experience. I have seen political approaches and mechanisms that seemed impossible to me before I came here. They are complex and sometimes complicated but they work. Such experience opens up your mind – and makes you ask new questions about your own context.»

**Claudine Haenni, Peace and Human Rights Advisor, Embassy of Switzerland, Yangon – Myanmar:** «Les délégations en visite ont beaucoup apprécié l'ouverture et le temps mis à disposition par les membres de la Région capitale suisse pour comprendre concrètement comment notre fédéralisme nous permet de vivre en harmonie avec nos spécificités régionales. Des rencontres avec des praticiens par exemple en ce qui concerne la façon de vivre le plurilinguisme ont rendu compréhensible notre culture politique variée de façon plus utile que des exemples abstraits.»

**Abiot Maronge, Director, Ministry for Rural Local Authorities, Zimbabwe:** «Study visits have the potential to help in strengthening relations between the respective countries and thus opening opportunities for collaboration at a higher level. Furthermore, they may facilitate cross-pollination of experiences, approaches and ideas and in the process stimulate new strategies to address practical issues of concern to the collaborating parties. In addition, study visits may also assist to widen one's horizon with respect to what can be attained towards advancing the development agenda.»