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## **Metropolitan Governance in Switzerland: Finally Some New Regionalism?**

van der Heiden, N

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# Metropolitan governance in Switzerland Finally some new regionalism?

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## **Abstract**

Questions of metropolitan governance were not on the agenda in Switzerland for decades. Swiss metropolitan areas are highly fragmented and the political entities rather compete than cooperate. Scholars therefore argued that Switzerland followed the idea of the public choice approach in metropolitan governance. However, recent changes indicate a move towards the ideas of the new regionalism approach. There are a few amalgamations of communes that took place recently and the federal state has installed an agglomeration program with financial incentives for cooperation schemes in metropolitan areas. The article looks at the overall picture of recent trends in Swiss metropolitan areas and especially at the installation of the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich*. I conclude that these recent trends are rather first attempts to implement aspects of metropolitan governance into a static federal system than part of a major restructuring of it.

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## 1. Introduction

Switzerland maintains an image as a country of cows, chocolate, and Heidi. Despite this rural impression that is actively promoted for tourist reasons, Switzerland is nowadays one of the most urbanized countries worldwide. About three quarter of its inhabitants live in urban areas. The political-spatial organization of the country however has not kept up with this constant urban sprawl and that is why Linder (1994: 77) called metropolitan areas "the lost dimension of Swiss federalism". The three-tier federal system of Switzerland has not undergone many changes since its installation in 1848 and certainly not rapturous ones. The organization in twenty-six cantons has seen only one adaption over the last 150 years with the secession of the canton of Jura from the canton of Berne. Although there is a recent trend to amalgamate communes<sup>1</sup>, this mostly concerns (very) small rural communes. Switzerland with its still more than 2'500 communes with on average of about 800 inhabitants is still one of the most fragmented countries concerning its political-administrative organization on the local level.

This fragmentation is high in urban areas as well; the agglomeration of Zurich now contains 132 communes that spread over three cantons (Schuler et al. 2005). The metropolitan area<sup>2</sup> of Zurich even contains 221 communes with about 1.675 million inhabitants, whereas the core city Zurich has as little as 365'000 inhabitants. This high fragmentation of the political-administrative organization is common to all Swiss metropolitan areas. In Swiss agglomerations with more than 200'000 inhabitants, only 30% of its inhabitants live in the core city. With an average of 21 communes for each 100'000 inhabitants of these agglomerations, the fragmentation index<sup>3</sup> of 0.73 is higher than the respective figures in the USA, Germany, and all other countries except France (see Table 1, Hoffmann-Martinot and Sellers 2005).

At the same time, the number of people living and working in the same commune has steadily decreased and mobility consequently has increased. The "urban pudding" of Switzerland with its excellent transport links allows the entanglement of the living and working spaces of its inhabitants. This leads to an enormous functional interdependence of communes as the spatial orientation of their inhabitants goes way beyond their political administrative boundaries. We thus witness a mismatch between the high functional interdependence and the high political independence of communes within metropolitan areas.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "commune" to refer to the local scale of government.

<sup>2</sup> The Swiss statistical office defines two layers of urbanization: (smaller) agglomerations and (larger) metropolitan areas. The exact definitions can be found in Schuler (2005).

<sup>3</sup> The fragmentation index is calculated as the share of the core city of the agglomeration inhabitants divided by the number of communes for every 100'000 inhabitants (Zeigler and Brunn 1980).

Table 1: Institutional fragmentation of Swiss agglomerations with more than 200'000 inhabitants

Country	Relation of core city / agglomeration inhabitants	Number of communes for every 100'000 inhabitants	Fragmentation index
Sweden	58%	2	0.03
Canada	66%	1	0.04
Hungary	75%	3	0.17
Germany	31%	18	0.63
USA	34%	15	0.71
Switzerland	30%	21	0.73
France	36%	32	1.06

Source: Hoffmann-Martinot and Sellers (2005)

Switzerland has thus long been considered a classic example of a traditional federal state organization. Communes had considerable freedom in policy making within a regional (i.e. cantonal) setting and cantons had even more freedom in policy making within a relatively weak national state. Cities and city-regions have not had any special role within this vertical federal system (Kübler et al. 2003). Metropolitan governance was not on the agenda in Switzerland until recently. It is the goal of my paper to investigate these recent trends. I will do this by following the theoretical discussion of metropolitan governance over the last 50 years. I will thus present the metropolitan reform tradition, the public choice approach, and, as a more recent approach, the new regionalism thesis. Each theoretical approach will guide the analysis of Swiss metropolitan areas. In a last step, I will focus on the recent project within the largest Swiss metropolitan area Zurich. Here, the installation of the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* is one step towards a new regionalist approach to metropolitan governance.

## **2. Theoretical conceptions of metropolitan governance**

The missing congruence between the functional space and the political-administrative organization in urban areas has led to a theoretical debate where two opposing positions have remained static for decades. Only in the 1990s, the new regionalism approach has set off the debate between the metropolitan reformers and the public choice theorists (Kübler 2003).

### **2.1 Metropolitan reformers**

Metropolitan reformers argue that only overcoming the incongruence between the functional space and the political-administrative organization can solve the problems in metropolitan areas (Downs 1994; Savitch and Vogel 2000). Problems identified are the centrality burdens

of core cities, the inefficiency in the production of public goods, the attachment of the democratic rights to the home town, and the social segregation into leftist core cities and conservative agglomeration communities (Kübler 2003: 536; Wood 1958).

Because cooperation between the communes within a metropolitan area is voluntary, the spread of metropolitan areas with an increasing number of communes makes cooperation even harder in the long run. Only if the political-administrative boundaries adapt to the socio-economic realities of metropolitan areas, political steering is still possible according to the metropolitan reformers. Such an adaptation can take two forms: First, through the amalgamation of the communes within one metropolitan area the congruence between the political-administrative organization and the functional space can be recovered. Second, an additional political layer at the level of the metropolitan area (metropolitan government) can overcome the impossibility of communes to cooperate in these domains. This metropolitan government is responsible for the steering of policy areas that are of importance for the whole metropolitan area. Scholars from the metropolitan reform tradition demand that such a fourth layer of the federal state should be independent from the other layers and democratically legitimate through direct elections of its government (Wood 1958).

### **Amalgamations**

Looking at Swiss metropolitan areas reveals that both demands have not found great response in the political debate. Amalgamations of communes within metropolitan areas predominantly took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Zurich for example amalgamated with eleven agglomeration communes in 1893 and with eight more in 1934. The boundaries of the communes within the metropolitan area of Zurich have hardly changed since then<sup>4</sup>. Although the urban sprawl is unbowed since the Second World War, this has not led a major political restructuring of the fragmented urban areas.

Only very recently, two agglomerations have undergone a reshaping of their political boundaries. In 2004, the core city of Lugano merged with eight agglomeration communes. Another amalgamation with four agglomeration communes was planned for 2008, but the inhabitants of Cadro refused the project in a popular vote, so only three communes joined the city in 2008. Although the cantonal law foresees the possibility of forced amalgamations, the canton did not enforce Cadro to join Lugano which is an enclave within the boundaries of the city since then. The second example is the amalgamation of the agglomeration commune of Littau

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<sup>4</sup> Some amalgamations recently took place at the margins of the metropolitan area and outside of the canton of Zurich,

with the core city of Lucerne in 2010. Although Lucerne plans to merge with other agglomeration communes, it is uncertain if such attempts would gain a majority in a popular vote in the respective communes. Almost any attempt for amalgamations, both in rural and urban areas, is opposed by the right-wing party SVP (*Schweizerische Volkspartei*) and they often succeeded in popular referenda against the amalgamation plans. It is argued that the sense of belonging would be destroyed and that the influence of one single inhabitant in the (direct-) democratic procedures is bigger in smaller communes.

These examples highlight that amalgamations in Swiss metropolitan areas are voluntary and thus dependent on the willingness of the inhabitants of each commune due to the direct-democratic veto possibilities. The financial incentives from the cantonal governments helped to overcome the unwillingness to merge with the core city in the case of Lugano. In Lucerne, the financial contribution for the amalgamation of the two communes from the canton was rejected by a clear majority of the cantonal population in a referendum. This again proves that amalgamations, especially the ones in urban areas, have a hard stance in gaining a majority. With the extensive direct democratic possibilities at both the local and the regional scale, the population can downturn almost any attempt of reshaping political-administrative boundaries.

The above mentioned examples of reshaping the political boundaries in Swiss metropolitan areas are rare examples up to now. Even these two metropolitan areas are still far from a congruence of its political-administrative organization with its functional territory. In both cases, the agglomeration communes in total still have more inhabitants than the core city despite the amalgamations.

### **Metropolitan governments**

Metropolitan government institutions were established in almost all OECD countries, prominent examples are the Greater London Authority, the *Communautés urbaines* in France, or the *Verband Region Stuttgart*. Many of them have a difficult history, being abolished, and some of them then re-established (Lefèvre 2001). This fourth layer of government usually had a hard stand against resistance from the local or the regional scale (Lefèvre 1998). There have been several attempts in Swiss metropolitan areas to establish such metropolitan layers of government as well, although they were called "agglomeration conferences" or "agglomeration boards". The most recent creation of such an institution is the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* (see below). Attempts in other metropolitan areas have remained weakly institutiona-

lized (Klöti and Serdült 1997) and none of them has gained the institutional power of the examples from other countries mentioned above (see Blatter 2005; Heinelt and Kübler 2005).

Three Swiss metropolitan institutions deal with cross-border relations (see Lezzi 2000): the *Conseil du Léman* in Geneva, the *Trinationale Agglomeration Basel*, and the *Regio Insubrica* in the Ticino region. Other metropolitan institutions within the national borders are the *Lausanne Région*, the *Regionalkonferenz Bern-Mittelland* (see Scheuss 2005), or the *Agglo Fribourg*. No organizational form dominates the cooperation schemes in Swiss metropolitan areas as each of the mentioned examples has its distinct organization form. The *Agglo Fribourg* is the only example of a Swiss metropolitan government that has directly elected members of a legislative body. Most other institutions are assemblies of communal delegates from the local executive and their representatives are thus only indirectly elected. The newly set up *Regionalkonferenz Bern-Mittelland* is the only one that has direct-democratic instruments at the scale of the agglomeration. The inhabitants of the agglomeration Berne have the direct-democratic instruments of initiatives and referenda at the agglomeration scale as they have it on the communal or cantonal level<sup>5</sup>. The creation of the new organization was accepted by 81% of the popular votes within the hundred communes that are now part of this metropolitan institution. All of the mentioned metropolitan bodies have some responsibilities in coordinating policy areas important for the well-being of the metropolitan area, as e.g. spatial planning, or transport.

Common to all these projects of metropolitan governance is the voluntary character of their creation. There has never been any hierarchical steering (as it was for example the case in France with the installation of the *communautés urbaines*) to force communes into a metropolitan governance scheme. Consequently, the cooperation forms remain limited in their scope as well as in their democratic legitimacy. The mentioned examples are incremental steps towards a political steering of Swiss metropolitan areas and far from realizing the theoretical ideas from the metropolitan reformer tradition. We can thus conclude that the ideas of the metropolitan reform tradition have not set foot in the organizational structure of Swiss metropolitan areas. Attempts to decrease the mismatch between the functional space and the political-administrative organization have hardly followed the ideas of metropolitan governments or of amalgamations within the functionally interlinked territories.

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<sup>5</sup> As the new organization has taken up its activities only very recently (in January 2010), no popular vote has yet taken place.

## 2.2 Public Choice

Contrary to the metropolitan reformers, public choice theorists do not see the high fragmentation in metropolitan areas as a problem. E contrario, they highlight the positive aspects of this fragmentation and refer to problems with amalgamations and metropolitan governments (V. Ostrom et al. 1961). A positive aspect of a high fragmentation is the competition of political-administrative entities that leads to low costs in providing public goods. As citizens can "vote with their feet" (Tiebout 1956) and thus leave the commune they live in, communes are in strong competition with each other, mainly on a low tax rate. Consequently, the more communes there are in a metropolitan area the better, as this increases the competition between them. Amalgamations however, destroy this competition and lead to a monopoly of the political entity. The exit-option for the inhabitants gets severely restricted<sup>6</sup> and the incentive for public bodies to produce efficient public goods is undermined.

The same argument is true for the shifting of decision making power to a newly created metropolitan government (E. Ostrom 1983). Here as well, a monopoly on the metropolitan scale replaces the competition of local communes. Problems of the fragmentation within metropolitan areas, which are undisputed by proponents of the public choice approach, could be solved by increasing inter-communal cooperation schemes but without the creation of new layers of government and without the amalgamation of communes<sup>7</sup>.

Switzerland has long been considered a typical model of the public choice approach to metropolitan governance. Indeed, with its very high fragmentation of political entities in metropolitan areas (see above) and their considerable freedom in fiscal policies (Kübler and Ladner 2002: 140), competition between these entities is indeed high. Amalgamations have been rare, and even in these cases where they took place, there is considerable competition left as these amalgamations have never comprised more than halve of the respective agglomeration. Metropolitan government bodies have only very limited responsibilities and the decision making power remains in the hands of the communes in most cases. Often, the transfer of decision making power to the metropolitan scale necessitates the unanimous consent of all involved communes and thus scarcely happens.

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<sup>6</sup> One could still move to another metropolitan area, but voting by feet within the same metropolitan area is not possible anymore.

<sup>7</sup> The approach of functional overlapping competition jurisdictions (FOCJ) goes one step further and demands spatially flexible and overlapping bodies in one or several policy areas to fully exploit economies of scale without the necessity for amalgamations (Frey and Eichenberger 2001)

However, the problems of centrality burdens remain to a large extent unsolved in Swiss metropolitan areas. Although inter-communal fiscal transfers have been established in most cantons and even the federal state now accounts for centrality burdens of cities in its own fiscal transfer system between the cantons, the redistribution remains relatively limited (Kübler 2007: 271f.). The sheer number of inter-communal cooperation schemes in urban areas (Kübler and Ladner 2002: 145ff.; Steiner 2002) additionally points to the importance of the public choice concept for metropolitan governance in Switzerland. However, experiments with the FOCJ-approach, although developed in Switzerland, have remained very limited up to now.

A primary conclusion is thus that Switzerland has followed first and foremost the model of public choice in its organization of metropolitan areas. The combination of direct democracy with the autonomy of communes has retarded changes of the political-administrative boundaries in Swiss metropolitan areas. Reform elements proposed by the metropolitan reform tradition are consequently scarce but have gained some importance recently.

### **2.3 New Regionalism**

The theoretical debate between metropolitan reformers and public choice theorists became unsatisfactory after more than fifty years without any progress. The question whether institutional fragmentation was something good or bad remained unsolved and that is why, from the 1990s on, a new theoretical concept emerged that can be subsumed under the term 'new regionalism' (Friskén and Norris 2001). New regionalists start from the observation that political steering capacity in metropolitan areas is nowadays made by a complex interlinked system of political actors (Keating 1998; Le Galès 2002). This system is clearly less than an institutionalized cooperation structure as demanded by the metropolitan reformers. It is however, more than just a purely functionalistic cooperation of autonomous communes as proposed by the public choice theorists. It is irrelevant whether the actors cooperating for the political steering capacity of metropolitan areas will come from the public or the private sector as long as they are committed to the same goals at the metropolitan scale (Norris 2001).

One of the core arguments of the new regionalist approach is that no best solution for all metropolitan areas and all policy areas can be theoretically predefined. Contrariwise, solutions to the functional integration of several communes within metropolitan areas must respect local peculiarities concerning institutional, economic, social, and political factors (Kübler 2003: 539; Savitch and Vogel 2000) as well as differences between policy areas (van der Heiden et

al. 2009). It is thus impossible to define an ideal system of metropolitan governance across metropolitan areas and across policy areas.

However, the new regionalist approach identified two aspects that help fostering cooperation within metropolitan areas despite the local peculiarities. First, hierarchical steering (Scharpf 2000) from upper-level governments helps to overcome resistance towards cooperation on the municipal level by setting respective (financial) incentives (Downs 1994; Savitch and Kantor 2002). Questions of metropolitan governance have thus become questions of multi-level governance and one needs to investigate the role of the regional, national, as well as the EU government in processes of metropolitan governance (Brenner 2003). Second, political leadership can push the vision of metropolitan governance and thereby the communes' willingness to cooperate. Because cooperation is basically voluntary, a political leader can use the metropolitan governance issue to present him towards the electorate as the one that enabled the cooperation. Strong personal commitment towards a vision of metropolitan governance can gather actors from the private and the public sector behind the leader and the metropolitan vision (as it happened for example in the case of Lyon, see Mabrouk and Jouve 1999).

### ***3. The metropolitan area of Zurich and the Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich***

Switzerland has, according to the population census in the year 2000, currently fifty agglomerations, three isolated cities and five metropolitan areas. The metropolitan area of Zurich is the biggest of the five Swiss metropolitan areas, followed by Basle, Geneva-Lausanne, Berne, and Ticino (see Map 1)<sup>8</sup>. It currently consists of about 1.675 million inhabitants and has grown from roughly one million inhabitants in 1980 (Kübler 2004b: 176). The three biggest agglomerations within the metropolitan area of Zurich are Zurich, Winterthur, and Baden. It spreads over seven cantons (Aargau, Schaffhausen, St. Gallen, Schwyz, Thurgau, Zug and Zurich) and includes 221 communes.

#### **3.1 Initiation and members**

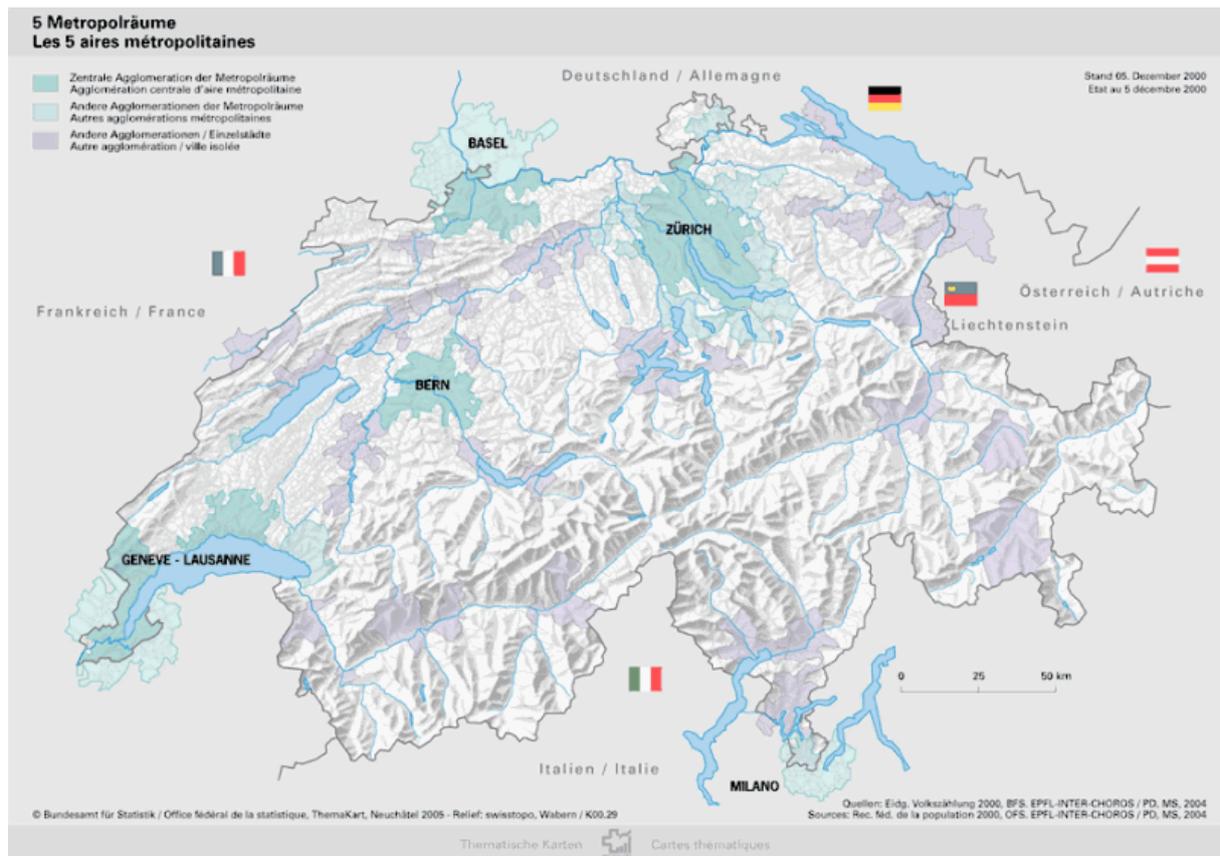
The kick-off meeting for the installation of the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* was the fifth agglomeration conference that took place in July 2009. The canton of Zurich, the cities of Zurich and Winterthur, and the association of communal mayors of the canton of Zurich in-

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<sup>8</sup> The federal statistical office has recently revised its definition of metropolitan areas (see Ernst Basler + Partner AG 2007). Now, only Zurich, Basle, and Geneva-Lausanne are considered metropolitan areas, whereas Berne is considered a capital city region (Hauptstadtregion) and the region Como-Chiasso-Mendrisio is considered a neighborhood agglomeration of Milano.

initiated the agglomeration conferences and from the discussions within these agglomeration conferences, the new metropolitan structure emerged. The cantonal councilor for interior affairs, Markus Notter, was especially engaged in the agglomeration conferences and in the setting up of a metropolitan governance body.

Map 1: The five Swiss metropolitan areas



Source: Federal statistical office 2010

([http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/11/geo/analyse\\_regionen/04.parsys.0003.PhotogalleryDownloadFile4.tmp/k00.29s.pdf](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/11/geo/analyse_regionen/04.parsys.0003.PhotogalleryDownloadFile4.tmp/k00.29s.pdf) )

Currently (July 2010), eight cantons and 107 municipalities are members of the association. Besides these political entities from two levels (cantonal and communal), eleven organizations are associated members: the Suva (Swiss accident insurance fund), the RZU (Regional Planning Zurich and Environment), the GZA (Greater Zurich area, i.e. the locational politics organization), another two cantons, and another six communes (see Map 2)<sup>9</sup>.

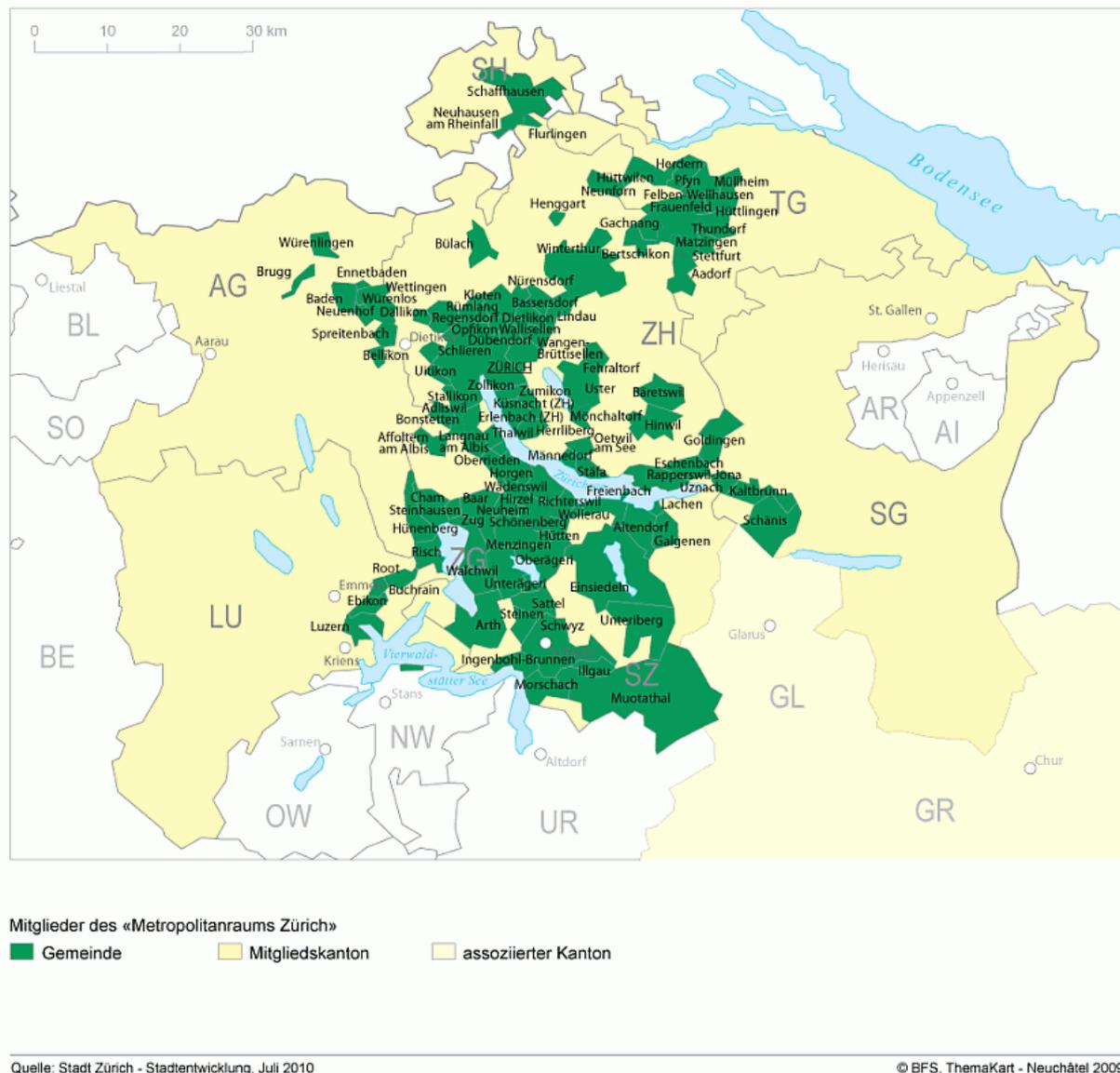
<sup>9</sup> All information can be accessed at <http://www.metropolitanraum-zuerich.ch>.

Two things are striking about this organization form: First, semi-private institutions are incorporated into the organization. There is thus a form of public-(semi)private partnership structure in the association. Second, the membership within the *Verein* is not congruent with the statistical definition of the metropolitan area. Many communes from within the statistical boundaries of the metropolitan area have refused to join the association, whereas others from outside the statistical boundaries were eager to join. The canton of Lucerne is a full member of the association although its territory is completely outside the boundaries of the metropolitan area. The membership structure is thus very flexible and set according to the logic of variable geometry. However, the membership structure remains a patchwork (as can be seen in Map 2).

The organizational form of an association is quite particular for a metropolitan governance body. It is a privately organized association with voluntary membership. It is possible to retreat from the association with prior notification one year in advance and no one is able to force any regional or local entity to join the association. This weak organizational form has been chosen intentionally because resistance from the communal level against a more institutionalized form was expected from the beginning. It is explicitly mentioned on the homepage of the association that it "will not touch the autonomy of the involved political entities" (my translation). The easy exit option should lower the hurdles for communes to join the association. Even with this very weak organizational form, only about half of the communes from within the statistical boundaries of the metropolitan area have joined the association so far, although the number of members is constantly rising.

### **3.2 Operational structure**

The general decision making body of the association is the metropolitan conference. Every member canton and every member commune sends one delegate to this conference that is split up into two chambers: The cantonal chamber and the communal chamber. It is foreseen that the majors of the communes participate (Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich 2009: 5). For the first 2'000 inhabitants, a commune gets one vote in the communal chamber. For every additional 4'000 inhabitants, the commune gets another vote. Although this organizational structure is thus laid out for majority voting, such majority decisions were hardly necessary. Almost all decisions were taken unanimously. The metropolitan conference takes place once or twice a year and debates the general orientation of the association.

Map 2: Members of the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich***Metropolitanraum Zürich: Vereinsmitglieder**

Source: Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich (<http://www.metropolitanraum-zuerich.ch/metropolitanraum.html>)

The metropolitan council is the steering committee of the association. It consists of sixteen members (one from each member canton and the same number of delegates from the communes, all representatives have to be members of their respective executive branch). The metropolitan council is responsible for the organization of the meetings of the metropolitan conference, it decides on operational matters, and it employs the general secretary. It also appoints the members of the operational committee which is comprised of members from the cantonal and communal bureaucracy. The current (and first) president of the metropolitan council is the cantonal councilor from Zurich, Markus Notter.

Four working groups have been founded within the association so far: Economy, transport, society, and living space. The participation within the working groups is open for all members that want to cooperate within the specific policy area. The association thereby only provides the platform for a further cooperation of certain of its members in one policy domain. It thereby again follows the approach of variable geometry as every canton and every commune is free to decide where and when to participate. The number of working groups is also not limited but dependent on the initiative of the members. These working groups can propose projects to the metropolitan conference and ask for subsidies from the participating cantons and communes. The annual budget of the association in total is about 200'000 Euros. Only the general secretary and the costs of the meetings are covered by this budget.

### **3.3 Metropolitan reform?**

Is the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* a first step towards a metropolitan government? One would not suspect so by looking at the current state of the organization. The institutionalization of the association is very weak. It is far from being a fourth layer of government simply because it completely lacks an administrative body. The voluntary membership for the communes makes a congruence of the functional space with the boundaries of the association virtually impossible. With its open membership structure that allows the membership of cantons and communes from outside the perimeter of the metropolitan area, no clear boundaries of the association are drawn. The membership structure is also almost totally detached from the functional interlinkages within the metropolitan area. The association can furthermore not be seen as a first step towards the amalgamation of communes in the metropolitan area. The fact that the autonomy of the cantons and of the communes is explicitly mentioned in the mission statement of the metropolitan organization shows the importance of the traditional three-tier federal system of Switzerland. Metropolitan reformers' demand for a high independence from the other layers of government is thus not achieved in the metropolitan organization of Zurich. The politicians acting on the metropolitan level are only indirectly elected which additionally undermines the independence of the metropolitan level. The set-up of the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* does consequently not reflect the ideas of the metropolitan reformers and will most likely not develop into this direction in the future.

### **3.4 Public choice?**

Consequently, the above mentioned domination of the Swiss metropolitan organization by public choice ideas remains almost untouched by the installation of the *Verein Metropolita-*

*nraum Zürich*. The competition of the involved communes and cantons continues to be strong, as concrete policy specific cooperation within the metropolitan organization is voluntary. There is also an easy exit option for both cantons and communes within the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich*. Consequently, the commitment remains low. The political decision making power stays completely in the hands of the cantons and communes. The public choice approach's demand for not creating a fourth layer of government is thus truly respected by the metropolitan organization in Zurich. The variable geometry followed by the association is an instrument promoted by the public choice approach as well. The *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* does thus not interfere with the general competitiveness orientation of the communes within Zurich's metropolitan areas.

### **3.5 New regionalism: hierarchical steering?**

In a last step, I analyze whether the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* reflects the new regionalist ideas of metropolitan governance. There are certainly elements of hierarchical steering visible in the set-up of the metropolitan organization. The regional (i.e. cantonal) level plays a very important role both in the initiation of the project as well as in the operational phase now. The original idea to set up the metropolitan organization came from a cantonal councillor. The cantons now play an equally important role within the organizational structure, holding half of the votes in the metropolitan conference, in the metropolitan council, and in the operational committee. The association is thus a two-level organization that reflects the scalar openness that is promoted by the new regionalist approach (Brenner 2003) and that is quite unusual in an internationally comparative perspective (see Heinelt and Kübler 2005). Usually, metropolitan governments are comprised of the lowest level of the federal system (i.e. the local level). This is the case for the other Swiss metropolitan governance bodies as well. Insofar, the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* is an exception concerning its flexible scalar structure.

However, it is not only the hierarchical steering by the cantonal level that is of importance, but also the one by the national state. Whereas the Swiss national state has showed disinterest in urban problems for centuries, things have shifted recently (Geissmann 2003; Schenkel and Haldemann 2003). In the revised version of the federal constitution of 1999, the national state recognizes the important role of urban areas for the well-being of the whole country for the first time in its history. This constitutional article became the foundation of an increasing involvement of the national state in the development of the metropolitan areas (Kübler 2007; Kübler et al. 2003). This involved on the one hand the installation of the *Tripartite Agglome-*

*rationskonferenz*, a discussion platform where representatives from the federal, the cantonal, and the local level can develop ideas on e.g. metropolitan governance. On the other hand, the federal state initiated the so-called agglomeration programs. These programs finance development projects in metropolitan areas with federal money. However, to access funding, cooperation between the communes and cantons within one metropolitan area is required by the federal state. With this financial incentive, the federal state has clearly pushed the willingness of the independent municipalities to cooperate (Kübler et al. 2003: 276).

It is thus no coincidence that one of the four policy pillars of the metropolitan organization in Zurich is transport. This is also clearly one of the key policy areas of metropolitan governance in general (Koch forthcoming) and the financial incentives of the federal states have pushed cooperation forms on transport issues. However, the financial incentives are not coupled with too harsh requirements on the cooperation within metropolitan areas. The very weakly institutionalized cooperation scheme in the Zurich area was obviously sufficient to meet the requirements set by the national state, as the Zurich area has successfully managed to obtain federal money for current major public transport infrastructure projects.

### **3.6 New regionalism: Leadership?**

The second element from the new regionalist approach identified as fostering metropolitan cooperation schemes, leadership, can be witnessed in the case of the *Verein Metropolitanregion Zürich* as well. The creation of the metropolitan organization was initiated by a cantonal councilor who was personally committed to the idea of metropolitan governance. The fact that he does not come from the core city of Zurich additionally helped his credibility as attempts from the core city to increase aspects of metropolitan governance have always provoked resistance from the agglomeration communes. Policy makers from these communes mostly feared that the core city wanted to share its centrality burdens with them and that metropolitan governance structures would take away part of their political autonomy. The chosen organization structure was carefully selected to respect these doubts as the particular cantonal councilor knew about them and anticipated them correctly. The cantonal and thus upper-level steering is thus dual in the case of the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zurich*: Not only does the cantonal political-administrative level play an important role in the setting up and the everyday working of the metropolitan organization, it was additionally the cantonal councilor that fosters the cooperation scheme with his personal engagement. It remains however unclear for the moment if he could personally capitalize from his engagement, as he recently announced his retreat from his post as cantonal councilor.

Last but not least, one aspect of the chosen organizational structure completes the picture of an organization that follows the pattern set out by the new regionalist approach to metropolitan governance: The involvement of private actors was intended from the beginning and indeed, several semi-private actors joined the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* as associated members. Whereas such a direct involvement of private actors is unthinkable in cases where metropolitan governance bodies are set out to be a fourth layer of government, this makes perfectly sense for an organizational structure according to the new regionalist approach. As the actors to steer the (economic) well-being of the metropolitan area come from both the private and from the public sector, an organization that brings these actors together on an institutional basis better responds to the necessities of metropolitan governance in the age of globalization. It seems indeed to be the case that those (semi-) private actors that share the vision of a strong (economic) metropolitan area Zurich have joined the association.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper was set out to analyze recent trends in metropolitan governance in Switzerland. It started with the notion that the federal state structure has hardly undergone any major changes in the last century and that the fragmentation in metropolitan areas is considerably high. Coinciding with a high political autonomy of the local as well as the regional scale, this setting makes efforts of metropolitan reforms very difficult. That is why Switzerland's metropolitan governance has long been considered a model example of the public choice approach highlighting the competition between the communes within metropolitan areas. The strong inter-communal cooperation schemes additionally point to the fact, that spillover problems were overcome in Swiss metropolitan areas without amalgamating the involved communes or to impose a fourth layer of government on them. However, recent trends show that the picture becomes less clear nowadays. Not only have two agglomerations started amalgamation processes, but several changes in the metropolitan governance mechanisms point towards a stronger institutionalization.

A closer examination of the very recently established *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich* however reveals that the traditional federal system remains dominant. The involved cantons and communes stay totally independent within this two-tier multi-level organization. Both hierarchical steering from the national and the cantonal scale, as well as a strong personal commitment from a cantonal councilor was needed so set up even a relatively weak organizational structure. This organizational form that relies on variable geometry for the policy cooperation

and on deliberately blurry boundaries follows the track set by the new regionalist approach. It however does not present a solution to the question of democratic legitimacy within increasing functionally interlinked metropolitan areas. The democratic impetus procedures are clearly linked to the traditional federal state structure that remains dominant within the Swiss metropolitan area (Kübler 2005; Scheuss 2005). To conclude that this is thus adorable from a democracy theory perspective is however misleading (Kübler 2004a). The living environment of most citizens within metropolitan areas has long ago broken out of the federal state structure. The problem that no democratically recognized body is responsible for the functional space of the inhabitants of Swiss metropolitan areas will remain unsolved for the near future.

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