Journal of Earth Science and Engineering 4 (2014) 612-626
doi: 10.17265/2159-581X/2014.10.004

The Scramble for Land—Saving the Remains of Rural Space in Switzerland

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Received: August 10, 2014 / Accepted: September 20, 2014 / Published: October 25, 2014.

Abstract: In 2012 and 2013, the Swiss population voted on two separate yet related issues concerning spatial planning. In 2012 a restriction on second homes was introduced into the Constitution, in 2013 referendum the planning law was revised. Both issues wanted to restrict disproportionate building activities, and were accepted after a heated debate. This outcome mirrors a change in popular attitude towards constructions in the countryside and so-called "cold beds" (second homes used for a short time only), but also towards the disfiguration of the (rural) landscape in general. At the same time it revealed two social rifts: between urban populations (that are increasingly migrating towards rural landscapes) and rural regions that want to obtain a similar level of living as the urban majority, and between lowland and mountain regions. The results of the referenda show that the population is very much concerned about the future of our landscape and environment. The paper discusses the two referenda and their implications for Switzerland in general and for regions that are considered marginal. Its focus lies on the political aspects of the two issues, which not only concern marginality but also are a challenge for national cohesion and direct democracy.

Key words: Rural areas, landscape transformation, democracy.

1. Introduction

Rural areas have often been considered marginal because they do not enjoy the perceived (or imagined) benefits of urban spaces, or only partly so. Marginality is in this case defined from a materialist point of view, which does not take the real assets of rural space and rural ways of life into account. But what are these assets and how important are they? Has urbanization left something that can be called rural space at all? Traditionally we see agriculture as the dominant rural trait. Rurality is characterized by primary production, as opposed to secondary and tertiary activities in urban space. Rurbanization and the advent of urban farming, however, question this simple dichotomy town—countryside. Similarly, while rural areas were characterized by low literacy requirements as opposed to high skills demanded in towns, things have changed in this respect too, and farming has very much become a hi-tech affair nowadays. The confrontation between rural and urban spaces in Table 1 is therefore a simplification of a much more complex present-day reality.

The assets comprise both the environment and the society: nature, open spaces, climate, low population density, traditions, food production. An important asset is the landscape, at the same time a core subject of geographical research. I consider it a primary "product" of nature and as such vital for our survival. Landscape is not simply the ecosystem but "a part of space perceived by a specific observer at a specific moment in time and from a specific point of observation" [3], and it is composed of multiple layers of elements dating from different periods, each leaving its traces. This makes it highly diverse, both physically and culturally. Diversity, in particular biodiversity, is a key factor for the survival of humans as well as the entire ecosystem. This has been recognized many years ago, as the paper by Edwards and Abivardi [4]

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Table 1 Rural and urban spaces [1, 2].

Rural space	Urban space
Agricultural production	Industrial commodities & services
Large families	Small families
Communality spirit	Individualism
Low mobility	High mobility
Infrequent cash transactions	Cash transactions the norm
Low literacy requirements	High literacy requirements
Nature, landscape	Buildings
Quiet	Noisy

illustrated in a convincing way.

To preserve diversity in its widest sense is on the one hand a physical task (which everybody can perform in daily life) and on the other a moral imperative, which is much more difficult to put into practice. The former executive director of the Human Environmental Programme, Klaus Toepfer, expressed it succinctly: “Respect for biological diversity implies respect for human diversity” [5]. Respect is indeed a quality that should govern both relations among humans and between humans and nature, and it underlies our responsibility towards them. But when we look at the way humans have been treating nature throughout history, the word seems to be unknown.

Respect in Toepfer’s statement means caring for something that one thinks to be important (nature or the ecosystem in this case, but also human emotions), and it underlies the following reflections on the future of rural areas in general and in Switzerland in particular. As an illustration I shall examine two recent referenda that have provoked bitter discussions throughout my country and whose implementation is likely to be followed by many court proceedings, up to the Supreme Federal Courts. The first (in 2012) was a vote on a new article in the Constitution imposing restrictions on the construction of second homes, the other (in 2013) on a major revision of the Spatial Planning Law. Both issues concern especially (but not exclusively) the rural landscape and landscape protection, in both lowlands and mountain regions. The former issue is intimately related to the place Switzerland occupies in the global tourism business, while the latter is more general but has ramifications also towards the former.

To understand the issue discussed in this paper requires a look at the political background. I shall therefore briefly introduce the complex Swiss political system, before presenting the two issues.

2. Federalism and Direct Democracy: The Swiss Political System

Switzerland (the Swiss Confederation) has been a direct democracy with a highly decentralized political system since it came into being as a modern state in 1848, but rooted in the country’s history: the small independent states (which later became the Swiss cantons) joined in a number of alliances in various treaties since the late 13th century. Since the 14th century they disposed of a sort of parliament, the Diet, which met several times per year. Internal conflicts arose from the contrast between urban and rural and between protestant (progressive) and catholic (conservative) cantons. After a short civil war in autumn 1847, which ended in a victory of the progressive side, the time was ready for an improved political solution. In 1848 the country agreed upon the Constitution, which reflected the history of its independent member states.

The Constitution of 1848 guaranteed the sovereignty of the cantons and included the right of the citizens to demand its revision. Fifty thousand

signatures of citizens were required. The revision of 1874 expanded people's rights, adding the right of the citizens to demand a referendum on laws passed by Parliament. In this case, 30,000 signatures were needed. These two rules (to demand and vote on constitutional and legal matters) are the cornerstones in our system of direct democracy. While they slow down the political process they require a careful preparation of the bills and guarantee broad public discussions. Articles or laws accepted have therefore a popular basis. The majority of the people and of the cantons must accept amendments to the Constitution, and referenda on laws require a majority by the people only. The revised 1999 Constitution maintains both cantonal sovereignty and people's rights but requires 50,000 signatures for referenda on legal and 100,000 on constitutional matters.

Cantons are small sovereign states with their own fiscal, police and education systems, large competences in health services and in spatial planning. The only limit to their independence is the Federal Constitution, which is the supreme reference for their actions. They have their own parliament, executive and judiciary.

A lower degree of autonomy has also been granted to the municipalities (or communes), but it is the cantons that define their range of action. They dispose of their own tax revenue, have their own legislative bodies (a local parliament or the communal assembly), and are competent in building and planning affairs. This is significant for the issues to be discussed in this paper.

The institutions comprise the Parliament (legislative), the Executive Government (Federal Council), and the Supreme Court. The Parliament has two chambers. The lower chamber (National Council) is composed of 200 members, distributed proportionally among the cantons according to population strength. Each canton has the right to delegate at least one representative. The upper chamber (State Council) comprises 46 members, two per canton irrespective of their population size. This has been introduced in 1848 to create a certain balance between the small and the large cantons. In a certain sense the first Constitution has already made a provision against the political marginalization of certain regions of the country. The Parliament elects the Federal Council, which consists of seven ministers of equal rank. One of them presides over their weekly meetings and in this capacity acts also as the head of state, but his term as President of the Confederation lasts for one year only. In this way the government keeps a low profile on the international level.

A relatively weak national centre and strong regional states therefore characterize the Swiss political system. The periphery holds considerable power, which illustrates the principle of subsidiarity. The government has been a coalition of several parties since the 1890s, and consensus building is one of the pillars of Swiss democracy.

3. The Development of Spatial Planning in Switzerland

The planning process in Switzerland reflects the decentralized political system, and the evolution of spatial planning in Switzerland illustrates the distrust people have towards central authorities. Planning is usually associated with centralist interventions, which runs against our traditions. We like to solve our problems as close to the people as possible. Prior to the first planning law of 1980 Switzerland was therefore a patchwork of communal and cantonal planning regulations [6], which were sufficient for a society with a mainly local and regional orientation. However, the economic boom after World War II led to an uncontrolled and usually hideous urban sprawl, and the municipalities were faced with the task to adapt their infrastructure at an increasing speed. The construction of motorways from the 1960s onwards accelerated this trend. Scientific preparations for planning legislation on the federal level were undertaken in the 1960s, and a first planning law was

submitted to a referendum in 1976. The people rejected it with a narrow majority, mainly on the grounds that it was too centralist. A more moderate and decentralized version came into force in 1980, this time without a referendum.

The planning law provided a clear distinction between building, agricultural and other zones of land use. Existing laws were, of course, incorporated, such as the protection of forests (law of 1905), of waters (in the Constitution since 1953), and the environment (in the Constitution since 1971). The competence to define the various zones was given to the municipalities, supervised by the cantons, and the cantonal plans are coordinated by the confederation. In this way, the people are involved in planning decisions, but an overall view is nevertheless guaranteed.

Emphasizing the local scale allows popular participation in the planning process. However, it also allows local networks and influential persons to pursue their own interests, which are often profit-oriented and care less about the ecosystem and the landscape. As a result we have experienced an excessive growth of built-up areas, and a disproportionate delimitation of reserve building-zones for future constructions.

As a tourist destination, Switzerland faces an additional planning challenge. Tourism is a relatively important sector of our economy, contributing about 3% to our GNP. One particular phenomenon related to it is second homes, a consequence of the growing affluence of large sections of the population since World War II, allowing buyers to invest their money safely. Second homes drive the building sector, but being not primary residences, and they are often empty for most of the year—we speak of “cold beds”.

4. The Two Issues on Second Homes and Planning

To vote on various issues is common in Switzerland. The two most important space-related referenda in the early 21st century concerned urban sprawl (2013) and second homes (2012). They both are directly related to the planning law, but the latter is also linked to the law on the sale of land to people residing abroad (see below).

Planning issues are also environmental issues. The Swiss started to vote in these fields in 1953 (Table 2) when water protection was anchored in the Constitution. A general constitutional article planning “Sensustrictu” in 1969, but the respective law was rejected in 1976 (see above). Contrary to environmental matters (which have a national and global dimension), planning questions are cantonal and municipal affairs, decided upon by the people who are directly concerned (farmers, landowners, local politicians).

4.1 The Revision of the Planning Law, 2013

The planning law of 1980 is the legal instrument for improving the spatial organization of the country, preventing an excessive fragmentation of the various

Table 2 Select referenda on planning and ecological issues in Switzerland (C = constitutional, L = law).

Issue	Date	Accept (%)	Refuse (%)	Participation (%)
Protection of waters (C)	1953	81.3	18.7	59.2
National planning (C)	1969	55.9	44.1	32.9
Environmental protection (C)	1971	92.7	7.3	39.2
National planning (L)	1976	48.9	51.1	34.6
Bogs and wetlands (C)	1987	58.8	42.2	47.7
Alpine transit (C)	1994	51.9	48.1	40.9
Second homes (C)	2012	50.6	49.4	45.2
Planning law revision (L)	2013	62.9	37.1	46.5

Source: Federal Office of Statistics.

user surfaces, and solving land-use conflicts. The best building land is often also the best farmland; conflicts particularly in low-lying areas are therefore inevitable. Agriculture is a sacred cow in Switzerland, and the loss of agricultural land is a threat to the idea of self-sufficiency[1]. We currently produce about 60% of our food inside the country [7] and self-sufficiency is therefore an illusion. But for ecological and quality reasons it makes sense to resort to local and regional suppliers and consume seasonal products, hence there is an overarching interest in maintaining good agricultural land.

The Confederation initiated a programme for cropland conservation in the early 1990s [8]. It required that a minimum of 438,560 ha of cropland, distributed proportionally among the 26 cantons, were set aside and must not be built over. This is just one percent of the country's surface, but more than 40% of all agricultural land (excluding alpine pastures). While preserving farmland can be seen as a goal in itself to ensure a minimum food production, cropland preservation goes beyond this quantitative aim and includes soil protection, the maintenance of green spaces between settlements, and long-term preservation and regeneration of agricultural land [9].

The revision of the national planning law of 2013 must be seen in this context. Many measures taken since 1980 were obviously not strict enough. Population growth on the one side, the tendencies towards smaller and therefore more households, and the trend to larger apartments fuelled the construction of residential surfaces. The process of rurbanization drives many people to live in rural areas, which increases the pressure on the land. It has been calculated that during the past 24 years more than one square metre per second was transferred from agricultural to other uses, mainly built-up areas (housing, schools, hospitals, transportation routes)[2]. This is over 550 square kilometres, which is almost the surface of Lake Geneva (Table 3).

Such processes and the related figures were the major argument for the revision of the planning law. The major amendments concerned the reduction of building zones, which should only cover the foreseeable need of the coming 15 years, and the taxing of value added through planning measures. As a consequence, excess surfaces will have to be allocated from building zones back into the agricultural zone. A lot of virtual money will in this case be destroyed, and landowners concerned will demand compensation. The population accepted it during a referendum on March 3, 2013 with a 67% majority and all cantons but one, Valais.

4.2 The Issue of Second Homes, 2012

The second homes issue is a delicate affair. Second homes are used temporarily only, usually as holiday homes in tourist areas, and they mirror the yearning by urbanites for life in the countryside. Occupied by the owners only, they will be closed for most part of the year ("cold beds"), but they can also be rented out to other holiday seekers, which will result in a better occupancy and use of the infrastructure. There is another kind of second homes, found mainly in cities, related to new working patterns (weekly commuting, students) and globalization (international mobility of managers).

Second homes have for a long time been a privilege of the upper class. Their history can be traced back to the 16th century when the English nobility built the first country houses [10]. It was only the economic boom after World War II that led to more widespread affluence and fuelled the demand for holiday homes.

During this period, Switzerland, in particular the Alps and the southern canton of Ticino, became a popular tourism destination. In the wake of the tourist

[1] The idea is rooted in the experience of World War II, when a vast ploughing campaign permitted us to be almost completely self-sufficient. This argument is no longer valid in a period of free trade, but there are ecological reasons to support it (in particular short transportation routes).

[2] The growth of forests is largely spontaneous and occurs in mountain regions, where farming is on the decline.

Table 3 Change in land use in Switzerland, 1979-2009.

	1979/85 hectares	2004/05 hectares	Change		% of total land area	
			ha	%	1979/85	2004/09
Built-up areas	238,187	294,034	55,847	+23.4	6.0	7.5
Agricultural land	1,349,287	1,277,316	-71,971	-5.3	37.9	35.9
Forests	1,071,278	1,096,673	25,395	+2.4	30.4	31.3
Unproductive	759,231	749,960	-9,271	-1.2	25.6	25.3

Source: Federal Office of Statistics.

Table 4 Apartments in Switzerland, 1990 and 2012 (all residential units in single houses and blocks of flats).

	1990		2012		Growth
	Units	%	Units	%	%
All apartments	3,159,977	100.0	4,177,521	100.0	32.2
Permanent	2,800,953	88.6%	3,513,956	84.1%	25.5
Temporary/unused	359,024	11.4%	663,565	15.9%	84.8

Source: Federal Office of Statistics.

boom, second homes became not only fashionable but also an interesting investment for wealthy visitors (domestic and foreign), and many regions recognized this potential for tourism development. The scramble for second homes in tourist regions incited the Parliament to pass a first law in 1961 (Lex von Moos, called after the minister responsible), fixing conditions for the purchase of land by persons resident abroad[3], which in an amended form (Lex Koller) is still in force today [11]. It has not been very efficient, however, because there are many ways to get round it, and there are too many interests involved. Critics of the new article saw it as an obstacle to tourism development (which concerns marginal regions in particular), whereas defenders argued that second homes were driving land and house prices up for local populations.

Second homes are not an easily defined category, and there are no national data available. The Swiss Statistical Office distinguishes between permanently and temporarily used and empty apartments, without entering into details. The data in Table 4 are therefore indicative only, but they show that the number of temporarily used or empty living quarters has been increasing at an alarming rate.

We must admit that second homes may bring benefits to marginal regions but they are temporary only. Local landowners can sell land, but they may have to find another source of income. Local or regional builders will be able to build houses and the necessary infrastructure, but there is hardly any follow-up. The municipality has to provide the infrastructure, whose capacity has to be planned according to a hypothetical population (locals plus all holidaymakers at the same time). There is also some tax income, but it is generally low (if the owners pay taxes at all). Local shops may or not benefit from holidaymakers, but many users hardly consume in local businesses and prefer to stock up in supermarkets instead.

4.3 Comment

The growth of primary and secondary residences results in a significant demand on land, which provides the direct link between the two referenda. It is true that the population of Switzerland has grown from 6.9 to 8 millions (17%) between 1990 and 2012, but this alone does not account for the scramble for

[3] This includes Swiss citizens residing outside Switzerland, but not foreigners who hold permanent residence in Switzerland.

land. The population in general demands larger flats[4], hence larger houses, which therefore require more space. Second homes are not necessarily smaller than primary ones. Planners thus face the difficult task to reconcile our growing space demands with the static (and diminishing) offer of land for building. This is a fact, but reducing building zones through de-zoning is seen as an impediment to development, an assault on private property, and on the freedom to dispose of one's land at will, whereas taxing value added through planning measures is an attack on landowners' purses. Rural and mountain cantons were therefore strongly opposed to the revised planning law.

The issue of "cold beds" divides the country. Tourist regions such as the Valais, the Grisons, the Ticino or central Switzerland are opposed to restrictions on the construction of second homes, contrary to other parts of the country: There are two rifts, one between urban and rural Switzerland, the other between lowland and mountain regions. But both "ordinary" and second home construction booms disfigure the landscape and devour farmland. Farming, however, is vital for our survival, and it is strongly supported and regulated by the state. The growing ecological awareness of the population was an additional factor that contributed to a general malaise, which eventually manifested itself in the request for a referendum (optional) on the latest revision of the planning law and the call for an article in the Constitution to limit the number of second homes (compulsory referendum).

We therefore went to the polls, first on March 11, 2012 (second homes), and again on March 3, 2013 (planning law). The outcome of both referenda mirrors the Swiss people's attitude towards ecological questions since the late 1980s (Table 1). However, regional differences were remarkable, especially as there has been much more resistance to the planning law issue that to second homes. Fig. 1 demonstrates that there is only one canton (the Valais) where both issues were rejected.

The map is based on the cantons and does not show regional particularities. The Bernese Oberland (the tourist part of the large canton of Berne, just to the north of the Valais) was also opposed to the limitations of second homes. Other tourist cantons obviously had acted before the referendum in a proactive way, and the population was not as strongly against as in the Valais.

5. The Planning and Regional Policy Background

Changes, challenges, responsibility—the motto of the 2014 IGU (International Geographical Union) Regional Conference was well adapted to the topic of this paper. Landscape transformations are a challenge to all actors, and they remind us of our responsibility towards both nature and our fellow humans. Landscape is a subjective category, and we all attach some specific significance with it (childhood memories, attachment for professional reasons, the sheer pleasure of seeing and observing). Landscape changes, both natural (after a disaster) and man-made always evoke emotions.

5.1 The Planning Context

Space for human occupancy is becoming rare, in Switzerland as elsewhere in the world. In order to cope with the problem of land use allocation to the various needs, societies have developed the instruments of regional policy and spatial planning. One of the needs is housing, which is linked to many others, such as transport, shopping, energy and water supply etc.. The growth of settlement areas thus entails the construction of roads and parking lots, the growth of populations requires new shopping opportunities, and they all demand additional infrastructure investments. The overarching goal of Swiss planning is laid down in the first article of the planning law, which wants to promote a considerate use

[4] According to the censuses, the average surface per apartment was 34 m^2 in 1980 and 44 m^2 in 2000, i.e., one additional square meter every two years.

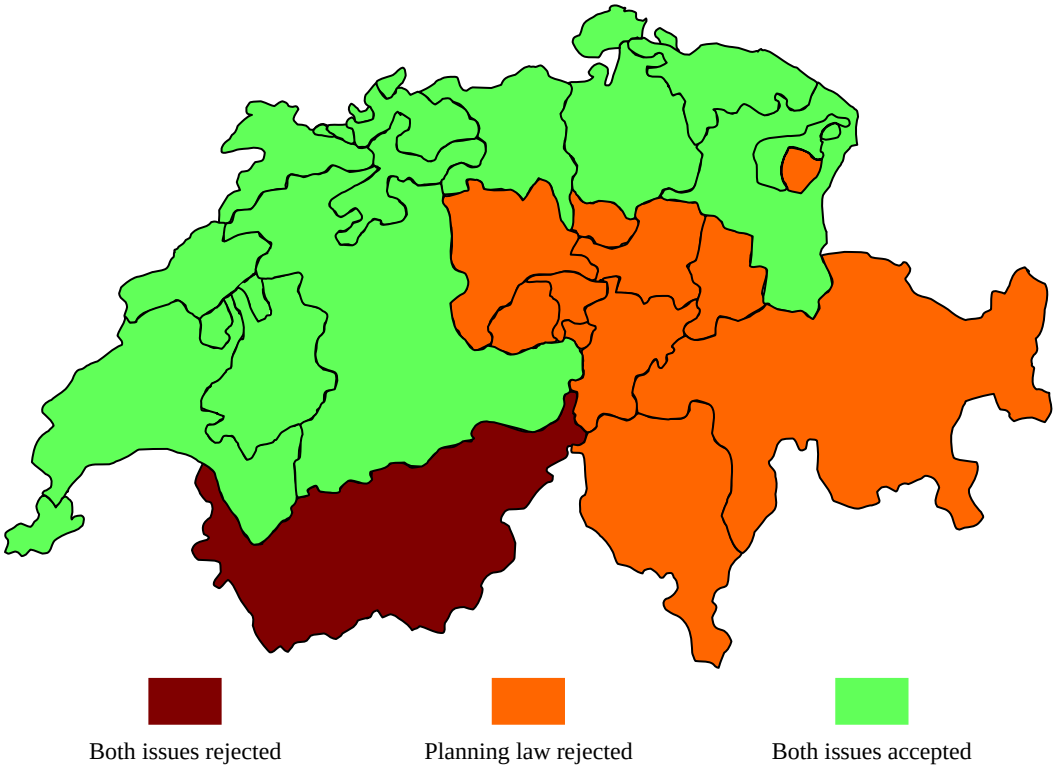

Fig. 1 Approval and refusal of limitation of second homes (2012) and planning law revision (2013), by canton.

of the land, resulting in a harmonious development of the country [12]. This includes care for and preservation of the landscape, soil, air, water and forests, called the natural bases of life. The law touches upon the relationship between humans and the land, for a long time characterized by respect, but which since the Industrial Revolution has given way to exploitation [13]. Everybody is conscious of the fact that the surfaces on Earth are limited, but nobody wants to scale down expectations. This physical limit has to be dealt with mentally and ethically.

The second point mentioned in Article 1 of the planning law is settlement, whose development should be harmonious. This is more easily said than done. The growing demand for housing originates from two sources: enhanced space requirements by the people, and population growth through immigration[5]. The Swiss economy employs many immigrants, both in highly qualified jobs and positions where domestic supply cannot cope with demand, and in less or unqualified positions, which are of no interest to the Swiss. On February 9, 2014, the Swiss people approved an amendment to the Constitution that will restrict immigration (17 cantons and 50.3% of the voters were in favour). Housing and salary dumping were the most important reasons advanced.

The problem of urban sprawls has continued unabated since the implementation of the planning law. Its 2013 revision is an attempt to curb the tendency to squander the restricted space at our disposal by limiting the building zone reserves for the foreseeable needs of the next 15 years (i.e., until about 2028). Of course, nobody knows what is going to happen until then and how to continue. Even limiting immigration is no guarantee that the housing problems can be solved and urban sprawl contained.

Second homes are part of the settlement zone and have the same space requirements as primary housing.

[5] According to the CIA World Factbook (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html; cons. 07.06.2014) the total fertility rate of Switzerland is currently about 1.5% (2014 estimate), well below the replacement level of 2.1%.

In the early phases of the tourism boom many communes, particularly in mountain regions, allowed the building of holiday houses wherever customers wanted. This resulted in a chaotic expansion of the villages. Once strict planning rules were issued, they set aside far too large building zone reserves. The new rule, which limits these surfaces to the foreseeable needs for the next 15 years, is interpreted as an infringement on communal autonomy. However, the federal law with its general standards is valid for everybody. It is understandable that tourist regions dislike the amendment to the Constitution that limits the amount of second homes to 20% of all residential surfaces. Certain communes have a far larger percentage and will not be able to reduce it, at least not in the short term. Others fear for their future tourism development. Since there are many forms of second homes (chalets, apartments, apart hotels etc.) and ownerships, the interpretation of the term is delicate and likely to be ultimately decided by the Supreme Federal Court.

The motivation for this new article in the Constitution was the proliferation of holiday accommodation (cold beds) in tourist regions during the past 40 years, because second homes have become attractive for outside investors. The sheer number of those holiday cottages and the trivial architecture of the huge flats with holiday apartments disfigure the alpine landscape; They are a veritable eyesore, visual blight or eye pollution, which disturbs not only “the aesthetics of the built environment” [14] but also the (rural) landscape.

The two cases presented the wish for more building zones which had to be balanced against excessive dispersion of settlements[6], and the run for second homes had to be set off against local needs and the aesthetics of the landscape.

5.2 The Regional Policy Context

Regional policy is destined to eliminate gross imbalances between more and less affluent regions. The most difficult living conditions can usually be found in mountain regions, but there are also lowland areas that lie off the beaten track or have lost a formerly important source of income (such as the regions of the traditional textile industry in Switzerland). Regional policy intervenes in support of marginal regions.

Swiss regional policy disposes of several instruments, all broadly discussed and voted upon in Parliament. The very first measures were taken in the late 1940s to prevent emigration from mountain regions and protect mountain agriculture [15, 16]. The measures were mainly of a financial nature, such as price guarantees and subsidies for difficult production conditions. The LIM (Law on Investments in Mountain Regions) of 1974 took a broader stance and promoted infrastructure projects (in transport, health, or education) with the same goal of stopping the depopulation of mountain areas. Regions with economic difficulties (which include rural areas across the country) began to benefit from a special programme in 1978. These fragmented programmes were assembled in 2008 in a new law on regional policy [17]. Driven by the neoliberal credo, the NRP (New Regional Policy) aims at (economic) growth, demands efficiency and competitiveness, and incites the actors to be innovative. If the old regional policy was of a distributive nature, the new growth orientation “means a departure from the principle of solidarity that had been practised so far” [17].

The priority domains in regional policy are knowledge transfer in export-oriented systems and tourism, followed by health and education, energy, natural resources, and agriculture [18]. The second home issue can therefore be seen as indirectly related to the NRP. Until now, most of the money spent (54%) went into tourism projects [18]. This figure show the importance of the tourism sector, which is dominant in mountain regions, particularly in the Alps (the Jura is touristically marginal; [19]). Projects realized in this

[6] The tradition of dispersed settlement in certain areas of Switzerland was not questioned in the context of the planning law revision.

context were: e.g., the double-decker cable car Stanserhorn in central Switzerland, and the walking and biking routes in the Rhine gorge upstream from Chur (Grisons). A project related to natural resources uses warm water from the Lötschberg railway tunnel to heat a tropical greenhouse and breed Siberian sturgeon.

The second instrument that tries to even out the disparities between the different cantons, which is the financial compensation scheme. It comprises a transfer of money from the rich to the poor: the rich cantons transfer money to a central fund, which is distributed among the poor cantons (called "horizontal compensation"), and the "vertical compensation" by the Confederation. It is here that the solidarity concept has survived, contrary to the market-oriented NRP.

Second homes in tourist regions can be seen as desirable elements for tourism development. This follows also from the argument the government used in its message to Parliament [20]. It admits that second homes are empty for most of the year and contribute to the expansion of settlements. It also agrees that this runs against the principle of considerate use of the land as stipulated in Art. 75 of the Constitution and in the planning law. On the other hand, halting the construction of second homes would result in difficulties for the building trade and associated businesses, reduce the demand for land for building in the municipalities concerned, and result in a collapse of the real estate market. Communes with low economic activity (marginal communes) might suffer even more [20].

The government was opposed to the initiative, judging it too rigid and not taking regional particularities into account. It argues on the basis of regional policy, discarding the planning argument. However, at the end of the message it refers to it by pointing to changes in the planning law that were being discussed in Parliament. The revision of 2013 does not concern second homes; we shall have to wait for the next revision [20]. The question has therefore been adjourned sine die.

The fact that the people accepted the limitation of second homes put the government into the uncomfortable situation that it had to act in a way that did not anticipate. This new provision has no legal basis yet and measures have to follow the temporary interpretation of the new article in the Constitution.

6. The International Dimension

The countryside has been one of the preoccupations of the Swiss planning legislation, in part because of urban sprawl, but also because of national food supply. But Switzerland was not alone, and the future of rural areas had been discussed well before the 1970s. Britain, for example, conducted a second land use survey in the 1960s[7] under the guidance of Prof. Alice Coleman [21]. The motives for this undertaking were manifold; for example it should permit to evaluate success or failure of land use planning and management, and to shed light on the misuse of the land [21]. Land was seen as an important national resource that had to be presservedor, in the worst cases of derelict land as a consequence of industrial development since the 18th century to be redeveloped [22].

Based on preparations that had started in the 1980s, the Council of Europe drew up a Charter for Rural Areas in 1996, which pointed out the importance of the rural space for humans and the necessity to preserve it, ensure sustainable resource management, and consider it as a multifunctional space embracing both traditional and new functions such as nature and landscape preservation [23]. Switzerland had participated in the early efforts, and the elements in our national charter are about the same as in the European version [24].

Efforts for the benefit of rural areas are political issues, but they require the participation and support of the people. The European charter is very general on

[7] Prof. L. Dudley Stamp had organized the first survey of this kind in the 1930s.

this subject but emphasizes the need to follow the subsidiarity principle. Local and regional authorities are called to "to strengthen the endogenous development of rural regions" [13]. The Swiss charter, on the other hand, clearly points to the cantons as the decisive political level for any measures. Municipalities should, however, also profit from financial compensation schemes (which occur between cantons on the federal and between municipalities on the cantonal level [24].

Why was it deemed necessary to preserve rural space in a period that was characterized by rapid economic development and growth of affluence that benefited the city rather than the countryside? A very good answer is given in the summary of the European charter: "The natural and man-made European countryside, in its diversity, offers beauty, peace and recreation to Europeans and to visitors coming from other continents. It is host to a rich flora and fauna and it is an important part of our cultural heritage. It is the source of most of Europe's food. Timber, minerals and renewable raw materials for industry and the energy sector come from rural areas" [23]. This short statement quotes both a number of use and non-use values of the rural space and shows that the preservation of the countryside is more than simple nostalgia: it is vital for the future of our society, not only European but worldwide. Survival is not only a matter of food, minerals, and timber but also of our heritage and the beauty and diversity of our landscape.[8]

Also the worldwide network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves contributes to the safeguarding of rural space. Promoted by the MAB (Man and Biosphere) programme in 1970, the concept was developed from 1971 onwards and subsequently put into practice [25]. Biosphere reserves respond to the globally felt necessity to pay more attention to the place humans occupy in the ecosystem and to improve the relations between nature and us. Putting this programme in track launched a period of increasing environmental consciousness [25].

Switzerland has taken some time to create its first biosphere reserve. It is true that the Swiss National Park, founded in 1914, has been part of this network since 1979, but it was temporarily excluded when the Sevilla strategy of UNESCO of 1995 defined more strict criteria [25]. However, it was reintegrated in 2010 with an extended zone outside the totally protected area. It lies in a very peripheral part of the country (right on the boundary with Italy) with little through traffic and no industry, which is ideal for conservation. The extended zone is still an agricultural region and the entire region is an ideal destination for soft tourism, while the core zone (the original National Park) has been monitored scientifically since its creation in 1924.

A second biosphere reserve was created in 2001 in the Canton of Lucerne, central Switzerland. The Entlebuch region was the poorest region of the country in 1980 with a personal disposable income of CHF 4,412 (as against CHF 14,855 in the wealthiest region near Zurich: [26]). In the meantime it has caught up somewhat but remains relatively poor. Its economy is based on two regional resources: forests and agriculture[9]. The Biosphere Reserve has enabled the region to market its products under the Biosphere label and has served as a factor of attraction for visitors. It is an ideal region for schools for educational camps and scientific research.

7. The High Stakes

To sum up, there is a simple question: what is at stake? What are the results of the two referenda in the long term? As I pointed out above, certain issues may have to be solved in court, and at least in the case of more severe planning restrictions (de-zoning) there will be financial consequences that nobody can foresee at the moment. But there are two topics that

[8] The values of biodiversity have been detailed in Ref. [4].

[9] One international firm produces specialized electrical wires and uses an external resource, copper.

are more important: politics (direct democracy) and landscape.

The Swiss are proud of their direct democracy and the decentralized system, values we are prepared to defend. The people legitimize the governments at the various levels and the political decisions (laws and the Constitution). Every state is a collective and can only function if everyone respects its rules, whether one agrees or not. Thus we take it for granted that the minority accepts a majority decision, because the laws are the result of a compromise. In the two cases described above the municipalities will have to diminish their excessive building zones, and they will have to implement the 20%-rule as concerns second homes.

The two issues have to be seen the overarching context of landscape preservation. They concern landscape in all its dimensions (Fig. 2), even if they touch upon separate and individual topics and are lacking a holistic perspective. Because of their juridical difference they cannot be implemented in the same way, even if (as regulations) they belong to the political dimension. A law can take effect rapidly, whereas a constitutional article has to be completed by a law that can be subject to a referendum. Preparing a legal text is delicate and requires the interpretation of the key terms, in this case second homes. This process inevitably delays the enforcement of the regulations, in particular in such a delicate matter. A decree of August 22, 2012 was the first legal text to implement the new constitutional article, but it is valid only until the final regulation has been approved—probably through a public referendum some time in the future. The initiators of the entire process, Helvetia Nostra[10], as well as Pro Natura and other associations are following the development of the legal procedure on all levels. In a field where a lot of money is involved, it is obviously difficult to respect the people's verdict, which is not very popular with certain actors. The topic gives rise to heated high-level discussions, which are followed critically by the initiators of the referendum.

Even implementing the modified planning law will meet with obstacles, in particular financial ones. Taxing the additional value that has been created by planning measures (usually allocating land to building zones) may be less of a problem than compensating landowners for the value lost because the land is being taken out of the building zone. In a period when public finances are under stress this may prove difficult.

Saving the remains of rural space means to save our landscape and the capital contained in it for people living now and in the future. One of its many assets is its positive effect on people's health. If people live close to nature (especially to forests) they may be motivated to go for walks and enjoy fresh air and exercise, which has positive effects on their health [28]. These are direct use-values (option value), but there is also the indirect non-use value (existence value) of the pleasure that the landscape exists [4]. Even if we use the economic terminology (assets, capital, value), we cannot express the non-use services of the environment (which includes rural space) in money terms, but the world would be much poorer without them.

The economic perspective used by Ref. [4] may be an appealing approach, but it fails to recognize one basic fact: The ecosystem (or nature) holds a monopoly (there is only one ecosystem). There is no market and there are no market forces that decide upon an eventual price. Supply and demand are distorted: A growing population and new demands draw from the same, limited supply. We call it "nature capital", which shows that it is a stock we draw from and that has to be preserved. Drawing on the ecosystem's interests only will entail drastic reductions in our lifestyle and is a long-term goal, towards which politics and ecology have to converge [29].

[10] This is an organization of the Franz Weber Foundation, which is active in nature protection.

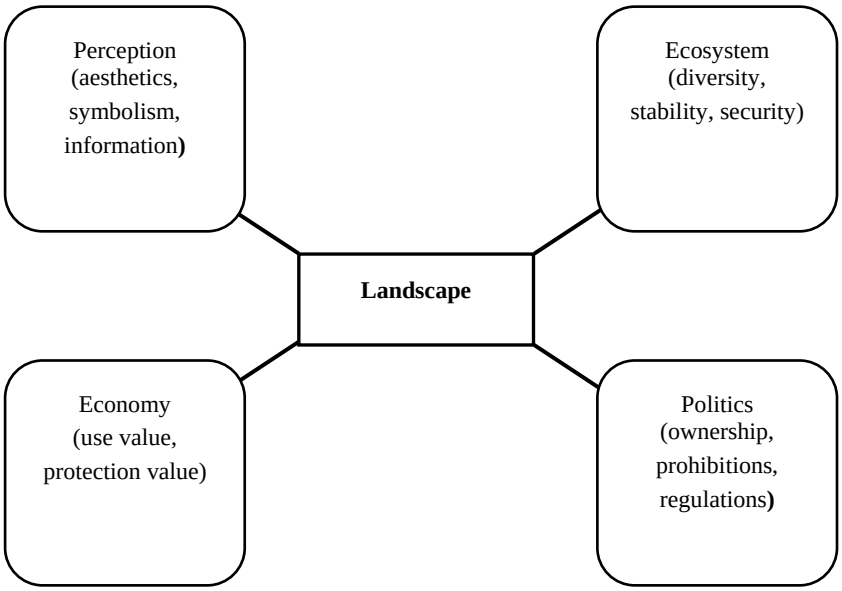

Fig. 2 Dimensions of landscape [27].

Landscape is also part of the ecosystem, but it is more than just that. While nature is a given factor, the landscape is the result of human perception. A specific landscape may be economically uninteresting as long as nobody pays special attention to it. Once its singularity has been discovered and someone has discovered its potential for economic development, it may become economically profitable. However, this same landscape may loose this attribute when interest in it vanishes or if human activities have resulted in degradation.

Landscape amenities are also a location factor and can attract residents and firms [30]. Landscape protection, in particular through regional nature parks, is expected to have positive economic effects [30]. These include new jobs, immigration, visitors (day tourists as well as holiday makers) who boost the restaurant and hotel business as well as local crafts.

8. Conclusion

Rural space is no longer the traditional cultural landscape but has given way in most parts of Switzerland to organized technical landscape. But many people regret this development—rurbanization is an indicator for this longing: to live in the countryside, close to nature (albeit with urban comfort). Rural space is almost sacred and seen in contrast with the secular urban society.

To “enlightened” people this attitude may appear romantic and idealistic, because they consider tradition as something of the past, evoking the illusionary “good old days”. But tradition is more. The past is the foundation of the present, and in our relationship to the landscape it stands for a way of life that was much more in harmony with nature than our contemporary lifestyle. The environmental movement takes precisely this stance, seeing tradition not as something antiquated or backwards but as a guideline for our future. The public increasingly understands this. The search for identity has also to do with an intact landscape. “In all traditional societies, the identity of the community is built on close relations to the territory, where every place, tree, rock, spring or meeting point are linked to the vicissitudes experienced by the people of past times.” [31]. These close and intricate relationships between people and the land accounted for the maintenance of the traditional cultural landscape [31]. Saving the remains of rural space is therefore not only nostalgia but helps people in their search for identity. Ultimately we all come from a rural background.

I cannot but repeat what I have written a few years

ago: “Rural areas are, however, not only economic space; they are far more, a complex living space. They are landscape with a meaning, an ecosystem, a place to work, to relax, and also a bearer of identity. Regional policy oriented towards neoliberal values alone cannot do justice to this diversity. Even landscape protection (not mentioned at all) can be an innovation, if it prevents excesses in settlement growth and the destruction of habitats. The countryside is a specific type of landscape and requires integrated landscape management, not growth policy” [17]. We all are responsible for it, and it is necessary to renounce the greed for money and prestige that is associated with both issues discussed here: materialist values have to be supplemented if not replaced by idealistic ones. “The future of the countryside thus becomes a matter of the entire population, even if more than three quarters live in an urban setting. It requires a wide perspective, which takes aspects of living space, economy and ecology into account. The chances are good that the Swiss are open to landscape protection” [17]. While the last statement seems to have been indirectly confirmed by the two referenda, and not everybody is convinced; in particular the farmers remain sceptic. Since February 2014 the Swiss Farmer’s Union has been collecting signatures for an amendment to the Constitution. An article on food security should be included, with the aim to promote domestic production, safeguard our farmland and guarantee good quality. The topic seems to be very popular and has met with widespread interest: Within three months the organizing committee had collected more than 100,000 signatures (the legally required minimum)—the time at disposal is 18 months! This is a record in the history of direct democracy. On July 8,six months after launching the campaign, the representatives of the Farmers’ Union deposited almost 150,000 signatures at the Federal Chancellery, and the Federal Administration will ultimately verify the signatures [32]. It remains to be seen what parliament and government will make out of this proposal.

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