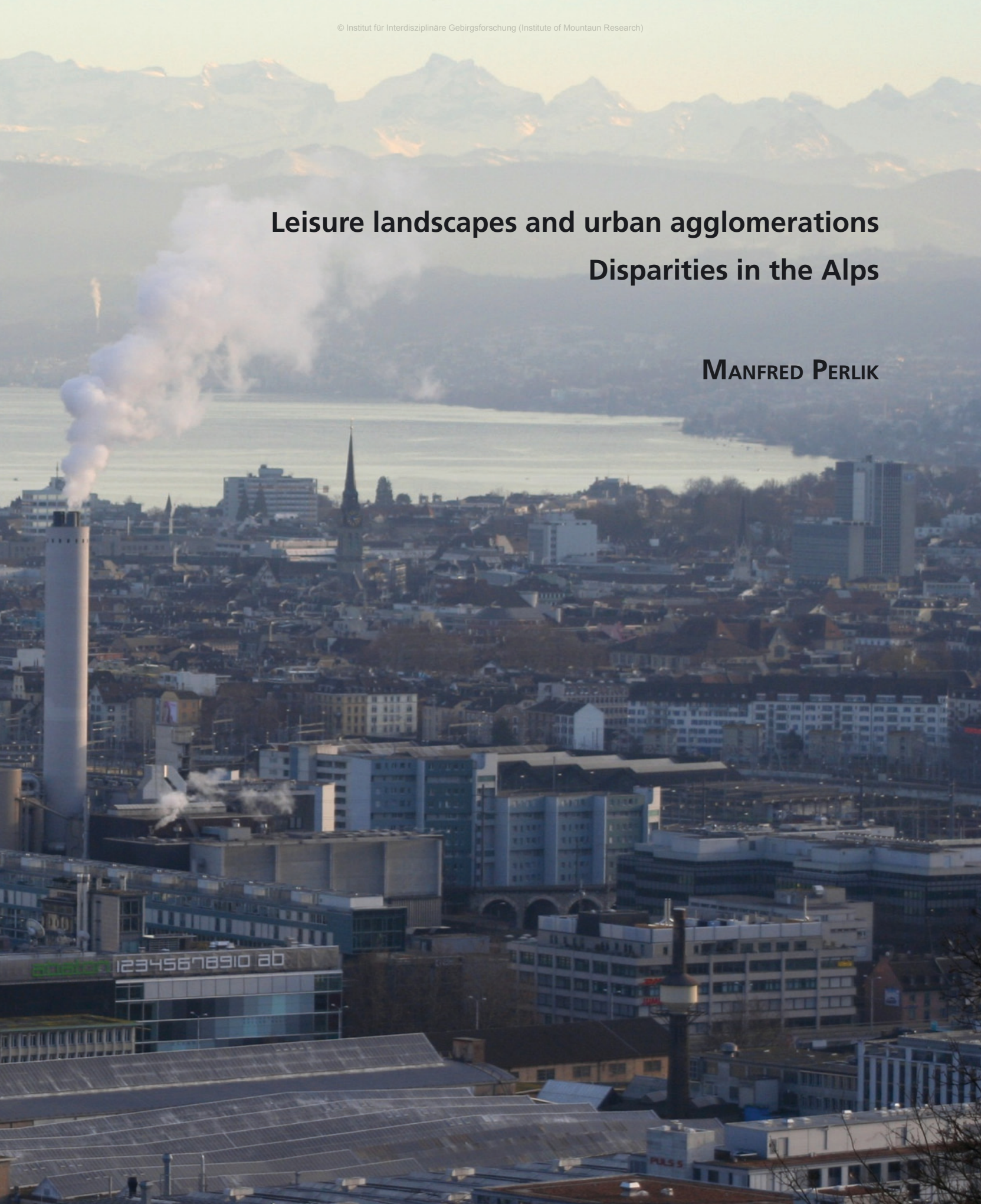


Leisure landscapes and urban agglomerations Disparities in the Alps

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Leisure landscapes and urban agglomerations – disparities in the Alps

The lost significance of the alpine arc: uneven development in the past

From the end of the 19th century, industrialization connects the Alps with the European markets. The period of subsistence agriculture ends, the existing market-orientated agriculture meets new competitors. The new economic sectors localize along the railroads traversing the Alps (extractive industries, specialized agriculture) or at places at high altitudes (tourism).

The new era alters ancient inequalities based on agricultural fertility and encourages an uneven development based on the investment in the new mode of production or lack of it. The disparities are exacerbated by the dramatic population decline during the First World War (Bätzing 1984). The subsequent economic development serves national projects exploiting internal resources (hydropower) and geopolitical aims (locating heavy industry in South Tyrol and in the Aosta Valley to “Italianize” the territory over national minorities).

The coping strategies for regional cleavages after the Second World War are based on “wealth by growth” and practised most consistently in France where, based on the “Plan Neige” with enormous investments in construction, an industrialized tourism is established in the French Northern Alps. The construction of local roads and mass motorization make lateral valleys accessible and encourage the conclusion that the car is the best adapted transportation system for the Alps (Veyret & Veyret 1967).

All the same, the Alps remain structurally relatively weak compared to the extra-Alpine regions. The national mountain laws of the 1970s modify the formula into “prosperity through growth and redistribution”. This policy intervention comes late in the day: in some alpine regions, a convergence of living standards between alpine and non-alpine regions has already begun, other areas (the least favoured ones) have already been abandoned, and the basis for these policies, i.e. the model of redistributed eternal growth, has already entered a crisis, most visible by the oil embargo.

The delayed spatio-temporal counter-tendency: 20 years of recovery

In subsequent years, there is a demographic and economic recovery of large parts of the Alps, in which only a few regions are excluded from the growth, particularly the Italian Western and Eastern Alps (Bätzing & Dickhörner 2001; Steinicke 2008). In Switzerland, a reversal in favour of its alpine parts starts in 1974. Since then, mountainous and rural regions have enjoyed steadily disproportional annual growth rates of population and employment. For the same period, the growth rates in the towns and agglomerations are below average. During this time, the alpine exodus largely ceases and a small migration into the Alps takes place. The alpine arc is no longer economically depressed. In the Swiss Alps, this phase of disproportional growth lasts until the mid/end-1990s, i.e. for more than 20 years (Fig. 1). We can thus speak of a double turnaround. What are the driving forces behind this development?

Our first explanation is the oscillation of economic cycles with upturns and downturns: the long-term analysis of spatial and economic development shows that cyclical upturns favour the urbanized regions which are steadily expanding. This is one explanation for the long-term growth of towns and agglomerations that is visible all over Europe and explained by Denise Pumain with the evolutionary economics approach (Pumain 1999, 2004). But the economic cycles (which mostly show growth, only briefly interrupted by recessions) cannot explain why, over a long period of 20 years, decentralized growth has been possible in the mountainous and rural areas of Switzerland. To explain this, a second approach is necessary: the juxtaposition with long-term societal paradigms or “regimes”. Regimes are instances of temporarily stable rapports about social values, practices and routines, arrived at and exercised by a constellation of societal actors. They are established by negotiation or struggle as a social compromise on the basis of common and diverging interests. Such a rapport affects two key aspects, the production of new values (regime of accumulation) and the redistribution of the produced values

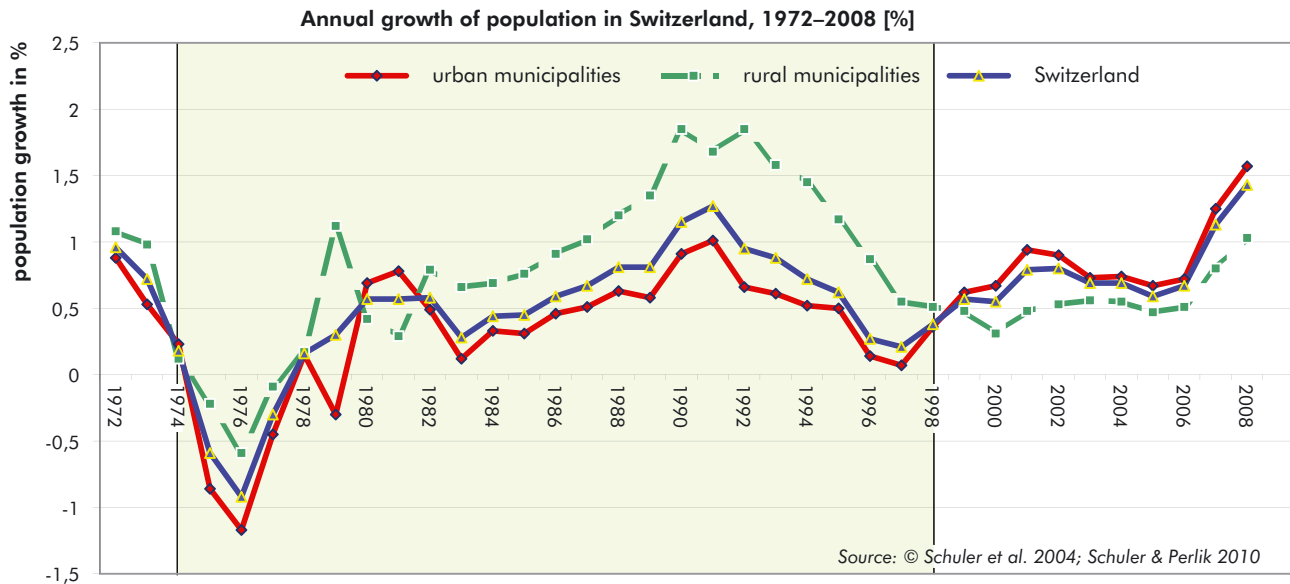


Fig. 1: The double turnaround of regional growth in Switzerland (Schuler et al. 2004; Schuler & Perlik 2010).

(mode of regulation). At the beginning of the 1970s, the predominant “Fordist” growth regime was superseded by the more flexible “post-Fordist” one. One of the characteristics of the Fordist regime was the idea of lean regional hierarchies at national level to avoid larger cleavages between social groups. Only this superposition of the mere oscillations of economic cycles with a spatio-temporally stable regime of social compromise can explain why it was possible for the trend of centralized spatial development to be overridden for two decades. This period proves that there is no permanent one-way street towards a concentrated spatial development and that more balanced spatial patterns are possible. The example also shows a considerable hysteresis (a time lag between the first occurrence of an impact and its general proliferation) which makes the social changes spatially visible only with delay.

The regime change to post-Fordism

By the 1990s, the post-Fordist regime change had become widely accepted. As mentioned, spatial effects only become visible from the mid/end-1990s onwards.

The most striking sign is the redevelopment of the city. Economically, this is induced by a new surge of global division of labour, combined with de-industrialization and tertiarization of the big cities (including inner-city gentrification). Socio-culturally, urban density as a lifestyle becomes attractive. Politically, the big cities are developing entrepreneurial qualities. Their representatives argue that towns are the national job engines and, especially in times of scarce public finance, they should be endowed with more federal support to cope with global competition; investment for mountain areas is inefficient as these regions constantly lose population and innovation capacity. This arguments seems to have won the day: economic stakeholders argue similarly (Blöchliger 2005) and official policies have adopted it (e. g. in the Swiss federal agglomeration programme and the New Regional Policy). Today, in all alpine countries, the majority of the population lives outside the Alps. The fast growing peri-alpine metropolitan regions exert a pull effect and at the same time they expand into the Alps. Other arguments highlight the environmental damage caused by urban sprawl and the socio-cultural stagnation of anti-urban attitudes (Eisinger & Schneider 2003; Diener et al. 2005). Here, the idea

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of economic efficiency is replaced by an argument of environmental efficiency. In fact, economic and environmental sustainability are seen as easily compatible but there is often a mismatch with the aims of social sustainability. Urbanization and metropolization in the Alps is therefore not a strategy chosen by the mountain actors themselves but the “autonomous adaptation” of an extra-alpine development, sometimes performed rather unwillingly.

Metropolises and parks: the new macro-tendencies of global change

The current spatial and social main tendency of global change can be summarized under the term of metropolization, in the Alps, under the catchword “metropolises and parks”. On the one hand, there are the metropolitan cores, where global decision-making is concentrated. On the other hand, the rural areas become integrated into the metropolitan regions as commuter areas or recreational landscapes. These leisure landscapes are suitable for multi-local living, as parks, for staging wilderness (with the reintroduction of large predators), or as “alpine fallow lands” (Diener et al. 2005), which makes them available for new investments. Alpine tourism has developed since the end of the 19th century from the interplay of exogenous and endogenous factors as a mountain-specific activity. Currently, tourism is on the decline or hybridizes with other forms of leisure (Bourdeau 2009). The number of overnight stays in the mountains is going down; upturns in the hotel sector occur outside the Alps as city breaks and business travels (Schuler et al. 2004). The alpine hotel sector is partly replaced by secondary homes. These residences are not only used for holidays. Thanks to the fundamental changes in the working environment, they also serve as home offices as they are larger than earlier forms and often include an office room (Flognfeldt 2004, for the Norwegian mountains). The most attractive areas become part of multi-local, urban defined living. In contrast, less spectacular landscapes as well as

many small and medium-sized towns are in decline. The abandonment of weak areas is openly discussed. Metropolises and parks are interdependent: the mountain areas are supported politically only if they open up to urban life. The metropolitan cores need the mountain areas as amenities that allow them to attract a highly qualified staff for economic activities that generate high added value.

The segmentation of the alpine arc: the Alps as an example of uneven spatial development

These macro-tendencies have consequences. The alpine arc is changing from a peripheral, nationally fragmented area (Bätzing 1984; Dumont 1998) into a regionally segmented one (Perlik 2001; Bausch et al. 2005) where

The enhancement of the peri-alpine fringe

The schedules of the two largest low-cost airlines list 23 destinations to the Alps, only two of them (Innsbruck and Klagenfurt) actually located in the Alps. The vast majority serves peri-alpine airports. Lombardy alone has four destinations near Milan. The economically strong regions provide the catchment of passengers. These flights can also be used by the alpine hinterlands and its guests. While this constellation allows a double use of the airports (for the metropolises and their hinterlands), the single use of the alpine areas is confirmed at the same time. The metropolitan periphery (like Memmingen or Bergamo) benefits by excess airport capacity, quick check-in and low fares at their third-rate airfields; it is upgraded as long as the loyalty of the airline lasts. Inner-alpine towns like Bolzano have only shuttles, an inner-alpine network does not exist. This replicates the 19th century situation, when the traversing railroads were built which did not connect the inner-alpine towns – but this time at a higher level.

the existing communalities are disappearing in favour of regional competition between the new metropolitan regions. Its peri-alpine cores become self-confident actors at global level at the expense of the national states. These metropolitan regions encroach into the Alps from both north and south and all the way to the main ridge (e.g. St. Moritz / Samedan). In terms of GDP, these entities are enormously successful (BAK 2006).

By no means can this polarized development be characterized as desolation. The shift in significance towards metropolises with their alpine parks reflects new, changed perceptions and preferences with new relations of power between different groups of social actors. It is a new use of existing resources and a valorization of former common goods which now become scarce resources. Examples are spectacular views, ownership of lakeside plots or sun and snow. These preferences are

selected with reference to the interests of other social actors than before. Now it is the urban majority who sets the standards. It may be questioned whether these new preferences in lifestyle are guided by a real interest in these landscapes. There are strong indications that prestige and the strategies of real estate investment play at least some role.

If this analysis is correct, why should this be problematic?

The alpine arc is an economically prosperous region in terms of regional GDP, accessibility and public interest which guarantees higher ecological standards than elsewhere. The real problems are therefore not primarily in environmental terms. Nor is a regional differentiation

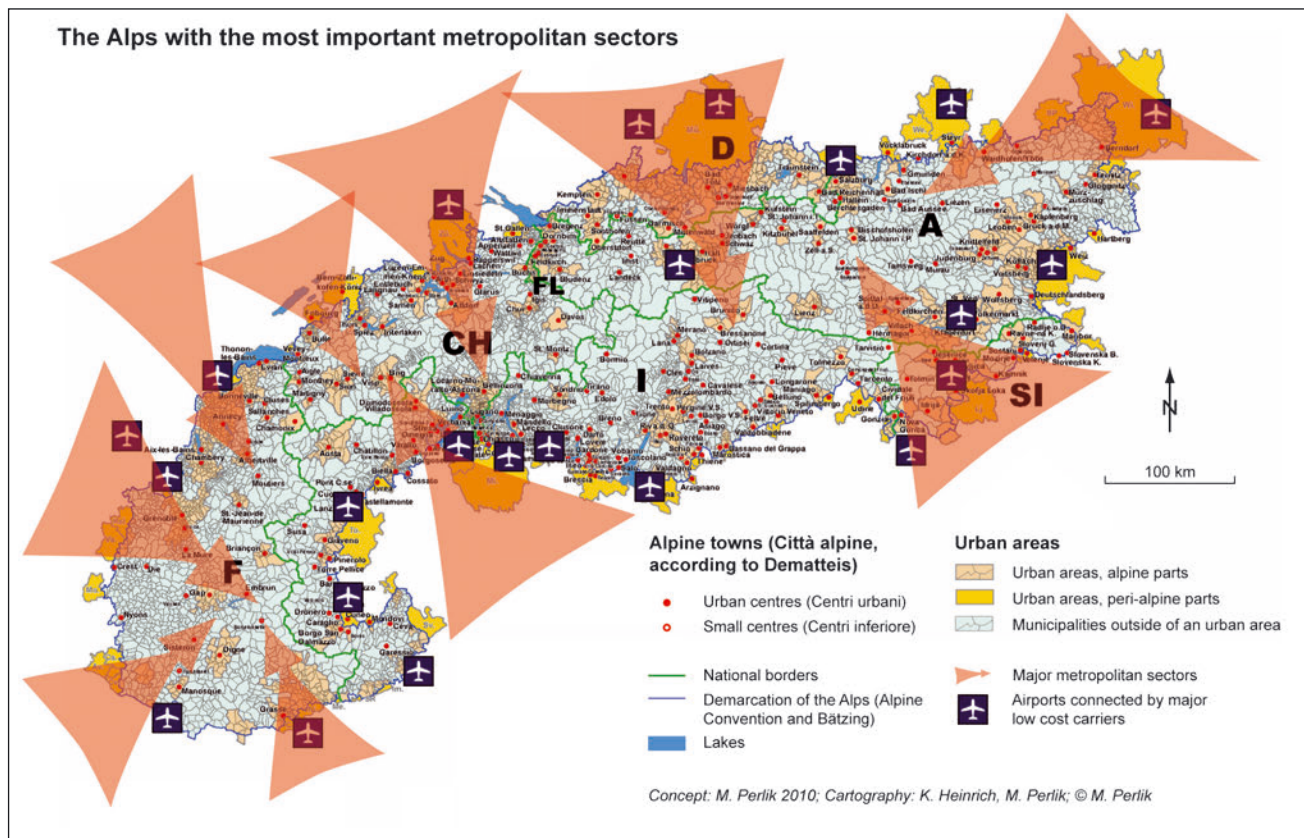


Fig. 2: The Alps with the most important metropolitan sectors.

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in the Alps, as such, the problem. The problems are rather indirect and may be subsumed as follows:

- (1) **Doubled consumption of space.** Detractors of urban sprawl argue for urban density but its promoters, the urban middle-class actors, enlarge their sphere of action by using both worlds: urban density and rural style in the resort towns plus the space required for enlarged transport infrastructures (motorways, public transport, regional airports).
- (2) The **increase of traffic** with its energy and social costs is an eternal topic but usually it is not linked with the debate about urban density and landscape attractiveness. Long-distance commuting is common within the densely populated metropolitan areas. It is understandable that the distances between mountain periphery and metropolitan core, which are not much greater, are more attractive than commuting within the suburban space.
- (3) The residential use of mountain areas is a **selective use of space** and because of its social structure it increasingly becomes a segregational use. This raises the question of overexploitation of resources as well as “underexploitation”. It creates specific ecological, economic and socio-cultural problems, e.g. the issue of exclusion from access to landscapes through built-up former public space.
- (4) **Loss of decision-making power.** Recently, mountain regions have begun to orient regional policies to providing the requested location qualities. This translates mainly into a commercialisation of landscape amenities and incentives such as flat or sometimes even degressive tax rates or special building zones in open ground. Such strategies do not necessarily accept ecological limits and may not succeed in attracting the active innovative actors needed for an enduring economic upturn.
- (5) **Immobile factors lose ground.** Territories have to renew the loyalties and the embedding with their decisive regional actors constantly in line with a common vision of a “territorial project” (Pecqueur 2005; Fourny & Denizot 2007). The new uses of attractive landscapes are rather volatile compared

with older activities like tourism. Often the regions lose old skills without gaining enduring new ones. After such changes, renewing the loyalty with the remaining social actors becomes more difficult or even impossible to achieve.

- (6) **Winning purchase instead of regional actors.** New urban people create new purchase power. This is a real opportunity for local agriculture and handicrafts. New purchasing power may also encourage the creation of personal services. However, there is a problem with the increase of social actors who are mainly consumers rather than getting involved in local issues. Often, even if the incoming residents wish to, they are kept away by the indigenous population. In this respect, the concept of the Swiss New Regional Policy, which targets innovation in mountain areas, might miss its target as the newcomers cannot or will not be innovative in services for the mountain region. This focus of the New Regional Policy may have to be reformulated.
- (7) **Masked increase of disparities.** The uneven regional and spatial development generates winners and losers but these are not visible at first sight. The combination of high regional income (taxes, purchase power) and reduction of local endogenous economic activities masks existing regional disparities. Within the last 15 years, regional disparities have increased in terms of population, regional productivity, future development opportunities and regional decision-making power.

Conclusion

In the Alps, the disparities have changed from a mere poor – rich cleavage to a decisive – executive cleavage. Competition between national states has been shifted to regional competition. The spatial division of labour has been expanded, new users have emerged, with new preferences for living in the Alps and at their fringe. Previously rural parts may be still sparsely populated but have become integrated as peripheries of metro-

politan areas. This development has brought new advantages for the peri-alpine metropolises in their global competition to attract high qualified staff and also offers some opportunities for small and medium-sized towns on the alpine fringe as locations for homes and leisure. The new preferences for landscape amenities are not an expression of a higher awareness of environmental issues, rather they are the catalyst for consuming a double amount of space. Besides new opportunities, this new development causes new problems. It seems that new rapports between regional actors, i. e. new forms of regional governance are needed to cope with these issues.

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