

URBANISTICA calls for a paradigm shift in spatial planning

Spatial planning in Switzerland over the last seventy years has been characterised by the construction of transport infrastructure and subsequent settlement growth via periodic designation to building zones. Since the 2014 revision of the Spatial Planning Act, designation to building zones has become almost impossible and building-land reserves have largely been built over. However, the densification of existing urban space enshrined in this act is either being implemented insufficiently or not at all. This is leading to an undersupply on the housing market, particularly in the economic centres. The consequences are a housing shortage, unabated increases in the prices of flats, and restrictions on economic development. Affordable flats can now only be found in peripheral areas. This is prompting ever-increasing commuter flows. In addition, leisure traffic is growing as a result of the concentration of supply services and leisure facilities in the major centres. The Swiss transport infrastructure is thus reaching the limits of its capacity. Expanding it is very expensive and increases the pressure on nature, as do any endeavours to make designation to building zones easier again.

URBANISTICA, the Association for good urban development, is calling for a paradigm shift:

1. Urban planning must take precedence over the expansion of transport infrastructure!

The existing transport infrastructure is basically sufficient to accommodate a population growth of up to 10 million inhabitants and the associated economic development. However, the prerequisite for this is that the inward settlement development postulated in the Spatial Planning Act takes place at locations that are already extremely well connected in terms of mobility, on the basis of plans that aim for high, explicitly urban, densities. Along with the core cities, these locations are mainly sub-centres and medium-sized centres in agglomerations, or regional centres in peripheral regions. Focusing on a polycentric settlement structure turns small and medium-sized towns back into interesting places to work, with attractive services and leisure-time quality. This then leads to a reduction in mobility.

2. Spatial planning on all three state levels must be consistently geared towards a polycentric networked urban settlement structure, along the lines of a Swiss Urban Network 2.0.

The strategy of a polycentric network of cities, towns and communes, as already envisaged by the federal government, cantons and communes in the Spatial Strategy for Switzerland, must be developed further. Based on the existing transport infrastructure, the concept of a Swiss Urban Network 2.0 must be jointly developed. This concept must set binding quantitative requirements for the densification and strengthening of existing well-developed centres. Swiss Urban Network 2.0 is to be planned according to the principles of urban development, in a quantitatively and qualitatively interdisciplinary manner, and with the aid of strategic guidelines, test plans and master plans in functional spaces. The desired densities must be laid down in the structure plans that are binding for authorities, as well as in the land-use plans that are binding for landowners. The communes and planning regions must be made responsible for implementation, but also supported.

3. Each year, 500 million Swiss francs, or a quarter of the expenditure on the expansion of transport infrastructure, must be channelled into a 'short distances fund' for the planning and implementation of inward settlement development, as per the requirements of a Swiss Urban Network 2.0.

The federal government, cantons and communes spend two billion Swiss francs a year on the expansion of transport infrastructure. A quarter of that, i.e. 500

million Swiss francs, should in future be used via a 'fund for short distances' to finance urban planning and urban development measures at commune level, and in the planning regions. This will enable the necessary strategic and planning measures to be financed, and the desired urban densification to be realised. The premise is that inward settlement development via urban development at networked locations with good transport connections leads to sufficient housing, higher settlement quality, sustainable economic growth and less mobility.

URBANISTICA – Association for good urban development was founded in June 2023. It strives to provide impetus and promote public dialogue, with the aim of ensuring that high-quality, sustainable, needs-oriented urban planning is once again practised in Switzerland's cantons, communes, towns and cities.

The first measure taken by URBANISTICA was the publication of a manifesto for sustainable, quality-assuring spatial planning and the creation of sufficient affordable housing. This has since been signed by around 1500 people. <https://www.urbanistica.ch/en/manifest/>

In February 2024, the first URBANISTICA retreat brought together committed and recognised experts from a very wide range of disciplines. Together, they devised the general direction of this resolution. It is supported by the participants named here:

Vincent Albers, Christoph Caviezel, Prof. Kees Christiaanse, Remo Daguati, Balz Halter, Thomas Held, Michael Hermann, Alice Hollenstein, Joris Jehle, Dunja Kovari, Prof. Stefan Kurath, Prof. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, Martin Neff, Mirjam Niemeyer, Haris Piplas, Marco Salvi, Markus Schäfer, Thomas Sevcik, Pascal Vincent, Joris van Wezemael