



The Characteristics of Public Administration in Switzerland

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

As the history of the country, the founding of the modern Swiss state and its political institutions, the organization of public services, and the understanding of state task fulfillment as the basis for public administration have been addressed already, this chapter is devoted to the characteristics of its various administrations. The plural is deliberate. The federalist structure, along with the many cultural differences in the country, means one cannot treat public administration in Switzerland as a unitary entity. The Confederation, the cantons, the cities, and the communities each have their own administrations which differ from one another—beyond their common basic responsibilities.

For Switzerland, as elsewhere, public administration has increased in importance vis-à-vis politics, due to the greater professionalization and specialization which go hand in hand with the heightened complexity of political tasks nowadays. As the locus of important decisions shifts to higher, or even international, levels, the administrators who carry out decisions come to have more and more influence and distance themselves

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from the policy makers. Also the ‘militia’ manner in which public services are organized and delivered that is still widely used in Switzerland nowadays only works if politicians can rely on strong administrations.

Switzerland does not have a politicized administration that is replaced when a new government comes to power, and party affiliation is not a precondition for employment in the higher civil service. Still, such affiliation can be important when filling top administrative posts: it is not uncommon for successful applicants to belong to the personal political network, and hence to the party, of the elected politician who selects them. At the local level, some of the community secretaries (*Gemeindeschreiber*), the highest civil servant, are still elected, though less often so than in the past.

Despite various criticisms, the degree of bureaucratization in Switzerland remains relatively low, and the various public administrations are generally not perceived as authoritarian, superordinate powers one must submit to. That the aspect of service provision is more prominent may in the end be due to a direct democratic system in which the voters have the last word—and perhaps also that voter’s tax monies directly pay the wages of administrators. This becomes particularly visible at the local level. The level of satisfaction with administrative service provision is exceptionally high, particularly at the community level and also compared with such satisfaction levels in other prosperous countries (Denters et al. 2016). Residents are highly satisfied with the accessibility and performance of their administrators, and this makes the Swiss civil service system interesting to outside observers.

This chapter describes the scope of the public sector and administration in a narrower sense, followed by a description of how the various governmental levels are organized. The more important characteristics of the Swiss administrations are then discussed, as well as reforms which have been carried out in recent years. The chapter closes with a brief comparison of the Swiss system of public administrations with those in other West European countries.

3.2 THE DELIMITATION AND SCOPE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

It is not that easy to determine the scope of public administration, nor its changes over time, due to the relatively fluid boundary between public and private sectors in Switzerland, and also because the attribution of tasks

has changed through the years. There is a gray area where governmental bodies provide services also provided by private actors, or where mixed-economy and private enterprises are charged with providing public services. Demarcation problems arise, on the one hand, in trying to separate core administration in a narrower sense from what other governmental actors do, and, on the other hand, in clearly separating public and private sectors. Employees of the postal service or the national railroads, for example, are not counted as part of public administration in a narrower sense, yet they provide public services and are employed by the government (formally, as *Staatspersonal*). Hospital employees too, depending on who owns their place of employment, may either count as public sector employees (e.g., of a canton) or as part of the private sector.

The nomenclature used by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office bases its determination of what counts as part of the public sector on the legal form a given administrative entity takes.¹ Public administration in a narrow sense thus includes national, cantonal, district, and community administrations, along with public corporations. Commercially oriented entities over which the government holds a controlling majority are counted among the public enterprises,² as are the public enterprises of the cantons, the districts, the communities, the public enterprises of a corporate body, as well as entities under public law. The public sector is composed of these public enterprises and entities, along with the public administrations in a narrower sense.

As of 2015, the Swiss public sector comprised about 575,000 full-time positions (see Table 3.1),³ or about 15 percent of all full-time positions. Just under two-thirds of these positions were in the public administrations, and a little more than a third were in public enterprises. In the case of the former, the largest share, at a little more than half, is accounted for by cantonal public administrations. About one-quarter of these positions are in the communities, and about 10 percent are at the national level. Among public enterprises, the largest share by far consists of positions in the public institutions, followed by the cantons and the communities.

¹The NOGA (*Nomenclature générale des activités économiques*) makes it possible, based on their economic activity, to classify the statistical units ‘enterprises’ and ‘workplaces’. NOGA 2008 is the current version.

²The legal entities which fall under corporate law (such as stock companies, sole proprietorships or unregistered partnerships) can also offer public services. However, they are not counted as part of the public sector and instead belong to the private sector.

³See BFS – STATENT.

Table 3.1 Full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, public sector employees, by legal form (2015)

<i>Legal form</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>In %</i>	<i>In %</i>
<i>Public sector</i>	572,044.3		100.0
<i>Public administrations</i>	373,969.5	100.0	65.4
National administration	36,071.3	9.6	6.3
Cantonal administration	190,145.6	50.8	33.2
District administration	1072.1	0.3	0.2
Community administration	92,329.9	24.7	16.1
Entities under public law ^a	54,350.6	14.5	9.5
<i>Public enterprises</i>	198,074.8	100.0	34.6
Cantonal public enterprises	40,075.7	20.2	7.0
District public enterprises	824.7	0.4	0.1
Community public enterprises	26,511.9	13.4	4.6
Corporate body public enterprises ^b	14,438.6	7.3	2.5
Entities under public law	116,223.9	58.7	20.3

Source: BFS – STATENT: <https://www.pxweb.bfs.admin.ch> (consulted on September 2, 2017), published values (provisional)

^aThese are public corporations which cannot be listed as falling under national, cantonal, district, or community administration, such as municipal associations, administrative districts, the public bodies responsible for schools in certain cantons (*Schulgemeinden*), and administrations managed by several corporate bodies. See Datenstandard eCH-0097, Version 3.0

^bPublic enterprises which cannot be listed under national, cantonal, district, or community enterprises, such as the forestry enterprises of residents' communities (*Ortsbürgergemeinden*) in certain cantons. See Datenstandard eCH-0097, Version 3.0

The growth of the public sector has been a repeated subject of political controversy. However, the statistics show that the share of the public sector has actually diminished, at least in recent years. My own calculations based on Federal Statistical Office figures show the numbers shrank by around 2000 full-time equivalents (FTEs) from 2012 to 2015. If one looks at the changes in FTEs relative to population increase, then the reduction is even clearer. In 2012, there were 72.2 FTEs per 1000 residents; in 2015, this stood at 69.4 FTEs. Hence there was a reduction in the public sector share of all positions from 15.4 to 14.9 percent, largely due to changes in public enterprises and entities under public law. Among the public administrations, however, FTEs increased from 44.9 per 1000 residents in 2012 to 45.4 FTEs in 2015, or from 9.6 to 9.8 percent of all employees.

The figures from the 2001, 2005, and 2008 business censuses showed no great shift of positions from the private to the public sector, either.⁴

⁴See Branchenporträt des öffentlichen Sektors (2015), p. 9 and 10.

Unfortunately, such figures do not allow one to follow developments over a longer time period, and the constantly changing definitions and categories do not make a definitive assessment easy. There is still a notion in Switzerland that the public sector generally, and public administration in a narrower sense, continue to increase in importance, at least in terms of positions and wages.⁵ The empirical evidence, however, is less unanimous or conclusive.

The proportion of Swiss public sector employees is markedly lower than in most other comparable countries. In Scandinavia, especially Denmark and Norway, it lies near 30 percent; at about 10 percent, Switzerland is right behind Germany and well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (OECD 2017a). Particularly noteworthy is the low share, at under 10 percent, of those employed at the national level in Switzerland, largely due to the country's federalist political structure. Yet even among federalist countries, this is very low. It may in part be due to a unique understanding of the state as well as to a particularly pronounced decentralization (OECD 2017b).

The largest single public administration in Switzerland is at the national level. If one looks at the development of civil service positions here, then one sees an increase starting around the year 2000 followed by a marked reduction (Fig. 3.1). In the following decade, the numbers again increased, reaching a plateau of about 35,000.⁶ As the country's population also increased substantially in this period, then at least in terms of positions per 1000 residents, the tendency since 2003 has actually been regressive. At least some of the reduction in personnel is probably attributable to efforts at rationalizing jobs and increasing efficiency, in turn related to externalizing some activities, dispensing with certain services, and outsourcing specific task areas. There is relatively high political pressure in the country to not increase the outlays for public administration activities.

Evidence for an implicit ceiling of 35,000 also is reflected by figures from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, when between 32,000 and 35,000 national-level administrative positions were recorded. Since 2000, a

⁵ See the NZZ, February 3, 2017.

⁶ Though the Federal Council had proposed 254 FTEs for 2016, as well as 177.5 additional FTEs based on internal changes, the total actually reduced (-21 FTE, for a total of 34,914 positions) for the first time in six years. This was due in part to cuts in personnel the Federal Council had decided upon, as well as a certain reluctance to recruit (Bericht zur Bundesrechnung R2016, Vol. 1, p. 79).

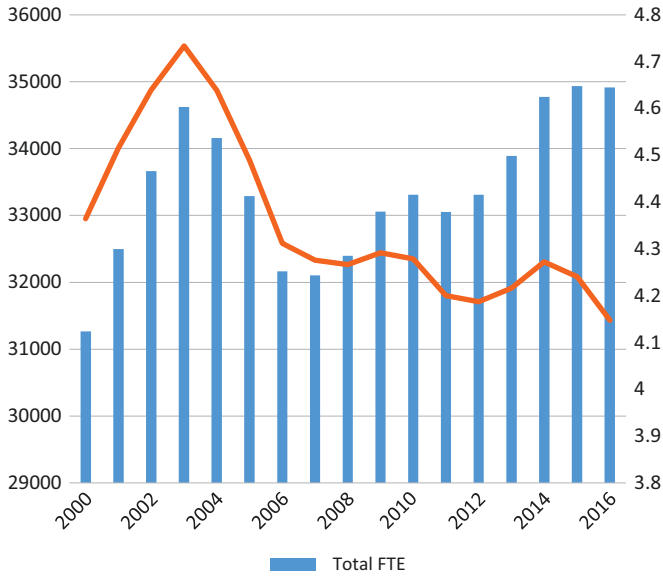


Fig. 3.1 National administrative positions and total positions per 1000 residents

number of entities, including the ETHs (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule) in Zurich and Lausanne, have no longer been listed under the ‘general national administration’ heading (Varone 2013: 113)—though they accounted for nearly 15,000 positions. Many of these are supported through third-party funding.

The government holds a majority of the shares in a number of large enterprises, such as Swisscom (telecommunications), and controls others (the postal service, the Swiss railroads, the defense company Ruag), and though these are not counted as part of the national administration in a narrower sense, they account together for considerably more than 100,000 FTEs (2015–16). With 44,000 employees in the postal service, 21,000 at Swisscom, and 9000 at Ruag, the current numbers in these enterprises are higher than in previous decades. The national railroads, at 33,000 FTEs, have also increased their employment compared to the turn of the millennium. However, one should not forget that the number of beneficiaries of these services (e.g., railroad passengers) also has increased, as have the services provided.

Most public administration staff, as noted, work at the cantonal level. In 2015, all cantons together employed about 190,000 FTEs, plus an

additional 40,000 in cantonal public enterprises. The most populous cantons (Zurich, Bern, Vaud, Geneva) have the largest administrations, though it is noteworthy that Zurich's cantonal administration (19 positions per 1000 residents) is significantly smaller than in these other cantons (26, 28, and 44 positions per 1000 in Bern, Vaud, and Geneva, respectively).

There are various reasons for this. In addition to the respective significance accorded the public sector, how public services are provided, for example, as a division of labor between public and private enterprises, or between canton and community, has an influence on the size of a cantonal administration. The centrality of a canton can play a role as well. Generally, the more urban a canton is (e.g., Geneva, Basel-City), the larger the cantonal administration. French-speaking cantons traditionally also give more weight to the public sector and prefer tasks being carried out at the cantonal rather than at the community level. One can speak of a kind of cantonalization of administration in French-speaking Switzerland but of a municipalization in German-speaking Switzerland.

In 2015, more than 92,000 FTEs worked as municipal administrators, plus an additional 27,000 in municipal public enterprises. Less work at the community than at the cantonal level, and communities have dwindled in relative importance as employers over the last few decades compared with the cantons. This is largely due to the considerable expansion at the cantonal level in education and health sectors.

There is even more variation in the size of administrations at the community level than among the cantons. In the smallest communities (less than 500 inhabitants), of which many still exist, the administration consists of the community secretary (*Gemeindeschreiber*) and at most one or two additional employees who divide less than two FTEs between them. The cities, by contrast, have fully developed and effective public administrations which may employ several thousand people. The relative size of community administrations, defined as the number of employees per 100 residents, takes a U-shaped form. As the number of residents increases, the relative number of community employees at first declines, but then gradually rises—above about 2000 residents—and reaches its highest values in the cities. This confirms findings familiar from research on organizations and administration: with increasing size of an organizational unit, a degree of rationalization can be achieved in fulfilling tasks, but that with increased functional differentiation, coordination efforts, and with it the costs, of administration begin to rise again (Geser et al. 1996).

If one compares the administrative density among the largest Swiss cities, defined as the number of city employees per 1000 residents, Zurich (28.5 positions) has the highest density, followed by Lausanne (27.5). At first glance, the difference between German-speaking Zurich and French-speaking Lausanne does not appear all that large. But in Zurich, one needs to add the 25 positions in the city's public enterprises, while Lausanne has only seven (per 1000 residents). This is corroboration for the point noted above: administration at the community level plays a greater role in German-speaking Switzerland than it does in Western, French-speaking Switzerland. French-speaking Geneva, for example, has only 18.5 positions (per 1000 residents) in city administration, and none at all in city public enterprise, due to a strong cantonal presence in public administration. Likewise, Bern has no positions in the city's public enterprises, and thus has a comparatively low administrative employment of 21 (per 1000 residents). Strong cantonalization is at work here, as is the fact that it plays less of a role as a regional center: the area taken up by the city itself is very small, and it is encircled by larger, high-performing communities.

According to surveys we have repeatedly carried out, the number of community personnel has increased over the last 20 years. In 2016, about 60 percent of the communities ($n = 1757$) have noted an increase in the number of positions over the last decade, while 30 percent report no change. Increases are largely confined to larger communities and cities.

3.3 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Swiss *national administration*⁷ is divided into seven Federal Departments: Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Home Affairs (FDHA), Justice and Police (FDJP), Defense, Civil Protection and Sports (DDPS), Finance (FDF), Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER), and Environment, Transportation, Energy, and Communications (DETEC). To this one should add the Federal Chancellery (FCh). The Departments have General Secretariats—four also have State Secretariats—and a variety of Offices and other units below them.

Compared to the Ministries found in other countries, there are few Departments, and this is directly related to the number of Federal Councilors (*Bundesräte*). The national executive, the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*), has consisted of seven members since 1848 (see Chap. 1),

⁷For a detailed overview, see Varone (2013).

and the number of Departments in the national administration reflects this. Some of them are quite large and heterogeneous: the head of the UVEK (Eidgenössisches Departement für Umwelt, Verkehr, Energie und Kommunikation) Department is simultaneously Minister for Transportation, Minister for Energy, Minister for Communications, and Minister for the Environment, and in international negotiations, depending on subject area, must deal with numerous different colleagues.

In terms of national civil service employment, the DDPS (Defense), at 30 percent in 2015, accounts for the largest share, followed by the FDF at about 25 percent, and the FDFA at about 15 percent (see Table 3.2). The other four departments all have less, though the number of employees is not directly related to how much that department spends. Thus, the FDHA, at about one-quarter, has the largest share, closely followed by the FDF; the share of the DDPS (Defense), however, has shrunk, and now stands at less than 8 percent.

The real backbone of the national administration is found at the lower level, in the Offices and other units associated with a given Department (Grisel 1984: 213). The Departments themselves are relatively immobile, so governmental activities occurs at these lower levels; in most departments, the number of such offices and other units have grown in the last century (see Table 3.3). Only in the DDPS (Defense), despite its size, can one see a countertendency owing to recent changes and reorganization efforts. The State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation

Table 3.2 Personnel (positions) and expenditures (million CHF) by departments in 2015

<i>Departments</i>	<i>Employees (absolute)</i>	<i>Employees (in %)</i>	<i>Expenditures (in million CHF)</i>	<i>Expenditures (in %)</i>
FCh	216	0.6	46	0.1
FDFA	5537	15.8	3170	4.8
FDFI	2227	6.3	16,870	25.7
FDJP	2410	6.9	2280	3.5
DDPS	11,670	33.2	4850	7.4
FDF	8681	24.7	16,230	24.7
EAER	2150	6.1	12,220	18.6
DETEC	2232	6.4	10,000	15.2
Total	35,123	100	65,666	100.0

Source: Der Bund kurz erklärt 2017: 42 ff

Note: Entities with large degrees of autonomy (the ETHs formally under the FDHA, FINMA under the FDF, or the Competition Commission under the EAER) are not included here

Table 3.3 Number of offices directly under department heads, 1928 to 2017

<i>Year/department</i>	<i>FDEA</i>	<i>FDFI</i>	<i>FDJP</i>	<i>DDPS</i>	<i>FDF</i>	<i>EAER</i>	<i>DEVEC</i>	<i>Total</i>
1928	1	7	6	15	7	6	3	45
1959	4	12	6	11	8	6	6	53
1980	5	14	8	7	13	7	7	61
1991	6	11	11	7	11	8	7	61
2001	5	11	11	7	10	8	9	58
2006	6	11	9	7	11	8	7	59
2011	6	12	10	6	11	10	8	63
2017	7	11	12	7	12	10	8	67

Sources: Germann (1996: 49) for 1928–91 and Der Bund kurz erklärt 2017 for 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2017

(SERI) and the ETHs, both previously in the FDHA (Interior), were transferred into the newly named Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research (previously: Federal Department of Economic Affairs), and together with the Commission for Technology and Innovation (CTI) comprise the new SERI.

The General Secretariats play a significant role in the individual Departments. They coordinate the administrative work of or for the Swiss parliament and the Federal Council, and serve as the interface between the various Offices in a Department and the respective Federal Councilor. In doing so, they undertake planning, coordination, consulting, and controlling or monitoring tasks, exert influence on personnel and finances, and also have the job of communicating messages externally. The individual General Secretariats are also responsible for, and provide, other, partly department-specific services, including for Presence Switzerland [public diplomacy, nation-branding], to aid gender equality, carry out translations, answer consumer inquiries, and so forth.

Certain areas are not directly under the respective Departments and follow a different organizational logic. This includes institutions and enterprises located farther afield as well as the ‘militia’ administration. In the case of the former, these include the enterprises, institutes, or agencies under public law which belong entirely to the Swiss Confederation, some of which may even be separate legal entities (e.g., the Swiss Institute for Intellectual Property, the two Federal Institutes of Technology [ETH], and the Federal Pension Fund [Publica]). Further from the center, one finds enterprises under public law or under special provisions in which the national government is the sole or majority owner. This includes former

state monopolies, such as the SBB/the Swiss Railway, Ruag Holding, Skyguide SA, the Swiss National Accident Insurance Fund SUVA, Swisscom, and the Swiss Post (Pasquier and Fivat 2013: 192). This segment of the Swiss public administration has gradually opened to greater competition.

Extra-parliamentary commissions, brought to life by the Federal Council or by individual Departments to carry out certain public tasks, are counted as part of the ‘militia administration’. Their members are mostly not federal civil servants but rather experts, and they are asked to address a large range of political and policy tasks. A commission might take the form of a board of experts or consultants who offer advice to federal administrators, or of interested parties who help with the preliminary work for proposed laws, or they might be those parties interested and involved in implementing specific policies. One study found 223 commissions of this kind in 2010 (Rebmann and Mach 2013: 167, 170).

Examples of such commissions, which gives an idea of just how broad a range of issues this ‘militia administration’ addresses, include the Anti-Racism Commission, the Commission for Women’s Issues, the Tobacco Control Commission, the Consumer Affairs Commission, the Commission for Radiopharmaceuticals, the Regional Planning Council, and the Swiss Delegation for the Regulation of Lake of Geneva. Over time, the work of some of these commissions can result in creating regulatory authorities which themselves may come to play significant roles in the nation’s administration. Prominent examples include the Competition Commission (under the EAER), the Communications Commission (under DETEC), FINMA (under the FDF), the Electricity Commission (independent of both the DETEC and the Federal Council), or the Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products (affiliated with the FDHA) (Gilardi et al. 2013: 203).

Due to the ‘implementation federalism’ (“Vollzugsföderalismus”) which is characteristic of the Swiss political system, the cantonal administrations, in spatial terms, can be counted part of decentralized administration—at least for those public administration tasks which are carried out in common. This category also includes deconcentrated services provided by the national level, for example, the customs directorate.

To some degree, *cantonal administrations* are analogs of the national administration.⁸ Public tasks and activities are first divided between

⁸For a detailed overview, see Koller (2013).

Departments (or Directorates) and then distributed among the various Offices (or Services). The cantonal administrations are also supported by the work of various commissions, with at least some cantons (Graubünden, Jura, Luzern, Obwalden, Uri; see Moor 1992: 43) anchoring the existence of such commissions in their constitutions, at least in part.

In the 1990s, the cantons began to simplify their administrative apparatus. Many cantons dissolved departments previously devoted to military or civilian defense, or agriculture, or welfare issues. In some cases, if interior or justice departments were not closed, they might be consolidated. Reorganization of this kind was carried out in nearly all the cantons, though at differing levels of intensity and with different results.

Two models have established themselves since 2006, with either seven or five equally strongly represented departments. Both cantonal departments and the cantonal offices below them have seen increased concentration. The number of cantonal departments has declined, across the country, by 33 percent (from 208 in 1990 to 156 in 2008), while the number of offices only slightly increased (by 4 percent from 1070 to 1110) over the same time period (Koller 2013: 139).

The activities carried out have also seen greater harmonization, reflected not least in the nomenclature used. Every canton at this point has an education department, one also responsible for science and culture, and every canton has a construction, transportation, energy, and environment department. Out of 26 cantons, 23 have police and justice departments, 21 have finance departments, and 19 have health and social welfare departments.

Generally speaking, the number of lower-level offices are proportionate to the size of the department, with education the largest (227 offices in the 26 cantons), followed at considerable distance by the health and social welfare departments (132 offices). As at the national level, six cantons (Aargau, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Schaffhausen, St. Gallen, Solothurn, Schwyz) had Interior Departments (as of 2001). One more rarely finds offices devoted to newer policy concerns such as the promotion of gender equality (nine cantons); only ten cantons have bureaus devoted to inter-cantonal cooperation and community reform (Koller 2013: 141).

As for the *community administrations*, there is quite a difference between the larger municipalities and the cities. The structure of city administrations is very similar to that of the cantonal administration, but due to the character of their tasks, they are closer to the citizens and the users of their services. Some of the city administrations are larger than the administrations

of smaller cantons, whereas the administrations of the smaller municipalities may only consist of a few people.

The president of a community, despite his or her role as *primus inter pares* in a community's executive or ruling council, also has added competencies, which in quite a few communities means managing the community's employees. Political and administrative responsibility lies with the community's executive body as a whole, with each executive council member responsible for one or more areas—typically construction, finances and taxes, public works, social issues, health, schools, security, and the official registration of the residents.⁹ The heads of these departments as a rule are only involved in preliminary consultations, or at best in the implementation of administrative decisions; decision-making power is in the hands of the executive council as a whole, or in a sub-committee it delegates to address certain tasks.

Legislative powers in slightly less than 20 percent of the bigger, or French-, or Italian-speaking municipalities are in the hands of a local council which decides on the budget, public expenditures or projects, and local regulations. In the rest of the municipalities, predominantly German-speaking, or the rather small ones, most decisions are taken in a local assembly. These gatherings of citizens entitled to vote take place about two or three times a year. Prior the vote, typically by a show of hands, the issues at stake are open to debate and amendments and changes can be suggested.

Beyond the executive and legislative, communities also have other organs at their disposal, in particular commissions which are responsible for a very specific sector in the community (e.g., construction, fire prevention, welfare, taxes, schools). On the one hand, they fulfill political purposes, inasmuch as different (political) groups in the community thereby have a chance to participate in decision-making. On the other hand, they fulfill function related to expertise, inasmuch as the occupational or professional skills and knowledge (of individual commission members) can be drawn on. As a rule, a member of the community's executive body presides over these community commissions, and its members are selected or elected by the legislative or the executive if they are not directly elected by the citizens, as it is often the case for school commissions.

In addition to community commissions which are granted independent administrative powers, communities can also create oversight commissions which examine the work of the administrators and of the executive.

⁹For further details, see Steiner and Kaiser (2013).

These include audit commissions, finance commissions, and controlling commissions.

The community secretary plays a particular, and important, role. As the ‘chief of staff’ of the executive, he or she is at the intersection of politics and administration. His or her responsibilities include organizing the entire administration of the community, preparing meetings (including of the executive council), and advising the political authorities. In communities with part-time executives, he or she may exert a great deal of influence on its political affairs.

Since the 1990s, and influenced by New Public Management (NPM) ideas calling for a sharper division between strategic (political) and operative (administrative) levels, various Swiss communities have increased the duties of the *Gemeindeschreiber* so that he directly manages the entire community administration. As in other European countries, this gives him a position like that of a city manager. In such communities, the executive is then responsible for the political decisions, and this city manager equivalent is responsible for implementation (Steiner and Kaiser 2013: 159).

The basic challenge for every administrative organization is both leadership and coordination. The typical form of organizational division used in Switzerland leads to structuring the second level down by subject or field—education, health, security, planning/construction, culture, and so forth. This runs the danger that departments (or directorates at the cantonal level or municipal level), owing to a certain degree of egoism, make themselves independent, and leave the executive, as a collegial body, having to accept the loss of a degree of control (Thom and Ritz 2008). That the heads of the various departments (at once also members of an executive council) may also have different party allegiances may reinforce this kind of organizational ‘silo’ culture.

Certain problems are also created for leadership. Though the higher-level civil servants are usually experts in their areas and remain for many years at their posts, the political careers of members of the executive are typically of more limited duration. This is a special issue at the community level, as political candidates often have little experience relevant to administering a community (Geser et al. 2011). It is also here where reforms, including new leadership models developed as part of NPM efforts, underscored by the Swiss Government and Administrative Organization Law of 1997, come into effect. A genuinely collegial leadership of public administration, based on a common perspective shared by all executive council members, has been no more possible to achieve (Germann 1996: 53) neither has a forward-looking, effects-based steering following political guidelines set out by a legislature.

3.4 CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic of administrations in Switzerland is their permeability with respect to the private sector, along with the now nearly obsolete status of permanent civil servants (*Beamtenstatus*). There is no particular examination that needs to be passed to become a civil servant, and the often life-long guarantee of continued employment government officials enjoy in many countries is an exception in Switzerland. Most cantons and communities, as well as the national administration, employ or employed a system of appointment to office for a specified length of time. According to Germann (2011), this reflects a pronounced republicanism, as well as the later direct democratic tradition, one alien to the professionalized civil services which emerged out of monarchical court administration in other countries.

With the new Federal Employment Law, in effect since 2002, the system changed from one in which civil servants were employed for four-year, renewable, periods to one with open-ended employment. With few exceptions (e.g., employees in judicial capacities), all those who work at the national level are employed using individual contracts under public law which can be canceled by either party. During the 1990s, numerous communities and cantons switched to employment relationships under public law.¹⁰

Nevertheless, in Switzerland, as elsewhere, there is critique of the bureaucratic mentality thought to be found among government employees, and critique of increasing bureaucratization. The perception, at times, is of a state which regulates life more and more with the help of a mighty administration dictating what the country's residents have to do. Overall, though, residents do not have an antagonistic relationship to administrators per se, and also do not perceive them as an authority deserving excessive respect. The strong degree of decentralization in the country and the traditions of direct democracy, coupled with the fiscal sovereignty at each political level, results in a rather different relationship of citizen to state and public administration than seems to be the case in other countries.

¹⁰ In 1997, the Swiss parliament decided to separate postal, telephone, and telegraph enterprises (then: PTT), creating the independent entities of the Post and of the Telecom AG (since 1998: Swisscom). Swisscom employees had earlier already been changed from that of civil servants to being employees under public law. When the new Federal Personnel Act came into force, employees of the postal services and of the federal railroads also lost their status as civil servants.

At the community level, people see exactly what is being done with their taxes, and they have quite direct ways to influence not only policy but also—and in particular—the expenditures of the local authorities. They do so with full knowledge that it is through their taxes that these expenditures will be financed. Correspondingly, they do not just let themselves be ‘managed’ or ‘administered’ but expect good quality, efficiently delivered services from ‘their’ community and ‘their’ community employees. Local politicians and administrators take this seriously, and make considerable efforts to be both transparent and accessible, and this seems to work extremely well. Residents in Switzerland, especially when compared with other wealthy nation-states like Denmark, Norway, or the Netherlands, are not only happier with the avenues open to them to influence policy locally, but are also happier with the local provision of services (see Denters et al. 2016).

Having part-timers fulfill public mandates contributes to this sense of being in touch with the people. Due to how small many communities are, but also often as a conscious choice, many public tasks are performed not by career administrators but by citizens who also pursue other professions (Geser 1981). Swiss often refer to this as a ‘militia’ system, and it reaches deep into local administration. In many communities, operational management also is carried out by elected, but part-time, politicians. Other residents, sometimes endowed with the requisite expertise from their ‘real’ professions, people the local commissions, and while these might only have consultative functions, they can have regulatory or even decision-making powers. Here, too, administrative tasks are carried out in the nebulous area between public responsibility and the private sector.

Since the Swiss political system does not function following a pattern of parties in government and parties in opposition ready to assume power, the politically motivated replacement of top administrators after a successful election, as occurs in the US, is also unknown. The party affiliation of top administrators plays a quite small role in Switzerland, allowing for greater continuity over time as well as more focus on the subject at hand (Krumm 2013: 230). At most, members of the Federal Council might select their personal staff or the directors of certain offices based on their party affiliation, but because the four most important political parties are all permanently represented in the national executive, these parties are also all represented in key offices in the national administration. True, for many years the Liberals (now: FDP. Die Liberalen) dominated the administrative posts, but this party also long dominated Swiss politics. Their predominant

position has weakened, so both the left-wing Social Democratic Party (SP) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) today have numerous officials in important civil service positions. Only the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP), whose rise to prominence and power (from 12 percent in 1991 to nearly 30 percent by 2015) has been relatively recent, is underrepresented in top administrative posts.

There is also a general feeling that a multilingual country should try to make sure its major language groups are proportionately represented in the civil service, even though this complicates how both administration and politics function. Some mitigation comes through federalism and community autonomy, since relatively few cities (Biel, Fribourg) or cantons (Valais, Fribourg, Bern, Graubünden—4 of 26) face genuine issues arising from multilingualism in their jurisdictions. Nearly all communities in the country are monolingual, whether in Italian, French, or German; so in terms of politics and administration, it is at the national level where multilingualism is most addressed and most relevant.

Multilingualism does not mean one can interact with the authorities anywhere in the country in one's own language, or even that one has a right to do so. Rather, if a German-speaking family moves to a French-speaking part of the country, then French becomes the relevant language for interacting with local and cantonal authorities. The right that does exist to use one's own language when dealing with the authorities is one that applies, in particular, to dealing with the national-level authorities.

At this national level, more or less successful efforts are undertaken to have the civil service mirror the proportion of those who speak a given language in the Swiss population. As a result, one finds 71.3 percent German-speakers, 21.4 percent French-speakers, 7 percent Italian-speakers, and 0.3 percent Romansch-speakers among civil servants at the national level, numbers which approximate the native speakers of these languages among Swiss (Eidgenössisches Personalamt 2017: 8).

Given this ambition at proportionality, it is perhaps not surprising that controversies arise, whether over the underrepresentation in key positions of those who speak particular minority languages, over the translation of working documents, or about the use of Swiss-German rather than High German in informal conversations. At regular intervals, directives are sent out in an effort to promote multilingualism.¹¹ As exceedingly few administrators are perfectly trilingual, the operative practice is that everyone uses

¹¹ See also Kübler (2013).

their mother tongue, under the assumption that everyone understands the other languages quite well. With three languages and complex problems, this can be a challenging standard to meet. The language which ends up functionally dominating is High German, though English is threatening to replace it and become the new *lingua franca*.

3.5 REFORMS AND MODERNIZATION

The NPM movement reached Switzerland in the 1990s (Lienhard et al. 2005). Here one should distinguish between reforms which concerned the responsibilities for, and the organization of, carrying out public tasks and reforms made to internal administrative processes and service delivery itself. While all of these are reforms to administration, we can call the first external and the second internal (see Kuhlmann and Bouckaert 2016: 4 et seq.),

Switzerland has a tradition of outsourcing public tasks, one established long before NPM emerged. Beginning in the early twentieth century, communities and cantons found numerous ways to fulfill public duties with the help of private and semiprivate providers.¹² This tradition has been strengthened more recently, particularly in areas where the market has been liberalized, with examples of such outsourcing including Swisscom, the defense industries and military workshops now part of Ruag Holding, or the cantonal banks.

At the national level, this trend is manifested in what are called the third and fourth circles.¹³ The third includes enterprises and institutions owned by the national government (the ETHs, Swissmedic, etc.) which exist due to dedicated legislation. These enterprises and institutions are chartered or organized under public law, but do not fall under the provisions of the Federal Budget Act. In the fourth circle, one finds public-private enterprises or stock companies chartered under specific laws which fulfill special national tasks (the national railroads, the postal service, Swisscom). This reorganization has led to a reduction in the size of the state sector, as understood narrowly (see Germann and Ladner 2014). At the cantonal level, building insurance and traffic offices have

¹² On this, see Pasquier and Fivat (2013: 190).

¹³ This model was introduced as part of NPM reforms. It separated the national administration into four concentric circles, with the innermost containing the core ministerial administration. The second contained the FLAG offices with their performance agreements and global budgets. The third circle included the enterprises and institutions under public law, while the fourth contained the mixed and private enterprises.

been outsourced; communities, by the same token, turn relatively often to private computer technology, spatial planning, or energy providers.

Administrative reforms in a narrower sense, particularly at the national level, also have a certain tradition, and in the past were often part of austerity measures or efforts to increase efficiency. More comprehensive reforms initially primarily affected the second circle of the ‘four-circle model’ introduced in the 1990s. Offices not primarily involved with political coordination, such as general secretaries or cross-departmental agencies, were gradually transformed into a new steering model given the acronym FLAG (*Führen mit Leistungsauftrag und Globalbudget*—Leading with Performance Mandates and Global Budgets), with the idea of introducing a more outcome-oriented form of administration providing more operative freedom. The differentiation between first and second circles was eliminated as of the beginning of 2017, and in introducing a new, comprehensive leadership model in the national civil service (the German acronym for which is NFB), a format very close to the NPM model is now operating. Administration and leadership are now goal and outcome-oriented, and both transparency and controllability are to be improved at all levels.

During the 1990s, a crisis in public financing, and changes to the economic and ideological environment led to radical administrative reforms in many cantons, including abolishing the tenure of civil servants, introducing NPM reforms, or reorganizing administrative departments (Germann and Ladner 2014). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than half the cantons use elements of NPM, most of them across all administrative areas (as in the Aargau, Bern, Luzern, Solothurn, Thurgau, and Zürich).

Efforts to modernize administration were also undertaken in the communities in the 1990s, in part, in response to what NPM called for. However, such changes tended to be carried out in the largest communities, and only rarely were core elements of NPM, such as outcome-oriented steering and the reorganization of the different public activities in the form of products or group of products, which can be quantitatively measured and which have a fixed price, introduced (see Ladner 2016).

The concepts and the goals of these reforms, which replace the interventionist and performance-oriented state model through a ‘guaranteeing’ state notion, were not fundamentally new to Switzerland, nor was the suggestion contained in these NPM and governance models that public service and tasks could or ought to be provided through greater private sector involvement. In fact, many smaller nation-states have traditions of

public-private cooperation and negotiating political solutions across party lines (Lijphart 1999). Noteworthy in Switzerland are the mixed or para-state solutions governments find, making the state appear quite lean despite the density of public services provided.

The Swiss state is certainly liberal in the classical sense, but it has little in common with the minimalist state. It is not that governmental tasks are not carried out. It is instead that they are carried out in other ways and, most particularly, not with the help of a central state apparatus. As history shows, this is not just the product of a consciously chosen strategy, but was in the end, and given the country's cultural differences and the absence of strong, centralized power, the only way a national Swiss state could emerge. This was augmented by appropriate political institutions which shared power both between the cantons and between the cantons and the Confederation (federalism), between the parties ('concordance'), and between the people and the political authorities (direct democracy). All these elements make it difficult to engage in grand and transformative political or administrative acts. The reforms the international literature calls for, however, are not completely unfamiliar to the Swiss administrative system. With its traditionally decentralized form and in light of the services already provided in partnership with the private sector, Swiss public administration is more modern than is often thought.

3.6 SWISS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ITS INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Swiss system of public administration was long ignored in comparative studies,¹⁴ and in light of the country's small size and minor international importance, this is understandable. But given the country capacities and capabilities, the high degree of acceptance its civil service enjoys in the population, and how accessible its public administration is, it stands as a model that could well be of interest outside its borders.

When the Swiss public administration is included in models, as in Kuhlmann und Wollmann's 2013 study, then it is seen as an example of a continental European federalist nation-state, along with Germany and Austria. This sets it apart from the administrative systems found in France, Italy, or Spain (continental European Napoleonic), in Great Britain (the 'Anglo-Saxon' or English-speaking world), or Denmark and Sweden (Scandinavian).

¹⁴For more detail, see Giauque (2013).

This can certainly be justified but only up to a point. Like them, Switzerland is federalist as well as a constitutional state under Roman law. Decentralization and a commitment to the principle of subsidiarity are also in common, though the latter is more pronounced in Switzerland.

What is far more alien to the Swiss case are traditions engendered by a hierarchical Prussian state (out of which German state administration grew) or by an imperial dual monarchy (which Austrian public administration has struggled to overcome). There are also differences with respect to public officials. Germany and Austria traditionally regarded their officials as ‘servants of the state’ who occupied a place above society (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2013: 26). In Switzerland, civil servants are more often seen as ‘employees of the people’. The boundary between public and private professional roles is more porous in Swiss administrations, and ‘the state’ has been regarded far less as a lordly, superior authority than in Austria or Germany. The acceptance of diversity, coupled with adamant assertions about cantonal sovereignty and community autonomy, together with strong elements of fiscal federalism, also sets Switzerland apart from its neighbors.

There are a number of parallels with the administrative systems one finds in Scandinavia. These include an openness toward public employees with respect to recruitment and career, as well as an openness toward the citizenry with respect to transparency, citizen participation, and a kind of ‘user democracy’. The Swiss also would seem to have some affinities with the liberal, utilitarian understanding of government found in the English-speaking world: the government is seen as one which acts, rather than as one whose existence is of ‘inherent value’ (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2013: 27). If one puts all these differences (*vis-à-vis* Switzerland’s German-speaking neighbors) and similarities (with Scandinavia or with England) together, then one can with good reason refer to the Swiss system as a hybrid model (Giauque 2013).

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