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THE WORKING COMMUNITY OF THE JURA

**THE DIFFERENT MOUNTAIN AREAS
IN A EUROPEAN MOUNTAIN POLICY**

THE JURA

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Much of this introduction to the Jura mountain area is taken from the following publications and studies:

- Étude sur l'armature économique et urbaine de l'espace CTJ, Synthèse générale (Study on the economic and urban framework of the area covered by the Working Community of the Jura, Summary), Michèle Tranda, 1990.
- Preliminary study by the INSEE (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) of the Federal Statistics Office and the cantonal statistics bureaus of Bern, Vaud, Neuchâtel and the Jura for a transfrontier booklet on demographic statistics.
- Chiffres Hebdo No. 171, 22/10/93, published by the Franche-Comté regional council.

THE JURA: AN INHABITED MOUNTAIN AREA

Routes have crossed the Jura mountain area ever since ancient times - most notably the Rome-Great Britain route of the Romans via the Jougne pass - and the area has been well populated from the Middle Ages onwards.

Physically, it is classified as an area of moderately high mountains surrounded by fertile plains. It has a characteristic structure for much of the area it covers: alternating between narrow ridges at an altitude of some 1000 metres and parallel longitudinal valley troughs. To the east-south-east, where it meets the Swiss plain, it is rather steeper, whereas in the west-north-west, large plateaus gradually merge with the French plain. The border, extending for some 150 miles cuts the mountains into two unequal areas.

As the folds run lengthways, there are few natural passes. These are situated at faults or transverse valleys. Over the area in question, apart from the possibilities of circumventing the mountains at both extremities, there are only four transverse valleys, including the Jougne through which the Roman route passed.

In 1990 the area covered by the Working Community of the Jura, which comprises the majority of the Jura mountain area, numbered 3 million inhabitants, 60% of whom lived in Switzerland and 40% in France. The area is made up of the whole of the Franche-Comté region and the four Swiss cantons of Bern, Vaud, Neuchâtel and Jura. The mountainous part (the Jura range) has only 550,000 inhabitants (45% of whom are on the Swiss side), with a density of 56 inhabitants/km², much higher on the Swiss side (88 inh/km² as opposed to 43 inh/km² on the French side).

The Swiss Jura is more urbanised and has larger peripheral cities relatively close to one another whereas the towns on the French side are smaller and further apart. The mountain municipalities are small: 40% of the inhabitants live in towns with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants; 13 towns have a population of over 5,000.

At the beginning of the century, 530,000 people lived in the Jura arc, ie, fewer than today since 1990 figures showed the population to be almost 550,000. The Swiss part has gained some 13,000 since 1990 and the French part 5,000. Until World War II, population loss in the Jura was markedly greater on the French side than on the Swiss. Since 1945, there has been a regular growth on the French side up to the present. In Switzerland, growth halted between 1970 and 1980. However, since 1980 the population has once again been growing, and at a greater rate in Switzerland than in France.

Both the French and Swiss age pyramids for the mountain area show a population which is younger than the national averages.

AN INDUSTRIAL AND AGRICULTURAL MOUNTAIN AREA

A particular feature of this well populated mountain area is its economic activities, of which industry forms a very important part. In both France and Switzerland, industry has been largely traditional, with the economic structure of the area made up of mostly specialised small- and medium-sized businesses.

In the whole of the area covered by the Working Community of the Jura, 34% of the working population are employed in industry - a percentage which in itself is higher than the national averages, but in the mountainous part the secondary sector involves almost half of the working population (45%), a third of them women.

In addition to the importance of industry in terms of numbers in the economy there is considerable specialisation in the secondary sector: in the area covered by the Working Community of the Jura, the first five branches of the economy in the French classification (out of a total of 22) account for 72% of regional industrial employment and the first five of the Swiss classification (out of a total of 17) account for 81% of industrial employment. Furthermore, four of these branches are the same on both sides of the border (mechanical engineering - watchmaking-jewellery; foundries and metal working - metallurgy; electrical engineering, electronics and optics; wood and furniture). Accordingly, the area covered by the Working Community of the Jura and the Jura range in particular has a very small service sector, a distinct disadvantage for future competitiveness.

These few figures will suffice to give a clear indication of the particular nature of the Jura mountain area which has resulted from the historical developments on both sides of the border: watch-making for example became established in Franche-Comté at the time of the Reformation in Switzerland and the majority of industries are inter-connected, at least through subcontracting. They are also indirectly linked by the transfrontier element, since skilled French workers are taken on by Swiss firms.

This transfrontier element accounts for some 12,000 workers crossing the border on a daily basis. The figures rose very quickly during the 80s (a 250% increase between 1984 and 1989) reaching nearly 16,000 in 1989. It is principally the industrial sector that is concerned (60%) and the work force in question comprises mainly white and blue-collar workers. Conversely, many Swiss families cross the border on shopping trips (food mainly) because of the - for them - favourable exchange rate.

In the mountainous part there is naturally considerable agricultural development involving 7.5% of the working population and 12,700 farms. Dairy farming is the principal occupation, with over 200,000 dairy cattle and over 80% of the farmland is used for grazing. Farming has helped create the typical chocolate-box landscape for which the mountain area is so renowned and which gives added tourist attraction. On the French side, the fact that tracts of countryside are being "closed in" could well bring to an end the alternation between pasture and forest, so characteristic of the Jura - there is over 70% forestation in some municipalities. Swiss farmers are already expressing their fears in response to probable economic developments.

Over the last twenty years tourism has become an economic sector in its own right, initially because of the opportunities for down-hill and cross-country skiing, then because of summer outdoor activities (water sports, rambling and mountain-bike tracks, etc). There are a number of sizeable resorts throughout the area and all villages have some connection with this sector. It may constitute the main activity for some villagers, while for others such as farmers, shopkeepers, craftworkers etc it is a supplementary source of income. Tourism has largely been a winter activity, but recent winters have led to a diversification of leisure activities on offer and tourism is firmly rooted in the typical landscapes of the Jura.

A WELL-SERVED OR BY-PASSED MOUNTAIN AREA?

The European motorway network, designed to be as logical as possible, has avoided having two mountainous through-routes (Jura and the Alps) by by-passing the Jura at its two extremities (Basle and Geneva). This disadvantage has not been helped by Swiss policy on HGVs and by the fact that Switzerland is not a member of the European Union.

The regions of the Jura are better equipped with rail routes than with roads. This can be partly explained by the fact that until the beginning of this century the rail network was constructed on the principle of competition between private companies. Because of this the Jura range has a number of rail routes giving access to the Simplon tunnel. Moreover, Swiss pro-rail transit policies have tended to counteract the negative effect of not belonging to the European Union.

The reasonable service of connections to the European networks may be improved by the future Rhine-Rhône high-speed rail track and improvement of the Paris-Dôle-Lausanne and Neuchâtel-Bern lines. However a high-speed train infrastructure may end up benefitting the peripheral cities to the detriment of the region as a whole if the local network fails to serve the whole region adequately.

The Jura mountain area therefore has a double disadvantage: it is by-passed at international level, and connections between small mountain centres are poor. The road-rail link is mediocre in the mountains: there are only two towns which have major road and rail routes. There is a clear lack of balance between the Swiss and the French sides.

OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPMENT

It is in particular the question of transport and its major implications for the region which justifies there being transfrontier co-operation with the Working Community of the Jura: the risk of being overlooked is not restricted to road and rail matters alone, it concerns the whole development of the mountain area.

Both the French and the Swiss regions concerned are outlying ones in national terms and as a result they are vulnerable and occasionally marginal in the face of national or federal policies. In addition, the growing shadow of the large surrounding cities (Basle, Mulhouse, Geneva, Lyon) is a further threat to their already diminished identity and influence and fragmenting this less structured region.

Culture and the industrial, technological, agricultural and tourist advantages are largely identical, specific and often vulnerable: only strategies of alliance, co-operation and promotion can bring this potential to international level. Whether or not this area is to form an integral part of Europe depends on its ability to look at its problems in common and then come up with some solutions.

Recent developments in the various economic sectors which make up the life of the mountain area clearly highlight this need: both the Common Agricultural Policy and the GATT agreements put agriculture in upland areas in a difficult position. But it is the key to attractive landscapes and to community life in the countryside.

Faced with strong competition, the tourism sector can only survive if it can get itself organised on a grand scale to show it can compete on an equal footing by taking significant promotion initiatives and offering a range of tourist facilities.

As for industry, it will only survive if it can combine research, development and marketing and if it becomes associated with international innovation networks, which presupposes rapid communication routes and comprehensive strategies for the whole mountain area, entailing a marked increase in the service sector.

THE NEED FOR COHESION

It is clear that there has to be a cohesive overall transfrontier approach to the problems facing the Jura in the future. In order to maintain its place within the Europe now taking shape, it has to defend its own specific features which also constitute its advantages.

Such a strategy must be implemented first of all at local level so that administrative constraints can be overcome and international borders transcended, the aim being to harness and enhance the economic, tourist and agricultural potential of the whole area.

But specific policies which take account of the specific features of "populated" mountain areas need to be introduced at European level, because this is the scale on which the future of the regions depends. The Jura, which has similar problems - be they related to tourism, agriculture or industry and the service sector - to other mountain regions should be recognised at this level and placed in the same category.