

Travelling through Space and Time with a Click: Introducing regionatur.ch, an Internet based environmental tool for Switzerland's Greater Basel Area (GBA)

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Abstract

regionatur.ch is a web-based environmental program, documenting the changes in nature and landscape over the last 500 years in the Greater Basel Area in Northern Switzerland. This paper will briefly outline the reasons for developing the program, look into the methods used and also provide guidelines on how to use the program. The history of green spaces in the GBA as well as their diversity in today's urban context is given a special focus in the program. Everyone is encouraged to make use of the free and easy access to the website.

Introduction

Due to development, the urban and rural landscape is rapidly changing in Switzerland. Urban sprawl has become a problem, in particular in the Greater Basel Area, where urban and industrial development has reached far into the former rural valleys around the City of Basel (190,000 inhabitants). The city, which borders France and Germany, is also the headquarters for the two multinational companies Novartis and Roche. They are among the main drivers of economic development in the area, attracting high-skilled workers. High population growth, also due to internal and cross-border migration, is expected over the next 15-20 years in the process further accelerating sprawl and threatening biodiversity and already scarce land resources.

Goal - Raising Awareness, Changing the Pattern

Compared to today, what did the Basel region look like 500 years ago? How did the city feed itself, where did the products come from? How was agriculture organized around that time and what did the landscape look like? What plant and animal species could be found then and why have they disappeared? Why did the City of Basel tear down its medieval walls in 1865? What was the influence of this decision on the establishment of green spaces in the city then and now?

Answers to these and many more questions can be found on regionatur.ch. The program was developed in and for Northwestern Switzerland, covering an area of 1,000 square kilometers to illustrate and document these changes over time. It is the goal of regionatur.ch to raise environmental awareness among the broad public and among a diversity of professions such as planners, politicians, architects, urban planners or historians of the pitfalls of development and to remind them of what was here before. It is suggested that consulting regionatur.ch and understanding why a specific community, a neighbourhood, a landscape area has changed dramatically or beyond recognition due to industrial development or urban sprawl, the public may better understand the natural history of their local area, take this knowledge into consideration and eventually change their behavior accordingly.

How - Pictures speak Volumes

7,000 historic and current photographs and 270 text modules document the rapid changes that have occurred and are still occurring at an alarming rate in our daily surroundings due to urban and industrial development. Photographs and historic paintings available in the program are used on purpose: Pictures provide the perfect method to comprehend and retrace the changes to nature and landscape over time. In addition, historic and modern maps

allow for time travel. Specific literature and links within the program as well as to outside sources enhance the information available to visitors of regionatur.ch.

Structure and Content of regionatur.ch

Access to the program is possible through three categories: maps (Karten), spaces (Orte), themes (Themen). Each category provides information on the history of change in nature and landscape from a different perspective. Individual text modules and image galleries clearly document the changes in specific places and themes over time.

- Maps: historic and modern maps from 1657 to 2012. This timeframe over several centuries allows for travels through space and time, illustrating change.
- Spaces: category describes specific villages, important historic places, conservation areas, lookout points, specific landscapes and river ecosystems.
- Themes: category describes history of agriculture, forestry, water, transportation, traffic, settlement, individual plants and animals, society and environment

In addition there is a specific category for schools, explaining the changes in nature and landscape for different grades, suggesting carefully planned daytrips and excursions to selected areas.

All modules are interactive and there is also a search function for the key words used in the program.

Methodology - Meeting the Past and the Present

It took a dedicated team of biologists and geographers from Basel five years to put this environmental program together. Searches of the historic maps, drawings of plants and animals and historic photos were conducted in city archives and libraries in the area. Luckily the City of Basel is the location of the oldest university in the country. Founded in 1460, the universities archives and libraries were a huge source of information.

We also drew on works done by renowned architects, botanists and medical doctors, planners and city builders, which were ahead of their times and left a legacy of paintings, drawings and maps and advanced the idea of urban “Green in the City” as early as the late 17th century, for example Matthäus Merian (1593-1650, copper, engraver, publisher), Caspar Bauhin (1560-1624, physician, botanist, professor), Emanuel Büchel (1705-1775, painter, aquarelist), Samuel Birman (1793-1847, landscape painter), Ludwig Imhoff (1801-1868, physician, entomologist), Jakob Höflinger (1819-1892, photographer).

Research was conducted not only in archives but also “in the field”. Trips to the villages and to the areas described in regionatur.ch were part of the research process. The change needed to be documented through photography.

Outlook – History and Identity

The program has been online since April 2015. It has been financed by Christoph Merian Stiftung, the Department of Education Basel-Stadt and the Cantons of Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft and Solothurn. regionatur.ch has received widespread media attention in the Greater Basel Area. It has been called “an incredible wealth of information” or “an addictive website”. However, this is only the beginning. Funding needs to be secured for continuously updating the content and the technical program. The team also plans to add oral history content – interviews with “Zeitzeugen” (contemporary witnesses) and also add a category “Sounds of Nature Lost”. We would also like to translate some of the aspects of the program into English, since many expats are calling the Basel Region their new home.

A regional environmental “encyclopedia”, this is an easy to use tool for the public, for politicians, planners, conservationists and students to learn about the changes that have occurred in nature and the landscape in the Greater Basel Area (GBA) over the past 500 years. The program is unique in Switzerland. We suggest that it could be used as a model for city regions worldwide, especially in metropolitan regions, where it might be difficult to remember what the landscape looked like even 50 years ago or where new immigrants have no knowledge of the history of their new “home” city. Knowing the history of change of one's

home city or region contributes to a sense of identity and belonging. We suggest that program such as regionatur.ch can make the difference.

Examples regionatur.ch

1 Medieval City of Basel with City Walls (1617)

regionatur.ch

Natur und Landschaft der Region Basel

Karten **Orte** **Themen** **Schulen** **Informationen** **Suche**

[Home](#) > [Themen](#) > [Siedlung](#) > [Mittelalterliche Stadt](#) > [Bildergalerie](#) > [Matthäus Merian](#)

< ↑ >



Matthäus Merian, Gesamtansicht der Stadt aus der Vogelperspektive von Nordosten, 1615/1617, Kupferstich, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, BILD_1_291.

© Dieses Bild ist urheberrechtlich geschützt.

Merian Kupferstich 1617

Dies ist wohl die bedeutendste und schönste Darstellung des mittelalterlichen Stadtbildes von Basel. Die genaue Wiedergabe von zahlreichen Details, von denen viele heute verschwunden sind, macht diesen Stadtplan zu einem wichtigen Dokument des Stadtbildes und der Baugeschichte Basels im 17. Jh.

Zur grossen Karte: [hier klicken](#).

2 Basel and surrounding area today

regionatur.ch

Natur und Landschaft der Region Basel

Karten **Orte** **Themen** **Schulen** **Informationen** **Suche**

Home > Orte > Aussichtspunkte > Schafberg Efringen > Bildergalerie > Rheinebene

< ↑ >



Beat Ernst, Die Rheinebene und Basel vom Schafberg aus, 3.5.2012, Digitalfotografie.

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Basel und Jura

Genau südlich des Schafberges breitet sich die Stadt Basel aus. Dahinter sind die Tafeln des Gempfenplateaus und der Passwang im Kettenjura zu erkennen.

3 Green Space in the Modern City: Barockgarten

regionatur.ch

Natur und Landschaft der Region Basel

Karten Orte **Themen** Schulen Informationen Suche

Home > Themen > Siedlung > Barockgarten > Bildergalerie > Barockgarten

← ↑ →



Beat Ernst, Landschaftspark Wenkenhof in Riehen barocker Buchsanlage, 23.6.2010, Digitalfotografie.
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Wenken

Seitlich des Wenkenhofs ist ein kleiner Barockgarten mit der typischen Buchseinfassung erhalten geblieben.

4 Urban Green Space: St. Johannspark in the City of Basel

regionatur.ch

Natur und Landschaft der Region Basel

[Karten](#) [Orte](#) [Themen](#) [Schulen](#) [Informationen](#) [Suche](#)

[Home](#) > [Orte](#) > [Gemeinden - Ortsteile](#) > [Basel St. Johann](#) > [Bildergalerie](#) > [St. Johanns-Park](#)

< ↑ >



Beat Ernst, Der St. Johanns-Park, Basel, 15.6.2012, Digitalfotografie.

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St. Johanns-Park

1992 wird zusätzlich zum Kannenfeldpark der zweite Stadtpark für das St. Johann auf dem ehemaligen Gelände der Stadtgärtnerei eröffnet. 2012 wurde der Park teilweise neu gestaltet. Dazu wurden unter anderem neue Spiel- und Klettergeräten und einem Pavillon mit Restaurant eingerichtet. Damit sollten die veränderten Freizeitbedürfnissen der Parkbesucher berücksichtigt werden.