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Getting Rid of Their Ties

The Long-Term Evolution of Elite Networks and Profiles in the Three Largest Swiss Cities, 1890–2020[1]

In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in elites, in part due to the »recent dramatic role played by elites in increasing inequality«.[2] Cities and city-regions are hotspots in this development. They are the focal points of elite (re)production and they are the geographical settings within which inequalities manifest themselves most visibly. More generally, city-regions are the main centres of economic, political, scientific, and cultural activity in post-industrial societies.[3]

So far, the analysis of elite networks and profiles has mainly focused on the national level. The urban dimension has received comparatively less attention – at least in recent decades.[4] Moreover, studies of elite networks and profiles have often focused on short periods or on single moments in time.[5] Yet long-term perspectives focusing on the local level are important for our understanding of inequality and access to privileged positions. Especially in decentralized countries, the local level serves as an important entry point for careers in different spheres and for access to elite positions at higher levels. Moreover, a long-term perspective makes it possible to assess whether promises of a more democratic access to elite positions have been realized.

1 Research for this paper was conducted as part of a research project on »Local Elites and Transnational Connections«, supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Grant Number: CRSII5_183534, URL: <https://wp.unil.ch/sinergia-elites> [29.9.2021]). All members of the research group have made invaluable contributions in the data collection process. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the workshop »Elites and the Critique of Elites«, organized by the Archiv für Sozialgeschichte. The authors would like to thank the participants of this workshop as well as Christoph H. Ellersgaard, Anton G. Larsen, and Thierry Rossier for helpful comments and suggestions.

2 *Shamus Khan*, The Sociology of Elites, in: Annual Review of Sociology 38, 2012, pp. 361–377, here: p. 362.

3 *Bas Van Heur/David Bassens*, An Urban Studies Approach to Elites: Nurturing Conceptual Rigor and Methodological Pluralism, in: Urban Geography 40, 2019, pp. 591–603, here: p. 592.

4 Notable exceptions on the study of urban elites were produced in the US in the 1950s and 1960s and triggered the »community power« debate, see *Floyd Hunter*, Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers, Chapel Hill 1953; *Robert Dahl*, Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City, New Haven 1961. These studies, however, are primarily interested in policy networks and in identifying those making or influencing political decisions and less in the background of urban elites from a sociological perspective.

5 *Johs Hjellbrekke/Brigitte Le Roux/Olav Korsnes* et al., The Norwegian Field of Power Anno 2000, in: European Societies 9, 2007, pp. 245–273; *Felix Bühlmann/Thomas David/André Mach*, The Swiss Business Elite (1980–2020): How the Changing Composition of the Elite Explains the Decline of the Swiss Company Network, in: Economy and Society 41, 2012, pp. 199–226; *Jacob Lunding/Christoph Ellersgaard/Anton Larsen*, The Established and the Delegated: The Division of Labour of Domination among Effective Agents on the Field of Power in Denmark, in: Sociology 55, 2021, pp. 110–128.

In this paper, we aim to fill these gaps in research by studying local elite networks in Switzerland's three largest city-regions between 1890 and 2020. We ask how local elite networks evolved in a long-term perspective from the end of the 19th century to the present day and we assess how the profiles of the most connected individuals in these networks have changed.

As a case study, Switzerland presents a number of distinctive features. It is a highly decentralized country where the different regions were quite loosely connected until the end of the Ancien Régime. Moreover, democratization and the introduction of mass suffrage – at least for the male population – took place early on. Switzerland was the only European country where the 1848 revolutions directly led to the establishment of a democratic regime.

The national elite in the new federal state was composed of both old elites from patrician families that were already powerful at the local level and new elites that rose to positions of power only after the turn of the 18th century.[6] Yet, a typical trait of the Swiss elite is that they accumulated positions of power in different spheres, particularly in the economic and the political, but also in the societal or cultural spheres. There was less differentiation and specialization across different spheres than in other countries, partly due to the »militia« principle, applied in politics as well as in the army, and according to which such public tasks were performed by elites alongside their respective professions. In the 20th century, this led to the emergence of a small »power elite«, highly homogeneous and cohesive – male lawyers belonging to the political right and having achieved officer ranks in the Swiss military – that held the most important positions in the Swiss system in the middle of the 20th century.[7] These dense and closed elite networks reached their strongest cohesion in the 1970s and 1980s, when they gradually started to decline as a result of internationalization and globalization processes in the business sector.[8]

It is an open question whether we find a similarly homogeneous and cohesive core elite in the three city-regions under scrutiny here and whether the cohesiveness of elite networks in Swiss cities follows similar trajectories as it does at the national level. One would expect local elites to have been more cohesive and integrated at the beginning of the period under scrutiny. The federal state was still in a process of integration at the end of the 19th century, whereas power relations at the

6 *Mario König*, Bürger, Bauern, Angestellte, alte und neue Eliten in der sozialen Schichtung, in: traverse 18, 2011, pp. 104–136. The ascendance of new elites to powerful positions in the federal state was facilitated by the fact that some of the newly created cantons used to be subject territories of old cantons in the Ancien Régime. In these formerly subject territories, no old elite existed as it did in the old cantons. The representatives of the new cantons at the national level thus constituted a new elite that was competing and integrating with the old one (ibid. p. 123).

7 *C. Wright Mills*, The Power Elite, New York 1956; *Hanspeter Kriesi*, Entscheidungsstrukturen und Entscheidungsprozesse in der Schweizer Politik, Frankfurt am Main 1980; *André Mach/Thomas David/Stéphanie Ginalski* et al., Les élites économiques suisses au XX^{e} siècle, Neuchâtel 2016.

8 See *William Carroll/Meindert Fennema*, Is There a Transnational Business Community?, in: International Sociology 17, 2002, pp. 393–419; *Gerhard Schnyder/Martin Lüpold/André Mach* et al., The Rise and Decline of the Swiss Company Network during the 20th Century, in: Travaux de Science Politique 22, 2005, and *Thomas David/André Mach/Martin Lüpold* et al., De la »Forteresse des Alpes« à la valeur actionnariale. Histoire de la gouvernance d'entreprise en Suisse (1880–2010), Zurich 2015.

local level were long established, especially so in the three city-regions that we analyse here, which have been important centres of power for centuries. Accordingly, we would expect local networks to have become continuously less integrated during the 20th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, a decline of local networks might result from a shift of elites' attention to the national level and by its end, local networks might be subject to the same processes of internationalization and globalization as the national elite network.

Our analysis will proceed in several steps. After a description of our data, a more detailed discussion of the city-regions of Basel, Geneva, and Zurich, and a brief discussion of the methods employed (section I), we present an account of the evolution of local elite networks over time and we provide a short collective biography of the core of the local elite with a focus on key socio-demographic characteristics as well as their national and local origin (section II). We conclude by proposing three phases of local elite evolution in Swiss city-regions (section III).

I. Analysing Elites in Three Swiss City-regions, 1890–2020

This study is based on the elites of Basel, Geneva and Zurich. Adopting a local perspective is especially relevant as Switzerland is characterized by a weak federal state and remains by far the most decentralized political system in Western Europe in terms of taxation, regional infrastructure, or higher education. Swiss political and administrative structures endow local and regional authorities with significant leverage. Furthermore, economic development has revolved around regional specializations such as textiles in Eastern Switzerland, financial sector and machine-making in Zurich, private banking – and more recently the luxury watch industry – in Geneva, or the chemical and pharmaceutical industry in Basel. This polycentric configuration underscores the existence of connected (but distinct) local elites and systems of governance that contributed to the consolidation of successful »economic centres«. The three city-regions are the most populated regions of the country, rank among the most prosperous, and are characterized by their high degree of internationalization in terms of foreign-born population, economic activities, and cultural diversity.

Several authors have shown that until the end of the 19th century local patrician families played a crucial role in urban economic, political, cultural, and scientific development.[9] The *Daig* in Basel, the private bankers' families of Geneva, and the industrial dynasties of Zurich were highly influential. Indeed, even after the formal democratisation of access to communal and cantonal authorities in the course of the 19th century, old patrician families as well as the new rising bourgeoisie continued to monopolise local positions of power, particularly in the political and economic spheres.

9 *Albert Tanner*, Arbeitsame Patrioten – wohlanständige Damen. Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit in der Schweiz 1830–1914. Zurich 1995; *Philipp Sarasin*, Stadt der Bürger. Bürgerliche Macht und städtische Gesellschaft. Basel 1846–1914, Göttingen 1997; *Olivier Perroux*, Tradition, vocation et progrès. Les élites bourgeoises de Genève (1814–1914), Geneva 2006; *Alexis Schwarzenbach*, Maman, tu dois lire mon livre. Annemarie Schwarzenbach, sa mère et sa grand-mère, Geneva 2007.

The importance of local patrician families has evolved over time and can be traced historically. In the 17th and 18th centuries, wealthy merchants formed an increasingly exclusive patriciate that governed the cities.[10] With the end of the Ancien Régime at the turn of the 18th century, and certainly after the restoration period in 1830, these patrician families lost their formal prerogatives in the political control of the cities and their surrounding areas. An important question – in the light of more democratic access to elite positions – thus concerns the longevity of these patrician families in positions of power. Studies of the Dutch elite in the 20th century have shown that – despite having lost their formal prerogatives in the state in the 19th century – descendants of noble families continue to occupy important positions in the Dutch elite.[11] Can we still find a significant number of descendants of these patrician families in local positions of power in the three city-regions – even two centuries after they have lost their formal privileges?

It is important to point out that new elites also emerged during the 20th century. In the political sphere, the left occasionally managed to come to power and overthrow the majority at the cantonal or communal level in Basel, Geneva, and Zurich in the first half of the 20th century. The second half was marked by women's accession to certain positions of power. They obtained the right to vote and stand for election in 1960 in Geneva, in 1966 in Basel, and in 1970 in Zurich. However, in the economic sphere they remain comparatively marginal to the present day.[12]

An important difference between the three city-regions is that Zurich can be considered a »territorial state«, whereas the other two are »city states«. In the 19th century, the city elite was challenged by countryside elites in Zurich. This conflict resulted in the introduction of a new constitution in 1869, which included direct-democratic procedures. The dominance of the liberal-conservative city-elite gave way to greater participation by the »democrats« – the countryside opposition – in politics at the cantonal level. Moreover, Zurich's cantonal territory includes a second important economic centre with its own patriciate, the city of Winterthur, which is also the sixth largest city in the country. In Basel and Geneva, patrician families did not have to compete with a countryside elite and were able to retain their power throughout the 19th century.[13] In sum, the three city-regions represent the most important economic hubs of the decentralized Swiss system – each with its specific economic sectors and territorial and political organization.

10 *Daniel Schläppi*, Patriziat, in: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz, URL: < https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/016374/2010-09-27/> [29.9.2021].

11 *Jaap Dronkers*, Has the Dutch Nobility Retained Its Social Status Relevance during the 20th Century?, in: European Sociological Review 19, 2003, pp. 81–96; *Huibert Schijf/Jaap Dronkers/Jennifer Van den Broeke-George*, Recruitment of Members of Dutch Noble and High-Bourgeois Families to Elite Positions in the 20th Century, in: Social Science Information 43, 2004, pp. 435–475.

12 *Stéphanie Ginalski*, Who Runs the Firm? A Long-Term Analysis of Gender Inequality on Swiss Corporate Boards, in: Enterprise & Society 22, 2021, pp. 183–211.

13 *Sarasin*, Stadt der Bürger, p. 11.

Data

To document the long-term evolution of city-regional networks among elites of different social spheres, we have compiled a systematic database of local elites from 1890 to 2020. Based on positional criteria, the database includes all individuals holding leading positions in the major academic, cultural, economic, and political institutions of the three city-regions. For these local institutions, we gathered information for seven benchmark years: 1890, 1910, 1937, 1957, 1980, 2000, and 2020. To build this database on local elites, we could partly rely on a database on Swiss *national* elites in the context of the Swiss Elite Observatory.[14]

For the economic sphere, we considered the regional chambers of commerce, as well as the most important companies of the leading economic sectors. This involved all the major banks (large universal banks, private banks, and publicly-owned banks) and insurance companies for the financial sector; for Basel, all the major textile (until 1937) and chemical-pharmaceutical companies; for Geneva, the major watch-making as well as a few other industrial companies; and for Zurich, all the major companies in the machine industry. The total number of companies varies from 49 in 1890 to 35 in 2020. The smaller sample for the recent period is due to the strong concentration process in all economic sectors, involving mergers and acquisitions as well as bankruptcies. For all these companies, we included the CEO/managing director and all the members of the boards of directors (BoDs) in the database.

Table 1: Sample size by city-region and benchmark year

	1890	1910	1937	1957	1980	2000	2020	Total
Basel	296 (381)	372 (432)	387 (455)	398 (473)	348 (440)	347 (411)	326 (348)	2,474 (2,810)
Geneva	272 (353)	307 (370)	343 (407)	422 (493)	410 (483)	464 (515)	471 (487)	2,689 (2,942)
Zurich	536 (643)	574 (701)	576 (695)	606 (744)	601 (729)	594 (668)	621 (630)	4,108 (4,636)
Total	1,098 (1,357)	1,245 (1,483)	1,291 (1,521)	1,403 (1,647)	1,321 (1,538)	1,378 (1,536)	1,407 (1,442)	9,134 (10,058)

Note. N individuals and N positions (in parentheses). The column total for the individuals can be smaller than the addition of the different lines since some individuals can occupy positions in different city-regions in the same benchmark year.

For the political sphere, we included all members of the cantonal (regional) and local (communal) parliaments and governments of Geneva and Zurich. In Basel, where the city's territory fully coincides with the canton, only the members of the cantonal parliament and government were included. For the academic sphere, all full and associate professors have been included in the database up to the benchmark year of 1957 and a selection of professors (based on institutional and scientific crite-

14 OBELIS, see URL: <https://www.unil.ch/obelis/fr/home.html> [10.9.2021].

ria) for the benchmark years 1980, 2000, and 2020. Finally, we also included all the committee members of the three cities' art societies (see Table 1 for the sample size).[15]

Method: Network Analysis and Prosopography

We proceed in two steps to answer our research questions of how local elite networks and the core elite's profiles have evolved since the end of the 19th century. First, we conduct network analyses for each benchmark year and each city-region separately. The organizations in which individuals can hold positions act as nodes and individuals holding positions in two organizations at the same time represent the ties between organizations. We focus on the organizational network, since we are interested in identifying those individuals who act as »linkers« between different organizations rather than in ties between persons from the same organization.[16]

First, we examine the general properties of the organizational network, its evolution over time, and similarities and differences across city-regions. This will allow us to answer our question about the evolution of local elite networks and to compare their development to our knowledge about their evolution at the national level. Moreover, we take a closer look at the organizations that occupy central positions in the networks – assuming that more central positions indicate more influence – and at the links between specific types of organizations.[17] This focus will allow us to better understand changes in the network structure over time and across city--regions.

In a second step, we focus on those individuals who establish the links between the different organizations. In a recent article on the Danish national elite, Lunding et al. analyse the »effective agents in the field of power«, whom they define as »the agents that, via their multi-positionality, bind together various fields and act as brokers in the ongoing negotiation of the relative strength of different forms of power.«[18] We follow this approach in drawing up a prosopography of those individuals that a) hold positions in two of the four spheres (academic, cultural, economic, political) in the same benchmark year or b) simultaneously hold three or more positions in the economic sphere. The first criterion reflects Lunding et al.'s statement that the most influential individuals are those who establish links across spheres. The second criterion captures the corporate elite whose members sit on the boards of different firms. This corporate elite is important for our network given that a significant number of organizations in our sample belong to the economic sphere. For the individuals that fulfil these criteria, we examine their socio-demo-

15 For more details on the composition of the sample, see Table A.1 in the online appendix, available at URL: < https://web.archive.org/web/20210928121324/https://wp.unil.ch/sinergia-elites/files/2021/09/OnlineAppendix.pdf> [29.9.2021].

16 See *Franziska Keller*, Analyses of Elite Networks, in: *Heinrich Best/John Higley* (eds.), The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites, London 2018, pp. 135–152, here: p. 141.

17 Ibid., p. 144.

18 *Lunding/Hellersgaard/Larsen*, The Established and the Delegated, p. 115.

graphic profile (age, gender, education), their geographical origin (nationality and family background), and their political affiliation.

II. The Dissolution of Local Elite Networks and the Exclusiveness of the Local Core Elite

The presentation of our findings regarding local elite networks proceeds in two steps. First, we focus on the network level and examine certain network characteristics. In a second step, we highlight some core commonalities and differences at the organizational level across the three city-regions.

From cohesive networks to disconnected elites

Figure 1 below presents the evolution of two indicators for a network's connectivity.[19] The first (Figure 1a) is a weighted measure of network density. It shows the number of links between organizations divided by the number of persons in the network, which yields the average number of inter-organizational links per person. First, we can see a decline of the network's connectivity over time in all three city-regions. This suggests that the local and regional levels became continuously less relevant as a sphere of activity for elites. Apart from this general trend, we can also see important differences between the three city-regions, particularly between Basel and Geneva on the one hand and Zurich on the other. In Basel and Geneva, we see a sharp decline in the network's connectivity from 1890 to 1910. While in 1890, the average person in the network created 0.7 inter-organizational links, this value drops to 0.3 in 1910. This decline is followed by a period of relative stability and moderate decline in the number of links per person until 1980 and a renewed acceleration of the decline from 2000 onwards. By contrast, the number of links per person remained constant in the city-region of Zurich from 1890 to 1957 and only then followed Basel and Geneva's pattern of steady and accelerated decline.

The general picture of a steady decline of the connectivity between local organizations is further substantiated by Figure 1b, which shows the percentage of persons holding more than one position in the same year. While 15–20 % of the elites in the network held at least two positions in 1890 in all three city-regions, this only applies to 2–4 % of elites in 2020. In Figure 1b, we see fewer contrasts across the three city-regions – apart from the stark drop in Basel and Geneva between 1890 and 1910 which is not present in Zurich. Afterwards, we see relative stability in all three city-regions until 2000, followed by a strong decline since the new millennium.

19 Graphical representations of the networks for each benchmark year and city-region combination can be found in Figure A.1 in the online appendix.

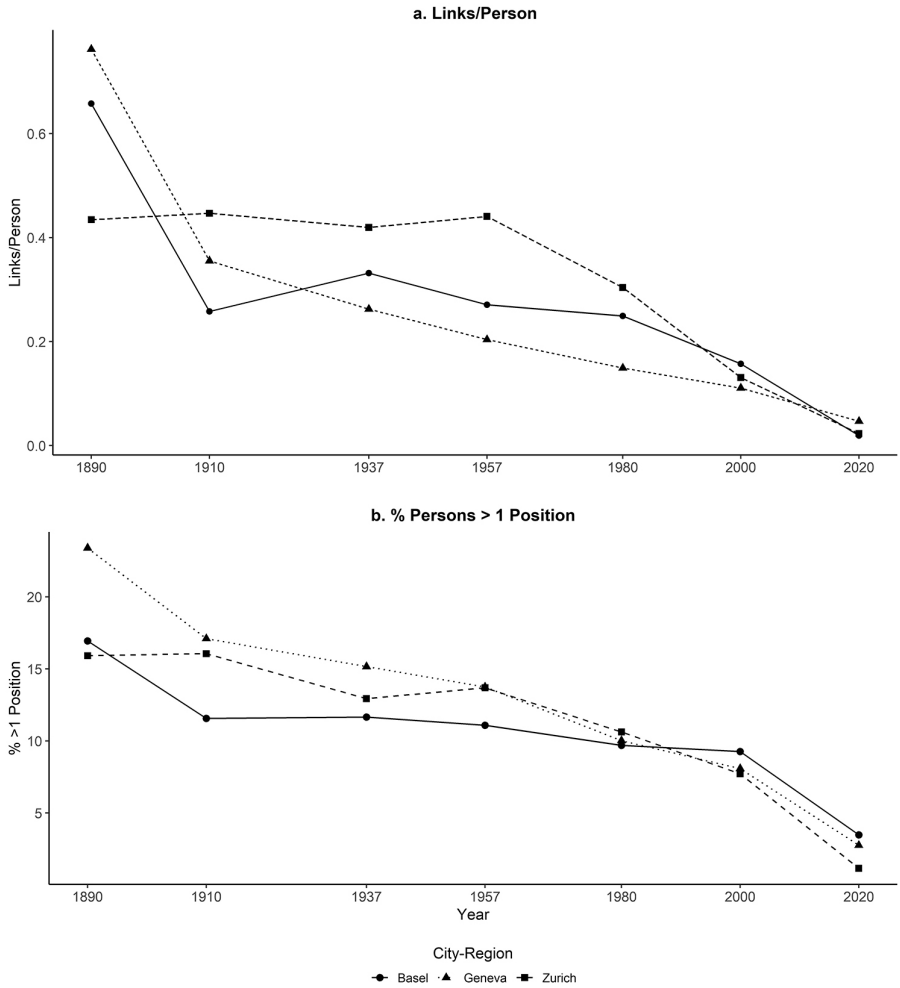

Figure 1: Evolution of Network Properties

A possible explanation for this steady decline of local networks over the last 130 years may be found in the changes in the structure of the national and the international economy, since the majority of organizations in our networks are companies and their BoDs. The Swiss economy was still rather fragmented and regionalized at the end of the 19th century. The emergence of a cohesive national business elite only began at the beginning of the 20th century, when the Swiss economy began to integrate at the national level.[20] Strong ties between the financial and the industrial sector developed, and a small and closed business elite dominated the economic sector between 1937 and 1980. In the wake of (renewed) globalization and interna-

20 For more details, see *Schnyder/David/Mach* et al., Swiss Company Network.

tionalization of business after the 1980s, this »model of elite coordination« disappeared and a more international and less nationally cohesive business elite emerged, particularly in the financial sector.[21]

For the local elite networks in the three cities examined here, this means that their decline in the beginning of the 20th century might be attributed to a shift in the scope of companies' activities from the local to the national level – a development which Stettler documents for the chemical industry in Basel.[22] It is important to note some differences in this process, however. In the city-region of Zurich, the network of companies was less integrated in 1890, but its decline only begins after 1957 and intensifies only after 1980. This comparatively long period of high network integration (1910–1980) can be attributed to Zurich being Switzerland's biggest economic and financial centre. A great deal of its firm network is thus not (only) local or regional but national.

By contrast, the continued and intensified dissolution of local elite networks at the end of the 20th century might be explained by internationalization and globalization dynamics affecting the large companies in all three city-regions. Carroll and Fennema argue that these dynamics can be attributed to a dwindling interest on the part of firms in having a voice in the local or the national political sphere because their scope of activity has internationalized and their ability to exit local and national markets and relocate hence grew substantially.[23]

At the organization level, we also find similar patterns across the three city-regions over time. When we look at the ten most central organizations in each city-region/benchmark year network, i. e. those organizations with the highest number of links per member, we find that organizations from the economic sphere clearly dominate the network – in all city-regions and across the whole period.[24] This is not surprising insofar as most of the organizations included in our sample belong to the economic sphere. Universities, political institutions, and cultural organizations only number three or four organizations in each cohort, depending on the city-region. Universities, in particular, are comparatively marginal in the overall network and never appear among the ten most central institutions in any city-region at any time despite their significant number of members and hence opportunities for establishing links. Moreover, political institutions predominantly create links among themselves (through the practice of holding office at both the communal and cantonal levels, as in the case of Geneva and Zurich) and less so with other sectors. A notable exception are the relatively strong ties between cantonal parliaments and

21 *Eric Davoine/Stéphanie Ginalski/André Mach* et al., Impacts of Globalization Processes on the Swiss National Business Elite Community: A Diachronic Analysis of Swiss Large Corporations (1980–2010), in: Research in the Sociology of Organizations 43, 2015, pp. 131–163.

22 *Niklaus Stettler*, Chemische Industrie und politische Elite in Basel, 1900–1923, in: Swiss Journal of Sociology 19, 1993, pp. 135–151, here: p. 141.

23 *Carroll/Fennema*, Transnational Business Community. Yet it is important to note that, while the boards of directors of large companies like Novartis and UBS are not connected to local institutions, the top managers of UBS Switzerland or Novartis Switzerland often are present, for example, in local chambers of commerce. These persons are not included in our sample since they do not sit on the board of the mother company.

24 See Tables A.2–A.4 in the online appendix.

publicly-owned banks (*Kantonalbanken*, equivalent to the German *Landesbanken*) in all three city-regions from the beginning of the period until the year 2000.[25]

Turning back to the economic sector, the strong presence of private banks in 1890 in the city-regions of Basel and Geneva is noteworthy.[26] Yet, in the early 20th century, the importance of private banks as actors in the city-regional networks diminishes in favour of public and large universal banks, which establish strong ties with industrial companies and act as the latter's creditors (see Textbox). Finally, the role of the local chambers of commerce in the organizations' network deserves some attention. Business associations are among the ten most central actors in all benchmark years and city-regions (except Zurich in 1957). Moreover, they are important »brokers« that connect different parts of the local network.[27] The chambers of commerce thus seem to act as a meeting place where members of different parts of the network, mostly from the economic and political spheres, get together.

In sum, the network analysis shows a presence of very dense *regional* networks at the beginning of the period, an initial decline between 1890 and 1910, and a period of relative stability until 1980. Beginning with the new millennium, we find a very clear disintegration of the network. This trend can mostly be attributed to a disintegration of the local or regional business network. In all three city-regions, the network is dominated by economic organizations, with political institutions in second place. Universities – as important incubators of talent and as suppliers of highly skilled personnel for the regional economy – occupy a comparatively marginal position in the network.

25 BKB in Basel, CEG, and Banque de Genève (1890–1910, went bankrupt in 1931) and, since 2000, BCGE in Geneva, ZKB in Zurich.

26 Private banks in Basel: Bank Sarasin, Banque von Speyr, Ehinger; in Geneva: Hentsch & Cie., Pictet & Cie., Lombard-Odier; in Zurich: Bank Leu.

27 This is indicated by their high betweenness centrality (see Tables A.2–A.4 in the online appendix). The higher this value, the more an organization connects otherwise detached parts of the network.

Three banking systems and their impact on local networks

The structure of local financial centres, and particularly the positions of private banks, exhibit some important spatial and temporal differences. The first two benchmark years (1890 and to a lesser extent 1910) are characterized by the central position of private banks in the network for Basel and Geneva. These old institutions, most of them founded before 1800, were controlled and directed by old wealthy patrician families. This situation was very similar in Basel (Bank Ehinger, Von Speyr, and Sarasin) and Geneva (Hentsch, Lombard-Odier, and Pictet) until the beginning of the 20th century. Other banks (SBS, Bank in Basel, C&W Bank, Depositenbank for Basel and Union financière de Genève, UFG, Banque du commerce, Banque de prêts et dépôts for Geneva) were largely the emanation of these private banks. The situation profoundly changed during the first half of the 20th century. While in 1890 the banking structure was characterized by its fragmentation and specialization in different specific bank activities, explaining the large number of banks, a process of concentration subsequently took place, with smaller banks being absorbed by bigger ones or disappearing due to bankruptcy.

One important difference distinguishes Basel and Geneva: whereas the private banks of Basel created two larger institutions (SBS in 1872 and Basler Handelsbank, BHB in 1862, dealing with bigger operations like credits to industrial companies) that progressively took over some of the private units, in Geneva, the most important private banks (the *quatuor*: Hentsch, Pictet, Lombard-Odier, and Mirabaud) never delegated too much power to larger financial institutions (for a rich and detailed analysis, see Mazbouri).[28] The SBS, which absorbed different smaller banks (such as Bank in Basel in 1907, Bank von Speyr in 1912, Depositenbank BS in 1897, and the Zürcher Bankverein in 1895), has become a large universal bank, engaging in banking activities of all kinds, and a central actor between 1937 and the 1980s in the city-regional network and at the national level, before it merged with UBS in 1998. Such an evolution never took place in Geneva, where no large universal banks emerged. Instead, Genevan private banks concentrated their activities exclusively on private wealth management. According to Mazbouri, this diverging evolution can be explained by two factors:

1) the lack of local industrial demand in Geneva, contrasting with the rise of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry in Basel, and

2) the importance of revenues generated by private wealth management in Geneva, mainly due to their French clients.[29] After the concentration process in the banking sector in the early 20th century, Basel started to look much more like Zurich.

In the absence of strong private banks, the situation in Zurich was very different at the end of the 19th century. Credit Suisse, founded in 1856 as a large universal bank, and Bank in Winterthur (founded in 1862, UBS from 1912 onwards), both founded mainly by industrialists, and not private bankers, had already become dominant financial actors by the end of the 19th century. These differences can explain the lack of formal connections between the financial and the industrial sector in Geneva that we can observe in the organizational networks. Here, ties between banks and industrial companies are largely absent, with a few exceptions, whereas the large universal banks in Basel and Zurich developed important connections with industrial companies for most of the 20th century.

28 *Malik Mazbouri*, L'émergence de la place financière suisse, 1890–1913, Lausanne 2005; *id.*, La banque privée comme métaphore: »vieille banque« et »nouvelle banque« en Suisse 1800–1930, in: Revue suisse d'histoire 70, 2020, pp. 93–115 and pp. 286–306.

29 *Mazbouri*, La banque privée comme métaphore, p. 293.

A homogeneous and exclusive core elite

We now turn to the individuals who establish links between organizations from two different social spheres or who occupy very prominent positions in the economic sphere. For the whole period, 405 individuals fulfil these conditions. Table 2 gives an overview of the connections across spheres established by the linkers in our network.

Not surprisingly, the most frequent combination is between the economic and the political sphere – accounting for 40 % to 65 % of the linkers depending on the benchmark year. The second most frequent category are linkers that occupy three or more positions in the economic sphere in the same year, varying from 11 to 35 %. Mirroring the marginal role of universities in the organizations' network, we find a very weak presence of university professors among the core elite. In 1890, 15 % of the linkers holding political office are professors, but this share diminishes sharply at the beginning of the 20th century. This initial strength of academic-political links can be attributed to the city-regions of Basel and Geneva, where several professors were also elected MPs at the cantonal or the local level.[30] Yet, the underrepresentation of the academic sphere among the core elite of the network is evident for the later benchmark years. In the overall sample, academic positions make up for 21 % of all positions, but professors only account for 12 % of the linkers sample (adding up the three columns that include the academic sphere in Table 2).[31] The opposite is the case for the cultural sphere. In the overall sample, positions in the cultural sphere account for a mere 3 % of the sample, whereas 13 % of the linkers hold a mandate in the cultural sphere. In contrast to academic elites, cultural elites are thus overrepresented among the linkers.[32] The weak presence of professors among the core elite might partly be explained by the fact that professorships are full-time positions that leave less space for additional involvements than board memberships or acting as lay politicians at the local and the regional level.

What is the socio-demographic profile of these – predominantly economic and political – elites? Not surprisingly, the typical linker in our sample is male and well into the second half of his professional career.[33] Previous studies have shown that women are still a very marginal group in Swiss boardrooms and that Switzerland lags far behind when it comes to women rising to top positions.[34] It is nonetheless striking that only 9 (!) out of 405 linkers are women – especially given that the local elite can serve as an entry point for higher-level elite networks in a decentralized system such as Switzerland. Until 1980, not a single woman has been part of the group of linkers – which is likely related to the very late introduction of women's

30 See also *Stettler*, Chemische Industrie, p. 139.

31 The numbers for the overall sample are provided in Table A.1 in the online appendix.

32 As a caveat for this (and all further analysis), we emphasize that the data for 2020 cannot be analyzed with prosopographical methods, since only 5 persons satisfy our selection criteria. This reflects the virtual inexistence of ties between organizations in the three city-regions today.

33 A separate analysis by city-region did not yield any meaningful deviations from the overall sample. For the sake of simplicity, we thus report only aggregated numbers for all three city-regions.

34 *Ginalski*, Who Runs the Firm?.

suffrage in federal politics in 1971 and to legal restrictions regarding women's work.[35]

With respect to education, the percentage of university educated linkers increases over time – but stays rather stable between 1937 and 1980 at around 65 %.[36] In contrast to the general population, where the expansion of tertiary education is a phenomenon of the 1960s, we witness a sharp increase from 1890 to 1937 among the linkers. This is an indication that the average linker grew up in a rather well-off family with sufficient financial resources to pursue higher education.[37] At the same time, the offspring of wealthy industrial families often did not go to university at the end of the 19th century. Rather, they made a commercial apprenticeship in the company of their father's friends, then worked abroad for some years to gain experience which they could then use when they ascend to the directorate of their family's company.[38]

Table 2: Linkers: combination of spheres

Year	3 spheres	Acad, Cult	Acad, Econ	Acad, Poli	Cult, Econ	Cult, Poli	Econ	Econ, Poli	Total
1890	2 (2.0)	3 (3.1)	1 (1.0)	15 (15.3)	3 (3.1)	2 (2.0)	18 (18.4)	54 (55.1)	98 (100.0)
1910	1 (1.3)	1 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (6.6)	3 (3.9)	3 (3.9)	13 (17.1)	50 (65.8)	76 (100.0)
1937	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.7)	1 (1.7)	4 (6.8)	4 (6.8)	18 (30.5)	31 (52.5)	59 (100.0)
1957	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (8.2)	6 (8.2)	5 (6.8)	5 (6.8)	23 (31.5)	28 (38.4)	73 (100.0)
1980	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (8.6)	2 (3.4)	5 (8.6)	4 (6.9)	20 (34.5)	22 (37.9)	58 (100.0)
2000	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	5 (13.9)	4 (11.1)	4 (11.1)	22 (61.1)	36 (100.0)
2020	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (40.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (60.0)	5 (100.0)
Total	3 (0.7)	4 (1.0)	14 (3.5)	29 (7.2)	27 (6.7)	22 (5.4)	96 (23.7)	210 (51.9)	405 (100.0)

Note. Percentages in parentheses; Acad=Academic, Cult=Culture, Econ=Economic, Poli=Politics.

35 Until 1976, Swiss women needed the written permission of their husbands if they wanted to take up paid work.

36 A caveat when interpreting these numbers is the considerable amount of missing information for some years – especially for 1890.

37 Unfortunately, we so far have only incomplete data on the incomes and wealth of the elites in our database.

38 *Eric Davoine/Florence Ott*, La formation au métier d'entrepreneur au 19e siècle dans les familles industrielles de Mulhouse, in: Management & Conjoncture Sociale, 2000, no. 584, pp. 40–47.

Apart from the socio-demographic profile, we want to shed light on the geographical origins of the linkers in our sample. A first way to do so is an individual's nationality. Almost all core elite members are Swiss citizens; only 6 out of 405 linkers are not.[39] The evolution of the share of foreigners in the overall sample of academic and economic elites takes a decidedly different path. Here, the share of foreigners reaches a first peak in 1910 with an average of 30 % percent non-Swiss professors and 12 % non-Swiss board members. From 1937 to 1980, the share of foreigners drops substantively in the economic sector (≤ 5 %). This is a development that is linked to the practice of limiting the stock acquisitions by foreign shareholders and the active exclusion of foreigners from Swiss firms' BoD. Among university professors, a reduction of foreigners is also evident in this period, albeit not as pronounced as in the economic sector. From 1980 onwards, the share of foreigners has increased substantially again, both in the economic and in the academic sphere. The quasi-absence of foreigners among the linkers shows that they remain weakly involved in local networks.

Can this exclusion of »outsiders« be traced further? To be more precise, does exclusion occur based on national citizenship or is there also a more local component to it? To assess this question, we examine a person's family origin. We divide the linkers into two groups. Those who belong to a family that held citizenship rights by patrilineal descent in one of the three cities[40] before the year 1800 and those whose families obtained a city's citizenship after 1800 or not at all. The year 1800 serves as the cut-off point because it marks the end of the Ancien Régime and the beginning of the Napoleonic Helvetic republic. During the Ancien Régime, there was a clear divide between those with full citizenship rights in the three cities and those with reduced or no citizenship rights. Only those with full citizenship rights could participate in city politics. In his book on the high bourgeoisie of Basel at the turn of the century, Sarasin uses the criterion of holding citizenship rights before 1800 to distinguish old, well-established families from »newcomers«.[41] He finds that these old patrician families still dominated Basel's upper class at the end of the 19th century. We follow his approach here and combine information on a person's place of origin, i.e. the place where s/he was historically granted social and political rights, with data from the register of Swiss surnames. The latter gives information on whether a certain family name has been registered as having citizenship rights in a certain municipality and if so, since when.[42]

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39 To a certain extent, this can be explained by the fact that only Swiss nationals can hold political office. The canton of Geneva introduced the active voting rights for non-Swiss at the local level in 2005. However, foreign nationals can still not stand for public office, which prevents them from access to political elite positions. Foreign nationals are thus excluded from holding positions in the political sphere, which reduces their chances of establishing ties between organizations from different spheres.

40 Or in the city of Winterthur, the second-largest city in the city-region of Zurich.

41 *Sarasin*, Stadt der Bürger, p. 103.

42 The register of Swiss surnames can be found at the Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz, URL: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/famn/?lg=e> [10.9.2021]. It must be noted that for certain city-region/benchmark year combinations a great deal of information is missing (up to 80 % for the city-region of Zurich in 2000). However, it is likely that persons with missing information belong to the group of those who do not have citizenship rights before 1800, since the families that do are not

Figure 2 presents the percentage of descendants from patrician families across the three city-regions over time. We can see that in 1890, both in the city-region of Basel and Geneva, roughly 70 % of the linkers are descendants of patrician families and that in 1910 they still account for more than 50 % of the linkers. Their presence shrinks drastically between 1910 and 1937 but then remains constant (Basel) or fluctuates (Geneva). In both city-regions, individuals from families with a long local tradition still made up significant proportions until recently. This continued presence of patrician families among the linkers in Basel and Geneva can be explained by their long-lasting presence in two important economic sectors: private banks in Geneva and the chemical-pharmaceutical industry in Basel, where patrician families remained important actors in the BoDs throughout the 20th century.

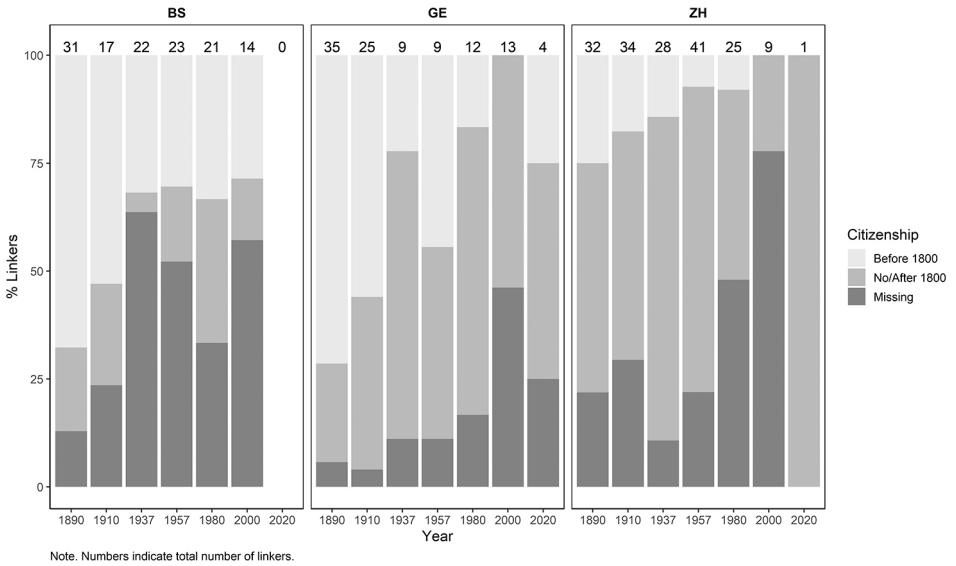

Figure 2: Local citizenship rights (before/after 1800)

What is clear is that the descendants of patrician families continue to be part of the core elite of these two city-regions – even two centuries after they formally lost their prerogatives in the city-states. This is in line with findings of Dronkers and Schijf et al., who show that descendants from noble families continued to play an important role among the Dutch elite throughout the 20th century. They argue that this group thrives to a significant degree on its »symbolic capital«, i.e. the reputati-

abundant and their names are rather well-known. The percentage of those who do have patrician family origins should thus be correct.

on that is attached to family name and origin, and hence are less dependent on personal qualities and achievements.[43]

For the city-region of Zurich, a different picture emerges. Here, patrician families »only« make up 25 % of the core elite in 1890, a number which gradually declines until patrician families are not involved in the core elite anymore by 2000. Zurich's core elite thus seems to have been more open to newcomers than those of Basel and Geneva. Or rather, the long-established families of Zurich faced higher pressure to share their power. This is also Sarasin's interpretation.[44] He argues that the patrician families in Basel were able to keep their grip on the city throughout the 19th century because they did not face competition from countryside elites in cantonal politics. This was the case in Zurich, where a conflict between the city and the countryside elite dominated the second half of the 19th century (which also transformed the political space of the canton; see below). Since the canton of Basel was divided in into a city part and a country part in 1830, the patrician families were able to maintain their dominance in the city. This explanation can be extended to Geneva, which is also a city-state. There, too, the old elite did not face the same pressure to »open the city gates« as in Zurich.

The presence or absence of patrician families from the core elite also seems to coincide with the density of the local networks discussed above. In the city-regions of Basel and Geneva, the number of links per person is higher than in Zurich in 1890 but lower thereafter until 1980 (see Figure 1). One explanation for this might be that the long-established families in Basel and Geneva were still very successful at co-optation in 1890 and 1910 but were unable to fend off their competitors afterwards, leaving ties across organizations in decline. In Zurich, by contrast, this process already took place in the middle of the 19th century and competitors have been successfully integrated into the core.

Such an interpretation can be further consolidated by looking at the political power distribution. Figure 3 shows the percentage of linkers from three major party families holding political office in the three city-regions. Liberal-conservative parties comprise the members of the old patrician elite. They were critical of the nation-state's integration and advocate strong decentralization. The centre-right party family includes the parties in favour of the federal state and comprises the new bourgeois elite which emerged during the 19th century. Finally, the social democratic party family includes all parties that are associated with the workers' movement on the left.

43 *Dronkers*, Dutch Nobility; *Schijf/Dronkers/Van den Broeke-George*, High-Bourgeois Families. For a discussion of the notion of symbolic capital, see also *Michel Pinçon/Monique Pinçon-Charlot*, Sociologie de la bourgeoisie, Paris 2003, pp. 22–26.

44 S*arasin*, Stadt der Bürger, p. 11.

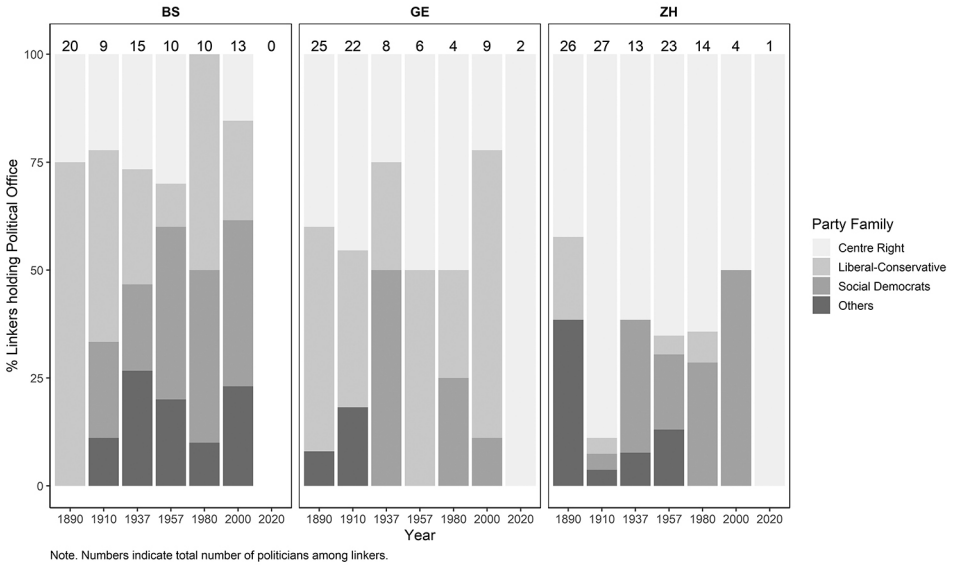

Figure 3: Partisanship of political office-holders

We can see that the liberal-conservatives were clearly the strongest party both in Basel and Geneva in 1890, whereas they were more marginal in Zurich.[45] Here, the centre-right dominated the political scene in 1890.[46] In all three city-regions, we can observe the rise of left linkers from 1910 to 1937 – a period in which the local parliaments of all three cities where in the hands of the socialists. In the 20th century, the centre-right dominates the core elite in Zurich, whereas liberal-conservatives maintain an important role in Basel and Geneva. Towards the end of the century, social democrats gain renewed access to the shrinking elite core of the three city-regions. Again, this is linked to a general increase of their political strength in these cities since the 1980s.

In sum, the profiles of the core elite of Basel, Geneva, and Zurich remained remarkably stable throughout the last 130 years. In all three city-regions, the typical linker is over 50 years old, male, university-educated, and a Swiss national. Moreover, in the city-regions of Basel and Geneva, he is also likely to belong to a patrician family that already was in power during the Ancien Régime – even if the dominance and overrepresentation of old patrician families progressively declined du-

45 In Basel and Geneva, the liberal-conservative parties remained important and independent from the centre-right parties throughout the 20th century and only merged with the Liberal Democratic Party (centre-right) at the beginning of the 21st century, while in Zurich the liberal-conservative faction joined the Liberal Democratic Party early on.

46 Again, an important caveat concerns missing information for Zurich in 1890. For this benchmark year, we do not know the political affiliation of 40 % of political office-holders (10 out of 26 individuals). Moreover, the results for the year 2020 again are not very meaningful since they only concern 2 individuals (Geneva) or 1 individual (Zurich).

ring the 20th century. That long-established families still play an important role in the city-regions of Basel and Geneva is also indicated by the strong position of »their« parties, the liberal-conservatives, in the political realm. The only clear transformation and opening of the elite core that we were able to observe is the inclusion of socialists.

III. Conclusion: Three phases of local elite evolution

The starting point of this article was the observation that comparative and long-term studies of urban elites and elite networks are rare. Our analysis of local elites in the city-regions of Basel, Geneva, and Zurich reveals a continual disintegration of formal ties between occupants of positions of power from 1890 to 2020. At the same time, the profile of core elite members has remained remarkably stable throughout the last 130 years.

We can distinguish three different periods in the evolution of elite networks and profiles. First, for the period from 1890 to 1910 our analysis clearly shows the existence of a dense regional network, connecting the major local organizations of the economic, political, academic as well as cultural spheres in the three city-regions. This period is marked by the central and hegemonic position of descendants of old patrician families, who largely monopolize and cumulate power in various social spheres. This is particularly true for Basel and Geneva, where private banks play a key part, but less so for Zurich. These results confirm previous studies by Swiss historians, such as Tanner, Sarasin for Basel, and Perroux for Geneva.[47] At the same time, this period is also characterized by a first wave of the »internationalization« of members of the local elite in the academic and the economic sphere.

Second, after an initial decline in the density of the networks for Basel and Geneva between 1890 and 1910, the networks remain relatively stable until 1980, particularly in Zurich. During this period, the core elite is very homogenous in terms of age, gender, and nationality. At the same time, we can observe a decline of descendants from old patrician families and the inclusion of socialists among the core elite. These findings have mixed implications for questions of inequality and elite renewal. On the one hand, the clear decline of old patrician families and the accession of some socialists to the core elite shows that there is a certain elite renewal. On the other hand, women and immigrants remain excluded. Such a systematic exclusion of certain groups is problematic, since the local level can serve as an important entry point to elite networks at higher levels – particularly in decentralized systems such as Switzerland.

Third, and finally, since 1980, we can observe an accelerated reduction of the formal ties between urban elites. This development mirrors the evolution of the national company network since the 1990s.[48] Large local companies have progressively grown during the 20th century, and their scale of operations has moved far beyond

47 *Tanner*, Arbeitsame Patrioten; *Sarasin*, Stadt der Bürger; *Perroux*, Elites bourgeoises de Genève.
48 *Davoine/Ginalski/Mach* et al., Globalization Processes; *David/Mach/Lüpold* et al., Forteresse des Alpes.

the regional level – first to the national and then to the international level. While these multinational companies remained largely controlled by Swiss corporate elites until the 1980s, this has changed since the 1990s, when their top managers and BoDs have become increasingly international with fewer connections to their local environment. Starting with a clear localization of their activities in the three city-regions during the 19th century, it seems that the top levels of these large multinational companies no longer need to entertain formal ties with other local organizations – or at any rate accord no priority to doing so. The changing importance multinational companies attribute to the place where they are based needs further investigation.

Before concluding, we briefly highlight some limitations of our positional approach to elite identification and of the quantitative analysis. First, and most importantly, merely focusing on elite positions and multipositionality does not reveal the concrete actions and informal interactions of these individuals. We can assume that members of the same organization or governing body – such as the BoD of an enterprise – regularly interact, share common interests, and try to advance these shared interests. Yet it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the validity of this assumption, as this would require a more qualitative and in-depth assessment of the behaviour of a much smaller group of persons.

A second caveat concerns the nature of the positions included in our analysis. Several represent full time occupations, such as being a university professor, a member of government, or an executive director of a company. As a result, holding two positions at the same time might be rather challenging for some individuals due to time constraints. Consequently, we probably somewhat underestimate the cohesiveness of local elites across different social spheres by our focus on formal positions of power. Moreover, this underestimation of elite cohesiveness might increase over time, due to the professionalization of certain positions and the additional time constraints associated with this development. A university professor in 1890 probably had more time to spare for other activities than a university professor in 2020. Still, most positions in our sample are not full-time positions, e. g. sitting on the board of a company, a cultural association, or a regional chamber of commerce, or being a local or regional lay or militia politician.

Finally, one might argue that the changing social prestige associated with a position over a certain period limits diachronic comparison. We can expect that social prestige forms part of the motivation to obtain and hold a certain position. Generally, local positions of power probably carried a higher prestige in 1890 than in 2020 and hence persons with a high social status would have been keener to occupy these positions in 1890 than in 2020. This in turn would lead to a higher cohesiveness of the network in 1890. Yet, this is not a methodological problem but an additional possible interpretation of our results: the positions we are looking at, as well as the formal functions they fulfil in society, remain the same throughout the period. Therefore, changes in social prestige of local elite positions might be another explanation for why we see a disintegration of local elite networks.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we can clearly observe a growing gap and disconnection between the central activities of elites of different social spheres, especially between the business world on one side and regional political life on the other

in the last 130 years. This sectionalization and detachment may have important consequences for regional power structures. On the one hand, it may be easier for newcomers to enter the stage and make their voice heard in local politics. On the other hand, this detachment may make it more difficult to engage in transsectoral collective action and tackle regional challenges effectively.