

THE POLITICAL ATLAS OF SWITZERLAND

Schulz Thomas
Swiss Federal Statistical Office
thomas.schulz@bfs.admin.ch
Suiza

Thematic maps are one of the most powerful means for efficiently exploiting and communicating statistical data to the general public. Among tables, descriptive text or charts, they constitute nowadays an increasingly popular information object in statistical publications, either in print or on the web, and are well received by the interested and media experienced customers.

Maps are, as we know, especially useful to convey large and complex data sets, where other forms of presentation lack an overview and a clear simple message, e.g. by reading just tables, one lacks all information on the spatial patterns in them and developments contained in them. One of the largest and continuously available data collections the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) hosts, is, apart from its rich demographic and census data, detailed information on all federal elections and votes.

The remaining historic data for this vast and important collection could recently be digitized from old statistical publications. The full time series dates now back to the first election of 1848. Taking this into account and having made already very positive experiences with the selling of a first Political Atlas on CD-ROM in 2004, FSO decided to elaborate and publish a completely new Political Atlas of Switzerland this year. The new atlas will for the first time illustrate completely and in depth all federal elections (party results, participation) and all 534 federal votes (actual vote results Yes/No and participation by voters) since the foundation of the modern Federation in the mid 19th century. The interactive maps are thereby presented for all three institutional levels (communes, districts, cantons) – as available – and be accompanied by interactive graphs, tables and abundant text explanations for the events, so that users can profit the most from a variety of different access points to this information.

The Political Atlas is issued on DVD and supplemented by a lighter “appetizing” version Online, containing the last 30 years or so of political events. As used from all FSO publications, the atlas will be multilingual. It comprises a new technology currently developed and used for the key Statistical Atlas of Switzerland.

This platform is based on three highly interactive and linked components: a cartographic data base, a Content Management System (authoring software) and a modern Graphical User Interface using Adobe Flash as output format to portray the atlas information system itself. It was only by using a sophisticated and state-of-the-art Content Management System that it had been possible at all to integrate more than 11'000 data sets, weave them into around 3'000 thematic maps (some of them with different methods of representation at the same time), integrate all necessary translations in three languages and constantly control the flow and quality of the output generated by two dozens of authors with different backgrounds and roles.

The results are very satisfactory so far for both – the team involved in the production processes as well as first tests have shown for the final customer. It can well be assumed that the product will eventually be of great use again for the public, researchers, journalists and of course politicians themselves – be it for professional in-depth spatial analysis, as a means of simple data retrieval or

as an explorative approach to better understand the evolution of the political system in Switzerland over the past 160 years.