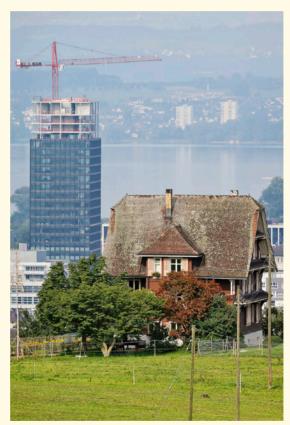# What municipalities are doing to counter urban sprawl

Between 1985 and 2009, the amount of built-up land in Switzerland increased by an area equivalent to Lake Geneva. In many places, the expansion of built-up areas results in a loss of farm land and increased energy consumption and infrastructure costs. Municipalities play a key role in the struggle against overdevelopment. They are required to develop within the limits of cantonal structure plans, but in doing so, they must reconcile a host of different interests.

With the support of the 'Sustainable use of soil as a resource' National Research Program (NFP 68), WSL researchers assessed responses from 1,619 municipalities on the question of which measures and organizational structures have been employed in recent decades to manage and develop the land. The most common measures taken were aimed at urban densification and the strategic development of the municipality. Local authorities often decide that parcels of land can – or indeed should – be developed with more and higher buildings, or they designate green conservation zones to limit urban expansion.

Large municipalities frequently control building projects on larger areas with special district plans and architectural competitions. Particularly in recent times, new land-use designations have been restricted, although only rarely. Smaller municipalities, on the other hand, try to fill centrally located empty sites instead of allowing the settlements to expand. This can be accomplished by stipulating that an area must be developed within a certain period of time after being assigned to a building zone.

The survey gives the first systematic overview of how spatial planning is organized at a local level, and also offers a chance to compare municipalities and regions with each other. Other relationships can also be examined using this data: for example, the influence of particular steering measures on urban sprawl.   *(bki)*

Building works on the tallest building in Canton Zug, Park Tower.