Spatial and social transformation as regional development –
Impact of new transport infrastructure

A unique process is currently evident in Switzerland that is accelerating and magnifying urban development and expansion at an extreme and unprecedented pace. The building of new railway tunnels is providing the capital of Berne with vastly enlarged commuter belts – representing an extreme convergence between previously peripheral, quite unspoilt regions and the centres.

One of these developments involves the opening of the Lötschberg base tunnel in 2007 – a railway tunnel that closely connects the area known as Oberwallis with the Berne metropolitan area. This has reduced the journey time by rail from two hours to less than one hour. In this case, the natural obstacles formed by the mountains are being appropriated using tunnel.

Questionnaire surveys conducted during the present study have shown that there is already a tremendous increase in the demand for accommodation in the peripheral regions concerned. Figures for numbers of inhabitants, which have been stagnating for years in the areas affected, have recently increased tremendously. The peripheral areas behind the Swiss mountains are becoming continuous with the urban regions in front of the mountains. At the same time, it can already be expected that the periphery, untouched nature, will lose its status. The pressure on the local authorities to build new residential accommodation and business premises is too great. More land is being made available and more natural areas are being spoilt. The peripheral regions are becoming urban, but still remain merely satellites of the metropolis, so that they are losing all of their special qualities and representation factors.

Keywords
Social-spatial changes
New transport infrastructure
Urban transformation
Center – periphery
Methodology