Chapter 7
Switzerland: the Green Party, Alternative and Liberal Greens

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Emergence and Development of the Swiss Green Parties

Green and alternative-left movements and parties claim to be different from established parties. In respect to their organizational structure and their intra-party decision making processes they refer to the notions of grass-roots or direct democracy and differ from established hierarchical (elite-oriented) and centralized party organizations. As Poguntke states for the German Greens, grass-roots democracy as a normative goal means 'that lower organizational levels should have as much autonomy as possible and that individual party members (or supporters) should have a maximum of participatory opportunities at all organizational levels and in the parliamentary activities of the party' (Poguntke 1994, 4). The organizational implementation of these principles is generally associated with decentralized structures and formalized direct democratic decision making processes as well as rules of democratic control (Fogt 1984, 97).

The translation of participatory elements into organizational structures and rules may be realized in many different ways, but always occurs within specific institutional conditions that impede or favour their realization. The case of the German Greens shows that the full realization of grass-roots democratic ideals is hindered by systemic constraints as for instance immanent mechanisms of the parliamentary system (Poguntke 1987, 630). In contrast, the Swiss political system seems to anticipate quite a few of the main goals of grass-roots democracy: the decentralized structure including a high degree of autonomy of the lower state units, the far reaching direct democratic means of participation, and consociational decision making as a core feature of the political system and the political culture. The federalist structure determines the general organizational structure of the parties as they have to organize at the specific state levels (Geser et al. 1994, 18). Accordingly, all Swiss parties are forced to develop territorially federalized party structures, and the institutional conditions 'prevent' the development of strong and centralized party organizations at the national level. Direct democracy not only offers smaller parties more possibilities to influence the political agenda but goes hand in hand with an anti-elitist

political culture, and consociationalism fosters the ideal of joint and discursive decision making instead of simple majority voting.

The history of the green parties in Switzerland is quite eventful. Originally there were parallel developments of locally oriented moderate green groups as well as left-alternative green groups and movements with divergent ideological alignments during the 1970s and early 1980s. The formation of a moderate green organization at national level was followed by the continuous affiliation of alternative green groups which shifted the green party to the left. With the growing success of the Greens after the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new liberal green tendency is about to enter the political arena.

The first ecologist party of Switzerland founded in the French-speaking canton of Neuchâtel in 1971 was named '*Mouvement Populaire pour l'Environnement*' (MPE). During the 1970s other cantonal green parties were founded, mainly in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The most successful one, the 'Group for the Protection of the Environment (GPE)' in the canton of Vaud, won a seat in the National Council in 1979 with 6.4 per cent of the vote. At this time, the GPE was one of the first green parties in western societies with a representative in the national parliament (Ladner 1989, 155).

Since the concern about environmental problems increased in the early and mid 1980s, the green and the left-alternative parties gained considerable support in local and cantonal elections (see Figure 7.1). In cantonal elections green parties gained, for example, 10.4 per cent of the votes in Zürich (1987), 7.8 per cent in Bern (1986), 12.8 per cent in Basel-Landschaft (1987) and 8.2 per cent in Geneva (1985).

In view of the national elections in 1983, the green and the left-wing activists discussed the formation of a Swiss Green Federation, but the severe ideological and strategic differences between the moderate Green and the left-wing alternative parties proved irreconcilable. The latter pursued left-radical political ideals regarding the future of society whereas the former positioned themselves 'being above left and right' and concentrated on environmental issues only. Accordingly, the left-alternative groups supported participatory grass-roots and anti-bureaucratic structures whereas the moderate groups tackled organizational questions in a pragmatic way.

The differences between so called 'cucumber-greens' (green inside and outside) and 'watermelon-greens' (green outside and red inside) finally led to the formation of two separate federations in 1983 (Rebeaud 1987, 101). The moderate ecological parties founded the Federation of Green Parties of Switzerland (GPS); the left-wing alternatives set up a rival federation, the Swiss Green Alternative (*Grüne Alternative Schweiz*, GRAS). During the 1980s the two federations pursued different strategies. The left-wing alternative federation remained a loose union of locally oriented radical and oppositional groups, whereas the moderate federation of Green Parties started to organize into a national party. In 1986 the moderate federation became the Green Party of
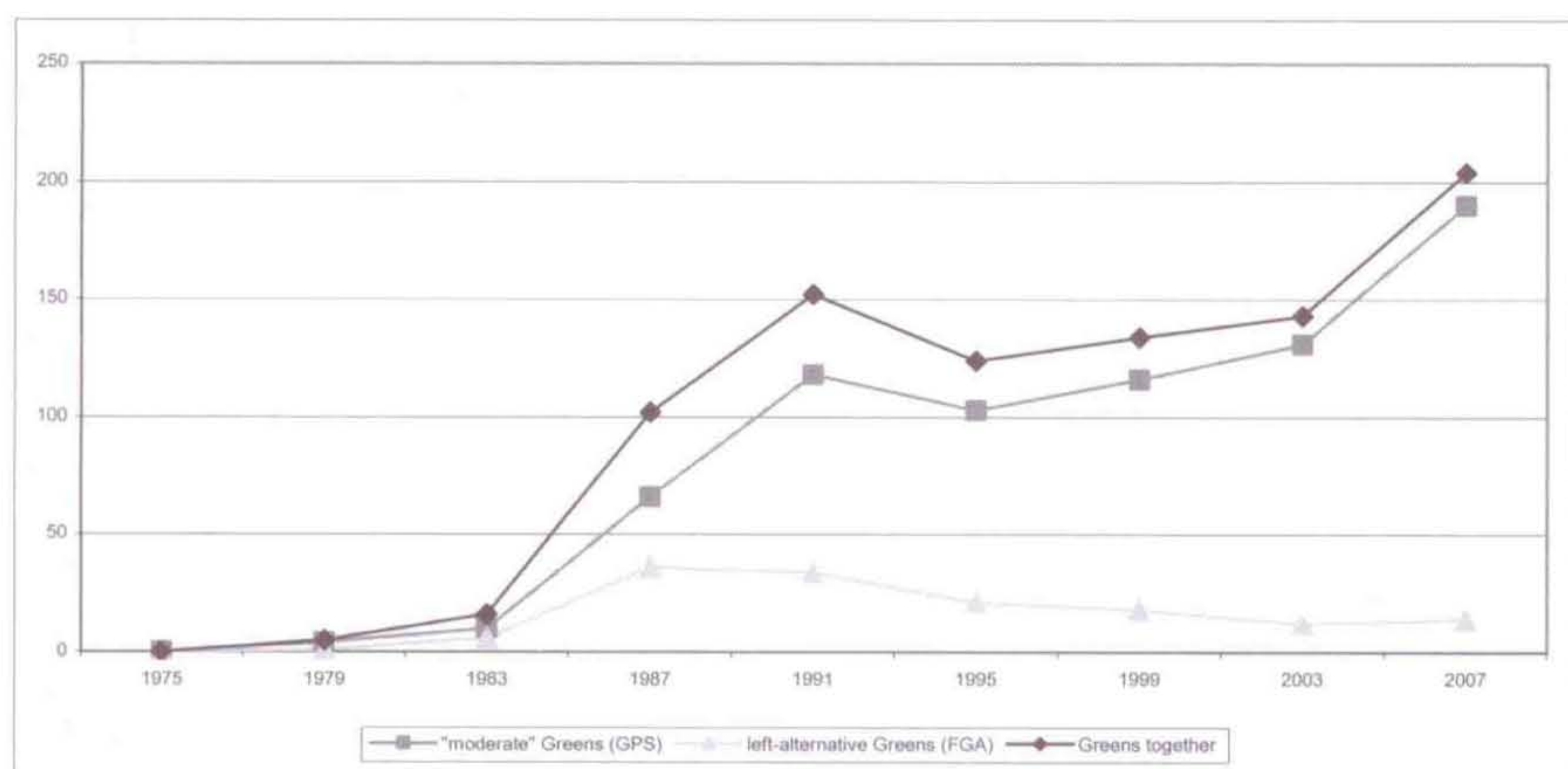
Figure 7.1   Number of seats in cantonal parliaments 1972–2007

Note: Total number of seats: 2,811 (1975), 2,888 (1995), 2,828 (2003), 2,624 (2007). For 2007 the ten seats of the Liberal Greens in the canton of Zurich are not included.

Source: BfS (2003b).

Switzerland (GPS). The GPS reached a vote share of 4.9 per cent in the 1987 national elections, whereas the alternative federation obtained 2.4 per cent only (see Table 7.1).

In the late 1980s the support for the left-wing alternative groups declined in cantonal elections, and after intensive and passionate debates on the participation within traditional political institutions some cantonal groups joined the moderate GPS. This process of 'fusion' continued during the 1990s. The GPS proved to be the leading green party organization. The success of the GPS in the 1991 elections (6.1 per cent) was to an important extent due to the entry of previously successful cantonal alternative groups into the GPS (Ladner 1998, 25). As an effect of the integration of alternative groups, the GPS turned into a left-green party and partly turned away from its more moderate voters (Ladner 1999).

In 1993 the GPS was renamed 'The Greens – Green Party of Switzerland'. Contrary to all expectations, the success of the Greens at the national level stopped quite abruptly (cf. Hug 1990, 660; Müller-Rommel 1993, 44). The decline of green issues during the 1990s economic crisis and the successful Social Democrats had weakened the GPS. In the 1995 elections the party lost 50 per cent of their seats in the national assembly. In the 1999 elections the Greens managed at least to stabilize, winning the same number of seats and share of the vote as in 1995. In the 2003 elections the Greens experienced unexpectedly a second spring, gaining 7.4 per cent of the vote and 13 seats. Since then they

seem to ride a wave of success, winning additional votes in all cantonal elections and scoring a best ever result in 2007 with 9.6 per cent of the votes and 20 seats in the National Council (see Table 7.1). Additionally the Green camp was strengthened by the newly founded Green Liberal Party which scored 1.4 per cent of the votes and gained three seats. The Green Liberal Party had split from the GPS in the canton of Zürich after a long-lasting conflict with the dominant left-wing party line.

Table 7.1   Representation in the Swiss National Council 1979–2007

	Green Party (GPS)		Green alternative parties	
	% of vote	Seats	% of vote	Seats
1979	0.6	1	0.2	–
1983	1.9	3	1.0	–
1987	4.9	9	2.4	3
1991	6.1	14	1.3	1
1995	5.0	8	1.5	2
1999	5.0	8	0.3	1
2003	7.4	13	0.5	1
2007*	9.6	20	0.0	0

*   Additionally the Liberal Greens obtained 1.4% and 3 seats in 2007.

Source: Official Electoral Statistics (BfS, 2003a: 33), <http://www.politik-stat.ch/nrw2007CH_de.html>.

Grass-roots Party Organization in a Federalist Context

The main features of the Swiss political system did not remain without influence on the organization of the green parties. The *federalist structure* of the country provides the lower state levels (cantons and communes) with a high degree of autonomy that comes close to the green ideals of decentralization. At the same time, the political system is *highly fragmented*, especially in regard to the smallness of the country. About 7.5 million people live in 26 cantons and about 2,700 municipalities. This comes close to the green ideals of 'small is beautiful' but it also increases the difficulties for local and cantonal party organizations to reach a minimal size within a constituency. The main effects of federalism and fragmentation on the party system and the party organizations are:

•   First, together with the system of proportional representation, the fragmented structure is responsible for *the large number of parties at all*

levels. There are about 180 parties and political groups in the 26 Swiss cantons and nearly 6,000 parties and groups at the local level (Ladner 1996, 134).

- Second, the high degree of autonomy of the two lower state levels forces the national party organizations to develop *decentralized party structures*. The political system is divided into three levels – federal, cantonal and communal (local) – each of which has its own executive and legislative bodies. The parties have to organize themselves at all three state levels if they strive for full participation. The organizational structures of all major parties reflect not only the federalist structure of the political system, but the cantonal and local branches also have a *high degree of autonomy* and may decide on policy, resources, and candidates on their own. The same applies even for the nomination of candidates for national elections: the role of the cantons as constituency for the national elections weakens the influence of the national party because the cantonal branches select their candidates and do their own campaign, whereas the national parties only coordinate the campaigns. Therefore, the national elections mainly take place within the cantons, which enhances the role of the cantonal branches.

- And third, the autonomy of the lower state levels takes account of the regional and cultural differences in the 26 cantons. However, the vertical segmentation also means that the cantonal and communal branches are involved in *26 different party systems and patterns of competition*, for example, small cantons with two-party-systems and large cantons with multiparty-systems (Kerr 1987; Ladner and Brändle 1999). This decentralized structure demands a lot of coordination and integration at the national level if a party wants to achieve a certain coherence and homogeneity.

The *formal structure* of the party organizations is based on the Swiss Civil Code and the respective (rudimentary) rules on associations which lay down membership requirements (entry, exit, obligations, and so forth), minimal organizational requirements (executive, congress, functions) and decision making. Consequently, the parties have a wide scope to adapt their party rules and statutes to their specific requirements and preconditions at all three levels (for example, regional and cultural distinctiveness). There is no particular law on political parties (as, for example in Germany) setting limits to grass-roots democracy in intra-party decision making.

The *structural adaptation* of the Swiss party organizations since the middle of the last century was characterized by continuous efforts to strengthen the central coordination of party activity (centralization, professionalization), to expand their organizational bases and, as a reaction to the emerging new leftist and nationalist parties and social movements in the 1970s, to democratize the

internal decision processes. All the efforts should mainly increase the general coherence and homogeneity of the national organization.

Originally, alternative green groups failed to organize themselves at the national level for reasons of ideological heterogeneity and divergent strategies, the moderate groups, however, united in a loose federation at the national level in a very pragmatic way. Compared with the traditional parties, the development of a national green party proceeded within a relatively short period of time. The foundation of the Federation of Green Parties in 1983 followed only 12 years after the first green party entered the local political scene. The same goes for the expansion of the national party that consisted of five cantonal branches in 1983 and increased to 20 branches until 1995.

Despite the difficulties and obstacles mentioned some of the institutional features of the Swiss political system also have positive effects on the emergence of green parties:

- First, the electoral system with *proportional representation* not only takes into consideration the parties' relative strength, but also facilitates the access of small parties to the political system and therefore supports the emergence of new parties, especially at the cantonal and local level (Ladner 1996, 5). Accordingly, the first green groups entered the local political scene in the early 1970s when they gained seats in several local parliaments (Rebeaud 1987, 138). At the cantonal level, the first green group gained four seats in 1978, and the same group won one seat in the canton of Vaud in the national election in 1979.

- Second, the role of the *cantons as constituencies for the national elections* allows cantonal political groups to enter the national political scene, even if they are only organized within one single canton. This effect, however, depends on the size and structure of a canton. Whereas the entry hurdles in small cantons are high (up to 50 per cent), the bigger and mostly urban cantons favour the entrance of new political groups with an entry hurdle of less than 5 per cent (Kriesi 1986, 337). That was the case in the national elections in 1979 when the '*Groupement pour la protection de l'environnement*' (GPE) gained one seat in the canton of Vaud. Its vote share came to 0.6 per cent nationwide, but in the canton of Vaud the vote share was 6.4 per cent. Very similarly the new Green Liberal Party gained its three seats in the 2007 national elections in the canton of Zurich, where they reached 7 per cent of the votes cast in the canton.

- Third, the *direct democratic instruments* facilitate the emergence of new political movements and parties (Kriesi 1986, 342ff; Kriesi and Wisler 1996, 30ff). The direct democratic instruments as for instance the referendum and the popular initiative enable political groups to mobilize citizens without having a large party apparatus or organized supporters (Gruner 1984, 149). The role of the established parties in a

direct democracy has to be seen in this perspective, since they cannot monopolize the political process (agenda setting, bargaining, and so on). Not only parties, but also social movements, single issue and interest groups are able to influence the political agenda directly, which means stronger *competition* within the political sphere. The electoral success of the green parties is preceded by diverse campaigns in connection with direct democratic instruments (Kriesi 1986, 338). Direct democracy allows a fast mobilization of supporters for or against controversial issues.

The first Swiss green party was a mere *electoral alliance* of five different regional green parties with rudimentary structures. The federation was formally organized as an association as all the other national parties, but its degree of formalization was very low. The federation was open to 'groups, movements and political parties that are active at the cantonal level and that may support national goals and the national program' (GPS party statutes, 1983). The *organizational openness* of the federation was increased by two additional statutory rules:

- *Two groups per canton* are allowed to become member of the federation as long as they do not compete with one another. With this rule the hurdles for joining the federation were lowered for the mainly locally organized green groups as they did not have to unite at the cantonal level first.
- New members first were admitted as '*observer members*', a special status with limited rights and duties within the federation. This rule allowed a slow and careful approach to the federation and took the heterogeneity and local orientation of the different green groups and movements into account. The 'observer members' do not absolutely have to affiliate, but can maintain the status. This special status is unknown within other national parties.

The *formal structure of the GPS* corresponds with the other national parties. The organization consists of two national organs, the delegates' council and the executive board. The constitution of the delegates' council – the national party's legislature – follows the principle of proportional representation, that is, the number of delegates of cantonal parties is proportional either to the number of members (where existing) or to the electoral strength in cantonal and national elections respectively. The executive board is constituted by a representative of each cantonal branch, that is, the federalist principle of equal representation of the lower levels irrespective of their size.

The same principle was also implemented in the *decision mode of the national party assembly*: decisions require a double majority: a majority of branches as well as a majority of delegates. This mechanism reflects equal importance of democratic and federal influence on all decision making as it is realized in

the political system, for example, the bicameral lawmaking in parliament and certain referenda requiring a double majority of people and cantons (cf. Linder 1994, 46). The party's president was elected for a two-year term by the delegates' council and could be re-elected once.

At the beginning the federation's organization was extremely weak. The five cantonal branches had to pay Sfr 80 per delegate to the GPS, the financial resources in 1983 amounted to Sfr 2,000 (Rebeaud 1987, 104). The GPS had no infrastructure and during the first few years the national party was administrated by its three MPs using the infrastructure of the national parliament. The continuous electoral response towards environmental issues accelerated the foundation of green parties that joined the GPS. The federation almost doubled its number of cantonal branches within only three years and consisted of nine members and two observer members in 1986. Despite the fast expansion of the GPS, the organizational reforms were limited to a renaming as 'Green Party of Switzerland' against the 'federalist opposition' of one of the cantonal parties (Rebeaud 1987, 112). The self-declaration of the Greens as 'party' should facilitate the full and equal participation in the political competition. For the party elite the term 'federation' seemed to be misleading, since the voters possibly would not perceive the federation as a competing party (Rebeaud 1987, 113).

The organizational development of the GPS was strongly influenced by the growing number of representatives in the national parliament who are of vital importance to the *green parties' finances*. Representatives of the GPS are required to pay 10 per cent of their income from the parliamentary mandate to the national party fund. Additionally, parliamentary groups (at least five MPs from one party) receive a special refund from the state (Ladner 1989, 159). As the GPS gained nine seats in the 1987 elections, the party was able to establish a paid national secretariat.

The continuous integration of different green parties into the GPS not only led to a fast expansion of the party, but also to an increasing structural heterogeneity. As a result of an organizational revision in 1990, the GPS remained 'a federation of groups, movements and political parties active at the cantonal level.' The reforms were mainly limited to the embodiment of federalist principles that guarantee the autonomy and equality of cantonal branches within the national organization. The growing influence of the former left-alternative green parties, however, led to limited organizational reforms regarding participatory rules, for example, the election of the party's president by the national delegates' assembly instead of the executive board.

The development of the national organization and its resources was favoured by the electoral success in 1991, when the GPS gained 14 seats (+5). The GPS was renamed again in 1993 and became 'The Greens – Green Party of Switzerland.' The new name should symbolize the integration of the alternative green groups, since eight alternative groups changed from the 'green alliance' to the GPS between 1987 and 1993. In 1995 the party consisted of 20 group members and six observer group members. The expansion of the GPS continued up to 2002,

when two observer group members decide to join the GPS. At the beginning of 2004 the Green party consisted of 20 group members in 17 cantons and four observer groups. And at the end of 2007 the Green Party counts 22 groups in 19 cantons. Nevertheless, the national party organization is still characterized by a low degree of formalization, although the process of consolidation led to a certain organizational normalization including more differentiated party structures and rules, such as the formal designation of additional organs (working teams, controlling body, and so on) with detailed competences as well as the introduction of gender quotas and the possibility of a co-presidency.

The electoral defeat in the 1995 national elections, when the GPS lost 6 of its 14 seats, not only de-motivated the activists, but it also weakened the national party. Since national resources mainly depend on the number of parliamentary representatives, the loss of nearly 50 per cent of the seats meant also a heavy loss of resources.

Organized as a federation of green branches with small central resources the annual budget of the GPS in 1997 amounted to Sfr 340,000 and the national party organization comprised two full-time employees. The decline of central resources in the course of the electoral defeat in 1995 led to a concentration on activities at the cantonal level, where the electoral loss was partially stopped. It is only with the gains in the 2003 elections that the GPS was able to organize itself on the national level more professionally. In 2006 the annual budget increased to about Sfr. 600,000 and the party counts now five employees on national level.

In analytical terms the development of the Swiss Greens reveals the difficulties consolidating a national party organization in a small and federalist state. Characteristic for the Greens, however, is that they are naturally more suspicious when it comes to centralized party structures. Their efforts at building a national party organization were mainly seen as a means to compete in national elections more efficiently. The smallness of the country together with the core elements of the political system and the political culture made the organization of the party in the form of an amateur-activist party something very natural being the only sensible and feasible thing to do. The Greens lacked the resources to build a professional party organization and their organizational units were hardly big enough to formalize intra-party decision making. It is thus not astonishing that the assembly of the party members, contrary to the ideals of grass-roots democracy, did not become a very important actor in intra-party decision making (see Geser et al. 1994, 208). Accordingly, there has never been a comparable debate about organizational matters and intra-party decision making like among the German Greens.

Intra-Party Differences and Changes within the GPS

The intra-party comparison of the *cantonal green parties* (see Ladner and Brändle 2001) offers some empirical evidence on the extent of heterogeneity within the federalized GPS. The data cover party structures as well as the relationship between the cantonal branches and the national party and allow some conclusions concerning the consolidation of the national party. Additionally, two nation-wide surveys among *local parties* conducted in 1990 and 2003 help to provide a closer look at the changes within the GPS.[1]

An overview of the development of the cantonal green parties illustrates the fast expansion of the Greens in the 1980s. In the 1990s the number of the cantonal sections increased due to the merging with the Green alternative groups, but the common resources in terms of members and finances did soar upward and the degree of professionalization actually went down (see Table 7.2). As the continuity of resources depends mainly on contributions of representatives, it appears that the cantonal branches suffered from electoral losses in the 1990s' cantonal elections. The supposition is confirmed by a large majority of the cantonal branches.

Table 7.2   Development of cantonal branches of the GPS 1980–1997

	1980*	1990	1997
Cantonal sections of the GPS	3	14	20
Local sections	17	103	116
Members	575	3,225	4,240
Adherents/sympathizers	4,300	39,500	40,000
Secretariat (full-time jobs)	1.2	5.1	4.5
Finances (Sfr)	n.a.	n.a.	800,000

*   Moderate groups that became founder members of the federation in 1983.

Source: Ladner and Brändle 2001, 361.

All the cantonal branches of the Swiss parties have a traditional hierarchical structure with a president. A strong minority of the green cantonal parties (35 per cent), however, do not have a formal presidency but *collective leadership*. This exceptional organizational form corresponds with the principles of the left-alternative green parties, and it is not surprising that all these parties first

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1   The 1990 survey covers 40 local parties of the GPS and ten of the Green-Alternatives (GBS) (see Geser et al., 1994). The 2003 survey includes 74 of the former and five of the latter (see Geser et al., 2003).

started as left-alternative movements. On the other hand, there is no empirical evidence that all the former left-alternative branches followed this participatory organizational principle, since some of them do not differ organizationally from the moderate branches. Between 2001 and 2003, the national party too was led by two people, Ruth Genner from the German-speaking part of the country and Patrice Mugny from the French-speaking part, where the Greens have been particularly successful.

The comparison of the organizations of the green cantonal parties in our 1997 survey (see Ladner and Brändle 2001) not only shows that the green parties are comparably weakly rooted at the local level but also that there are large differences concerning the local sections, their members and sympathizers.

- First, the degree of formalization is relatively low. About 50 percent of the cantonal green branches apply the membership principle and have formal members. These differences do not depend on the size but on the party structure of the cantonal branch: None of the parties with collective leadership has a formal membership, whereas the large majority of the traditionally organized branches have formal members.

- Second, regarding the organizational differentiation, the Green parties are characterized by mainly rudimentary rules. In contrast to the other parties, all Green parties have institutionalized a *plenary assembly* instead of an assembly of delegates at the cantonal level. This common participatory structure is probably partly ideologically motivated (especially former left-alternative groups) but also goes back to the small size of the cantonal parties. Yet the party control is rather weak as neither the decision-making process nor the selection of candidates is highly formalized. Party leaders and representatives can acquire a far reaching autonomy and sometimes go their own ways (Ladner 1989, 159).

- Third, although the GPS is present in 19 cantons, there are only about 120 local sections. In comparison, the governmental parties comprise between 940 (Swiss People's Party [SVP]) and 1,360 (Radicals [FDP]) local sections. The number of local sections within the cantonal parties of the GPS varies considerably, between one and 35 sections. Accordingly, the numbers of members and sympathizers differ enormously. The smallest section of the GPS had 40 (Jura) members whereas the largest cantonal party consisted of 1,200 (Zürich) members in 1997; the number of sympathizers varies between 150 (Jura) and 25,000 (Zürich).

The *personal and financial resources* of green cantonal parties also suggest a high degree of organizational heterogeneity: On the one hand, more than 40 percent of the sections are totally non-professionalized and have very small financial resources, that is, the annual budget amounts to a few thousand francs. Accordingly, all the party work is done by amateurs and activists respectively. On the other hand, eight cantonal parties are partly professionalized and provided

with between Sfr 20,000 and 200,000. This mainly covers administrative work, since all of the eight branches have part-time employees only. Their degree of employment amounts to not more than 30 percent for a majority of the branches. Interestingly, there is no connection between the size of a cantonal branch and its extent of professionalization. The two largest cantonal branches have more than 1,000 members, but their employees are part-time with the degree of employment 95 and 20 per cent respectively. The extent of professionalization also varies independently from the number of sympathizers of a cantonal branch. Looking at the party structures, however, the professionalization is higher in the more formalized branches applying a clear membership principle. The degree of formalization also has a positive effect on the financial resources, since the more formalized branches are able to fall back on their members (fees), whereas the branches without formal members mainly depend on voluntary contributions of sympathizers.

The 2003 local party survey reveals more about the *financial resources of the local party organizations* of the Greens. In comparison to the four big parties in national government, the average budget of the local green parties in an electoral year is between two and three times lower (see Geser et al. 2003, 19). At the same time, the average membership fee is higher than in most of the other parties and almost reaches the one of the Social Democratic Party. Like in other parties, membership fees cover an important part of the annual budget. In recent years, however, the share of membership fees, on a compulsory as well as on a voluntary basis, has decreased (see party model (see next section)).

Contributions from the cantonal party and from Green party members in public office have become more important. The question is to what extent the increasing financial importance of party members in public office goes in hand with the increase of their importance in intra-party decision making. If this is the case, then it could be seen as a step away from grass-roots party democracy towards a parliamentary or activist party model (see next section).

The strength and coherence of a federalized national party organization depends at least partly on the loyalty or general orientation of its cantonal members. The data on the *relationship between the GPS and its cantonal branches* in 1997 suggest minor relevance of the national organization. The data are based on assessments of the cantonal branches' presidents and leadership groups respectively. For two-thirds of the cantonal branches, the influence of the national party line on the cantonal party is weak. Likewise, two-thirds of the cantonal branches assess their influence on the national party as weak. According to the assessments, the two organizational levels function quite independently and autonomously.

For the cantonal branches, the role of the national party is mainly limited to the development of national policies and the information about national issues. The cantonal branches support the GPS in the course of national elections and referendums, but only a few are interested in mediating and implementing decisions of the national party. The organizational weakness of the national
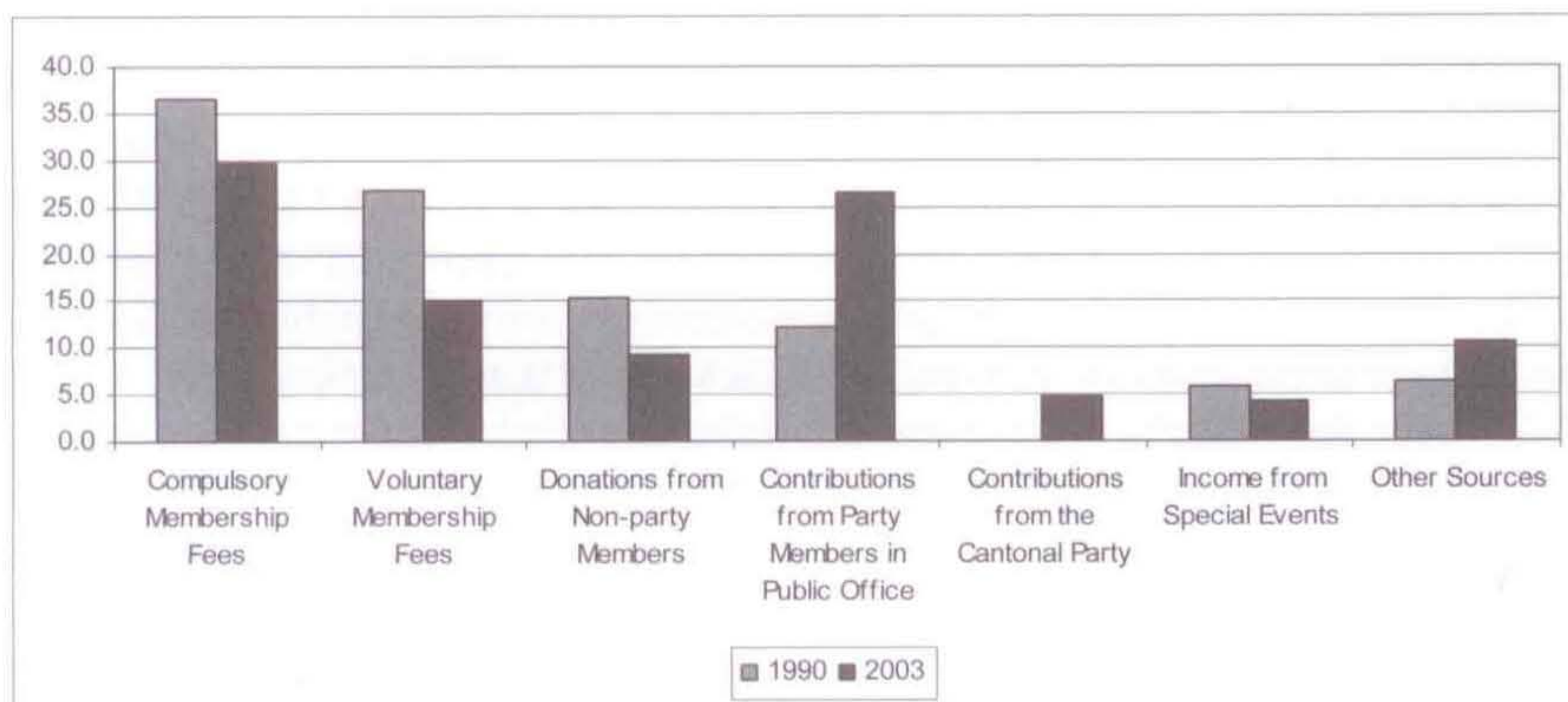
Figure 7.2   Financial resources at local level (average share of income in 1990 and 2003)

$N_{1990} = 38; N_{2003} = 71.$

party is confirmed by the cantonal branches; none of them expects any financial support from the national party, and organizational help is only expected by a very small minority of cantonal branches.

The cooperation between the national and the cantonal parties clearly has been intensified during the last decade, but the result is ambiguous. One half of the cantonal branches consider the cooperation intensive, the other half denies an intensive cooperation. In the same direction point the answers of the local parties in 2003. Like in other parties, the importance of the political orientation and the programme of the parties on a higher level have slightly increased for the green local party organizations. More often than in 1990 the local parties of the Greens agree also with their party organizations on higher level. For the other parties the opposite is the case.

These assessments of the local and cantonal parties illustrate the functioning of a loose federation of cantonal parties. The loyalty to the national organization is virtually limited to the support of policies. The mutual influence is considered weak, and only one half of the cantonal branches confirm an effective vertical cooperation. The question is, however, whether the lack of a stronger cooperation is due to Swiss federalism, the young age of the Green party, a deliberate programmatic choice of the Greens, or big intra-party differences. Most probably all of the four factors can be partly made responsible.

Interestingly, the *coherence regarding decisions on national policies* is quite high compared to the other national parties. Empirical evidence for the internal heterogeneity of the national parties is, for example, given by the process of policymaking at the national level. An analysis of the voting recommendations of national and cantonal parties for national ballot votes (referendum or initiative) illustrates the functioning of the federalized party organizations with respect

to decisions on national policies. The cantonal party sections are autonomous in their passing of voting recommendations with reference to national ballot votes, that is, the cantonal parties can take a different stand than their national organization. In the 90 national ballot votes between 1987 and 1995 the Green Party was even more homogeneous than the Social Democrats: only 16 per cent of the slogans of the national party were contested by cantonal branches and the average percentage of deviant branches is less than 2 per cent.

Thus in spite of the limited mutual influence of the national party and the cantonal branches of the GPS, the programmatic coherence is relatively high. The extent of *programmatic coherence* can be explained by the size and the institutional status of a party, since a small oppositional party has to present itself as a united group that draws a clear dividing line between governmental and oppositional policy. In so far it would have more to do with a deliberate strategic decision than with shared programmatic values. This thesis is supported by the positions of the local parties on a left-right scale reaching from 1 to 10. Their self-placement reveals a slightly higher standard deviation for the Greens than for the other big parties. The differences have increased within the last 13 years, no doubt due to the already mentioned unification of moderate and green-alternative parties in the early 1990s.

Still an Amateur-Activist Party but more Left and Older

The same characteristics that helped the Swiss Greens to organize according to the principles of grass-roots democracy prevented them from becoming a professional electoral party (or professional electoral machine) in an ideal type sense. Smallness, decentralization, lack of professionalism, and heterogeneity make it impossible to lead such a party on a top-down basis. Nevertheless, some recent developments regarding Swiss parties more generally also touched the Greens.

As far as the *intra-party power structure* is concerned, our surveys among the local parties in 1990 and 2003 reveal that the differences between the Greens and the other parties have become smaller although they have not been as important as expected, considering the different organizational backgrounds of the parties. In the newly founded Green parties in the late 1980s, the party's preferences for grass-roots democracy came out much clearer. Intra-party working groups and single party members were more important in 1990 than in 2003. The Greens, compared to other parties, however, did not prove to represent a completely different type of party organization. The assembly of the party members, however, was only slightly more influential in the Green parties than in all the other parties whereas the parties' executive board was only slightly less important in the Green parties than in all the other parties. If there are any changes within the last few years, it is the members in parliament and the party on cantonal level together with the party's president and the

executive board that have become more important, whereas the parties' assembly lost some of its power. The differences, however, are very small and follow a pattern which is rather similar to the one in other parties having thus more to do with a general trend among political parties in the direction of leadership and party in public office.

These findings are supported by another survey result. The party representatives were also asked to state whether they considered the involvement of rank and file party members more important than a certain independence of the party leaders to respond to everyday affairs. In 2003 operational freedom seems to be considered more important than intra-party democracy. This reveals some sort of an 'operational backlash' making the parties more responsive to the demands of a media democracy. Considering all the other features of Swiss and especially Swiss Green Party organizations, the parties are still miles away from a professional electoral party machine. Grass-roots democracy, however, was more applied because of the importance and independence of the parties on the lower state level (due to federalism and local autonomy) than because of intra-party power structures and decision making processes. Party activists always played a more important role than the concept of grass-roots democracy wished them to play. In recent years they have even become more important.

In 1990 more than 10 per cent of the local green parties were not able to place themselves on a left-right scale (not left, not right but green), thirteen years later not a single party refuses to answer this question. Ideologically, the Green party has changed quite considerably over the last years. At the end of the 1990s, just before the merging of the Green Party and the Green Alternative Party, the GPS was rather homogenously placed at the same position (3.3) on the left-right scale as the Social Democrats, leaving the Green Alternatives (1.6) quite far away from them on the left. In 2003 the GPS has moved to the left (2.9), becoming more left-oriented than the Social Democrats (3.1). This overall tendency comes out as well when we look at the positions of the local green parties on various political issues. They generally have a firmer stand on left positions than the Social Democrats which themselves are already positioned rather left in an international comparison. The only important difference is found in the Greens' position towards Switzerland joining the European Union. Here they are less enthusiastic than the Social Democrats. Looking at the intra-party homogeneity, however, the Greens in 2003 cover a broader spectrum than in 1990 (see Figure 7.3).

Finally, the Greens are aging faster than the other parties. In 1990 the average percentage of adherents under 40 years of age was over 60 per cent; in 2003 this number had dropped to 34 per cent. And a closer look at the activists or militants within the local parties of the Greens points into the same direction. The shares of militants in the lower age brackets were smaller in 2003 than in 1990, the higher age brackets have become more important (Figure 7.4). This trend to the higher age brackets is much stronger in the Green party than in all the parties together. The share of party activists between 45 and 60 in
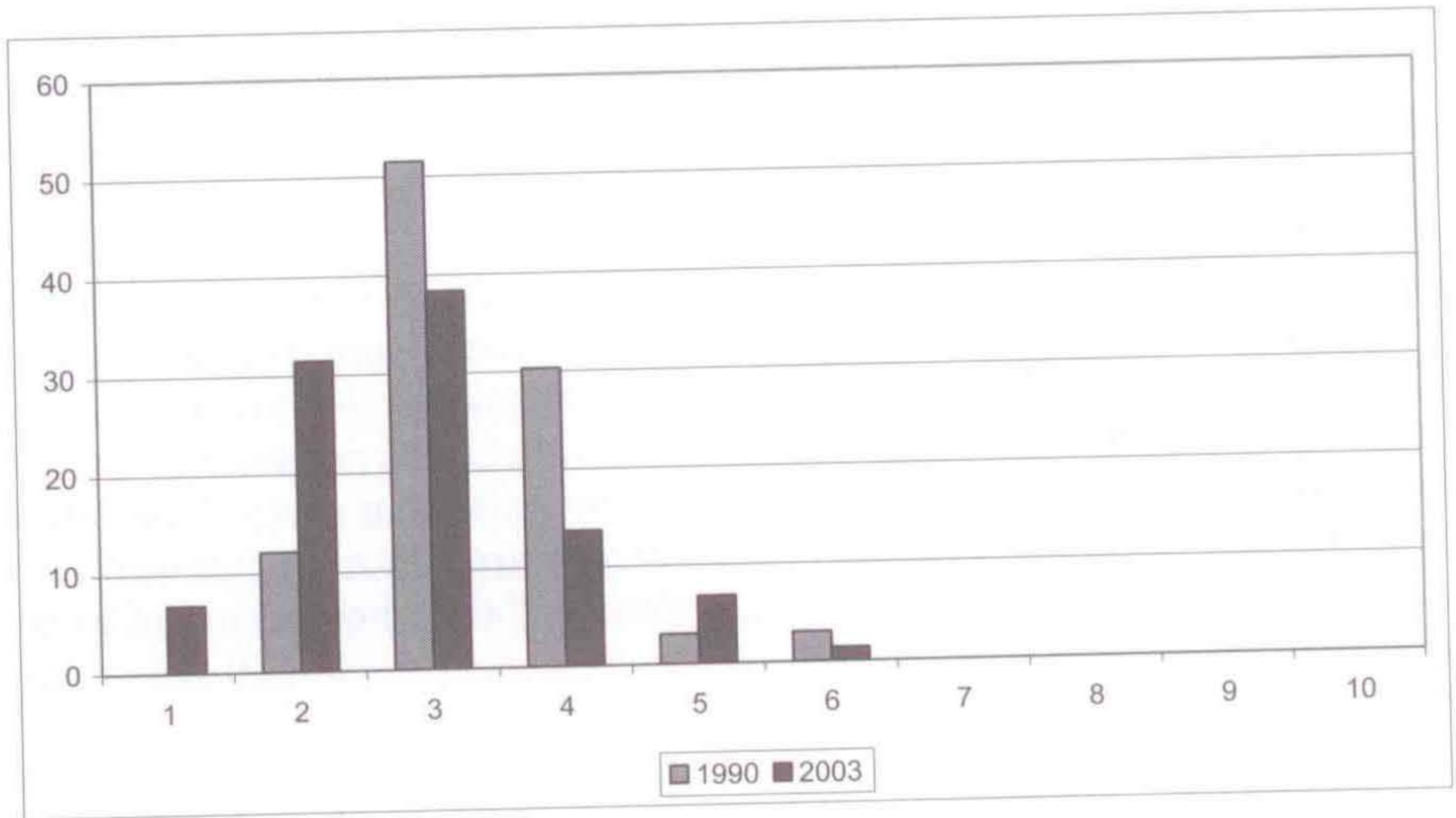
Figure 7.3   Position of the Green local parties (GPS) on the left-right scale in 1990 and 2003 (percentages)

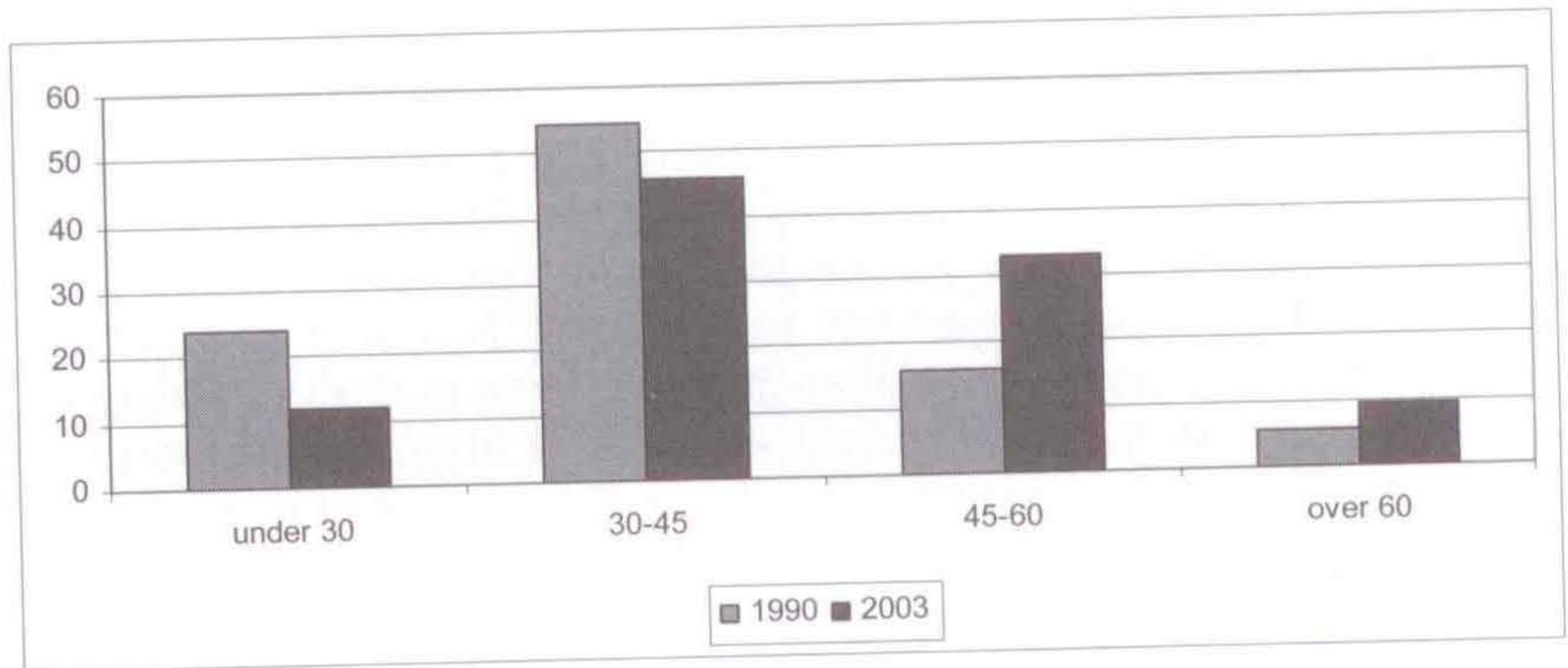1 = left; 10 = right; N_{1990} = 33; N_{2003} = 73.

Figure 7.4   Green activists: average importance of the different ages groups in 1990 and 2003

N_{1990} = 597; N_{2003} = 958.

Switzerland increased by about 4 per cent from 35 to 39 per cent, in the Green party it doubled from 16 to 33 per cent.

Conclusion and Outlook

In organizational terms there has never been a fundamental difference between the Greens and the traditional Swiss parties. On the one hand, this is partly due to the federalist structure of the country, giving not only to the political units but also to the parties on the lower level a considerable autonomy, and partly due to the smallness of the political units and most of the party organizations of the lower levels, lowering the need for formal party structures. On the other hand, the history of Green parties started at a time when intra-party democracy was also a major concern of the traditional Swiss parties (see Ladner 1999, 240).

The federalist structure thus offered the Green party organizations in Switzerland an ideal background for the implementation of common 'green' organizational goals. The autonomy of the cantonal branches allowed for different organizational forms such as collective leadership or more hierarchical structures. The degree of formalization remained low and the national rules mainly included the guarantee of the equality of cantonal branches in the decision-making process. The low entry hurdles in most cantons also allowed, at least in the 1980s, a parallel development of green and green-alternative parties.

Given the smallness of the constituencies in which most of the green parties on lower state levels are organized, the parties' central offices are very small. Practically all political and a lot of the administrative work for the party is done by activists on a voluntary basis. The smallness of the single party organizations also lessened the necessity to formalize intra-party decision making and representation of the party in public offices. Having a plenary assembly on the cantonal level instead of an assembly of delegates is one of the few features where the Greens are clearly more oriented towards grass-roots democracy than other Swiss parties. Nevertheless, many of the classic 'green organizational features' such as specific rules on mandate rotation, imperative mandate, limitation of salaries, participatory instruments, did not seem appropriate or necessary and there was hardly any debate on these topics. The Swiss Greens started as an amateur-activist party and they still are an amateur-activist party although some of the activists, mainly those in public office, increased their influence.

Since the 2003 national elections the Green Party is back on the path of success. This is to a large extent due to the reappearance of environmental issues on the political agenda. In some respect it might also be due to the fact that the Greens do not take part in the joint four-party government on national level. After the electoral success of the Swiss People's party which led to the replacement of one Christian Democrat through a representative of the Swiss People's Party, the government seemed to go through a period of heavy internal conflicts which was disapproved by quite a few citizens. However, with something like ten per cent of the vote the question eventually will arise whether the Greens

should not be represented in the national government. This, with doubt, could be another milestone for the development of the party.

Another issue is the political position of the Green Party. Although being rather heterogeneous combining pragmatic green-green (or pure green) forces in the French-speaking part of Switzerland as well as in some of the German-speaking cantons with more left and green alternative groups, the party's positioning in the national parliament is clearly to the left. There have been some serious doubts whether all the green voters realized that they were giving their vote to a party which was even more left-wing than the Social Democrats. The latest success of the Green Liberal Party in the canton of Zurich, which split from the Green Party, shows that there is a potential for a green party situated more in the centre of the political spectrum. It might thus well be that the umbrella holding together the different cantonal groups on the national level is not big enough in future, bringing the Greens back to their beginning when the green-green and the green-alternative forces found themselves in different national organizations.

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