

Integral Politics: A Swiss Perspective

Elke Fein and Hans-Peter Studer¹

Abstract: This article tells the story of the Swiss NGO “Integrale Politik (ip)” founded by about 20 people in November 2007 with the aim of becoming a regular political party at a later stage (www.integrale-politik.ch). We wish to make ip’s concepts and approaches known to a wider public. Inspired by integral thinkers such as Jean Gebser and Ken Wilber, ip develops its own ideas and interpretations of *integral* in view of the concrete challenges of Swiss and European politics.

Integral political culture is understood, for example, as including practices addressing all senses, turning political commitment into an experience of meaningful activity and an expression of joy, ease and celebrating life. One of the most important challenges currently faced by the group is to perpetuate and further develop this working culture as the organization grows. Its success in doing this seems to be one of the main reasons for ip’s attractiveness to the Swiss cultural creative sector in general and the growing integrally-minded community in particular to whom it gives an increasingly visible face and a clear-cut voice. At the same time, the Swiss political system offers particularly favourable preconditions and thus, a fruitful ground for new political ideas and experiments such as this integral political one.

Keywords: awareness, creativity, democracy, holacracy, integral consciousness, integral economy, integral politics, integral society, integral working culture, spirituality, Switzerland.

This article tells the story of an NGO called “Integrale Politik (integral politics)” which was founded by about 20 people from all over Switzerland in November 2007 with the aim of becoming a regular political party at a later stage. Meanwhile, Integrale Politik (ip) has considerably increased its membership and considers itself probably the best organized and the most dynamic integral political force in Europe. With this “report from the field,” we wish to make ip’s concepts and approaches known to a wider integrally interested public in order to share some of the experiences ip has had in the course of preparing the establishment of an “integral party.”

The History of “Integrale Politik”

The history of “Integral Politics Switzerland” reaches back to the beginning of the Millennium. In 1995, ip’s founding president Gil Ducommun, at that time professor of

¹ Dr. Hans-Peter Studer is an economist and a founding member of ip. He was a member of the board and chaired ip’s commissions for integral economy and for platform development (Programmkommission) until the end of 2009. Contact: hpstuder@swissonline.ch.

Dr. Elke Fein is a political scientist at the Universities of Freiburg and Basel and member of three working groups and commissions within ip. Contact: fein@uni-freiburg.de.

Drs. Fein and Studer are researchers at the Institute for Integral Studies (IFIS) in Freiburg (www.ifis-freiburg.de, info@ifis-freiburg.de).



agriculture and development at the Swiss College of Agriculture in Zollikofen, launched a project called Holon, a network of holistically oriented organizations promoting new and unconventional ideas, especially in the field of economy. Holon was founded in March 1997 in four countries (Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Austria, with additional contacts in France and Belgium). Later, supported by Holon's network, a group called *dynamik5* emerged which for the first time set itself the aim of becoming a political party based on holistic views and principles. *Dynamik5* held regular meetings, had local groups, and produced several papers on specific topics related to holistic/integral politics and economics. However, because of difficulties to constructively integrate different personalities and opinions as well as the perspectives from different countries into one common project, the original aim could not be realized.

In hindsight, Gil Ducommun openly calls his personal “lack of maturity” and emotional competence the main cause of this failure, more important than substantial differences between the participants. As a leader, he concedes to have been overcharged by the task since he inevitably lacked some of the necessary capacities to build an integral party. One of the main lessons he drew from this experience was that a strong group was necessary right from the beginning which could not only pool together the competences and perspectives of its members in view of a shared vision, but also accomplish the necessary shadow work to compensate and transform individual or collective shortcomings whenever they appear. A similar group was missing in the case of *dynamik5*.



Another aspect which, in Gil's view, might have rather harmed than supported the development of *dynamik5* was a donation of 1 million Swiss Francs given to the association. Since this money had not been earned through “hard work,” it in some sense prevented the organization from growing organically – and to build up the competences necessary to generate surplus income by its own efforts. As a result of these difficulties, *dynamik5* stayed a social project trying to introduce new ideas into public discourse instead of becoming a political party. Lately, it was fused with Holon and thus does not exist as an independent organization anymore.

Gil Ducommun himself then took a creative “time out” during which he published *After Capitalism. The economic order of an integral society* (2005, in German). After that, he tried to find other, more adequate ways of institutionalizing integral politics, still in view of establishing an integral political party. This time, he started off along with a few of his close companions, experts from the fields of economics, psychotherapy, as well as party-politics proper. A draft concept was written of what they thought to be basic principles of integral politics. On this basis, several more members were carefully selected. As a result, the so-called core group (“Kerngruppe”) of 20 people emerged who later founded it as an association. Before that, the core group, made up of ten men and ten women from different social contexts and areas of work, further elaborated the draft concept during a process of about two years of intensive work and cooperation.

The result of this creative and mutually transformative process was a white paper (“GLIP”) of 52 pages on the foundations of integral politics (“Grundlagenpapier, GLIP,” www.integrale-politik.ch/d/images/stories/dateien/dokumente/glp1.pdf) which now constitutes the substantial theoretical basis of the association. The paper deals with central dimensions of the

current global crisis and proposes new ideas on how they could be addressed in an integral way. Amongst the basic elements of integral politics which the paper elaborates on are integral consciousness, integral economy, integral ecology, integral health, integral education, migration, and what ip calls “peace politics,” a new way of dealing with transnational conflicts in a globalizing world.

At this point, a few remarks are due with respect to the question: Why a party? This question is indeed asked again and again by people from the cultural creative sphere who are interested in ip’s work. In fact, “integral” and “party” seem to be contradictions at first sight, since the integral vision wants to unite and view the whole picture instead of mere partisan and partial truths. Instead, it is often suggested that integral actors introduce their values and perspectives into already existing parties and enter into a dialogue with them.

ip’s answer to these concerns, meanwhile formulated in a short FAQ text, is that firstly, integral consciousness, thinking, and feeling, for the moment, actually is only a part – and a rather small part – of the spectre of social and political world views. However, being a part that will try to look for integral perspectives and solutions, ip neither can nor should speak for all, even if it is prepared to perceive and appreciate all other opinions and perspectives. All it can and does try to do is to bring new ideas into the political process and to take care of promoting a political style of respect, awareness, and constructive cooperation. In order to become visible as a new culture, it needs its own “container” where integrally minded people can come and work together both to substantiate and concretize their vision and to publicly stand up for them.

However, ip is also only part of a larger integral movement, more precisely, its political part or aspect. The emerging integral consciousness is constantly gaining ground in most (western) societies. Now, it is in need of a political voice making it more clearly visible in the public and political scenes. While a growing number of non-political networks, NGOs, institutes, and educational centers give birth to integrally informed citizens, ip offers a structure for the latter to channel their efforts in order to bring about a deeper, integral transformation of society as a whole. Thus, ip sees itself as that part of the integral movement which brings together those who wish to take responsibility for implementing the integral vision on a larger scale. Let us now take a closer look at ip’s notion of “integral.”

What is Integral?

As mentioned before, ip’s predecessor organizations still operated on the basis of a different terminology, mainly using the term “holistic” (“ganzheitlich”) to describe their “spiritual, eco-social, European” aims.² The term “integral” is being used only since the publication of Gil’s book in 2005. In this sense, ip is giving itself a broader basis. Nevertheless, the main theoretical impulses of *dynamik5* have been almost fully integrated into ip’s thinking and position building.

ip’s use of the term “integral” is strongly inspired by Ken Wilber and Jean Gebser – yet without becoming dogmatic about either of them while elaborating ip’s own interpretation of

² *Dynamik5* – ein ganzheitliches Gesellschaftsprojekt. Anregung zur spirituellen, öko-sozialen Partei Europas, January 2002.

integral in view of the concrete challenges of Swiss and European politics. ip's white paper therefore makes clear: "What 'integral politics' means, cannot be found in any encyclopaedia. It still has to be thought out, palpated and invented."³ In this document, the term "integral" is defined first, following Gebser, as a newly emerging era within human cultural history, and second, as the level of consciousness of a growing number of people within this era, with consonant attitudes, ways of thinking and being-in-the-world.

On an individual level, integral consciousness is able to de-identify with thoughts and feelings while watching them from the perspective of a timeless observer (witness) and rather identifying with consciousness itself. Therefore, it senses the unity of all things and beings, an outlook which is able to generate a loving and compassionate attitude towards all things. As such, integral consciousness is thought to give birth to the new culture which Gebser was probably the first to call "integral" (GLIP, p. 3).

On a cultural level, integral consciousness thus increasingly transcends either-or dualisms such as of body and mind, left/right or better/worse by inclusive, intuitive ways of thinking and acting from the centre of the heart. Whilst helping to give up an exaggerated adhesion to materialistic values and attitudes in favour of a more balanced integration of the multiple human needs and potentials (such as social, emotional, spiritual ones), it enables creative freedom to emerge. At the same time, competitive logics are replaced by an attitude which seeks the good, the true, and the beautiful in every contribution, i.e., through transcending and including ever more aspects into ever broader perspectives with the aim to "protect and promote the greatest depth for the greatest span."⁴

Thus, instead of arguing against what it holds to be inappropriate, ip rather tries to develop positive visions. By the way, this self-set standard has important implications for ip's future interaction with other political parties. It is therefore aware that the way it communicates with external partners, counterparts, and competitors will be a decisive challenge to the organization's identity and reputation (see GLIP, p. 52).

Integral consciousness in ip's understanding invites the individual to an ongoing self-development in the sense of ever growing awareness of the levels of being and of one's own trajectory through states and stages (GLIP, p. 7). In view of policy outlooks and society as a whole, ip holds that integral politics is *liberal* in that it promotes the creative freedom and responsibility of the person. It is *social* in that it considers a factual equality of chances as a primary aim in order to enable the personal growth of all individuals. It therefore consequently rejects an unlimited freedom to enrich oneself and to accumulate power on the account of others. Integral politics is *ecological*, since it wants to arrange economy and consumption in a sustainable way bringing it into utmost harmony with the needs of nature of which we are all a part. And it is *spiritual* in that it values immaterial qualities and vertical, transformational development at least as much as material quantities and horizontal innovation (GLIP, p. 6).

These principles have led ip to develop quite visionary goals which, as of today, might still look somewhat radical, but which ip is very realistic about. For the group is fully aware of the

³ Grundlagen integraler Politik. Für eine tiefgreifende Erneuerung der Gesellschaft (GLIP), 2008, p. 4.

⁴ Ken Wilber, Collected Works, Vol. 6, p. 640.

fact that integral consciousness at a cultural level is still in the process of emergence, and that therefore some of the more ambitious goals will only be achievable within one or two generations. However, ip is convinced that “time is working in our favour,”⁵ since to the extent that today’s materialistically oriented society and economy are confronted with their limits, and the more obvious the problems become which the latter bring about, the more people will have the courage to search for new solutions, individually as well as collectively. They will recognize, in ip’s presumption, that the present, mainly materially motivated striving for ever more possessions and consumption at some point has to be limited both for the sake of personal development, of social welfare and of democracy. At the same time, people are expected to increasingly share the experience: If we are able to gradually limit our material demands to what really serves our lives, we will become free to detect and live our social and spiritual potential in a new and fascinating way. We can only achieve true satisfaction and live deep joy if we seek them within ourselves, thus connecting ourselves to wider wholes and learning to transform the world (also) from within.

The Making of an Integral Policy Platform: The Example of Integral Economics

Integral political position building, for ip, is an ongoing process, which is why the governing board has decided not to publish a traditional party platform, but rather to popularize integral political solutions through more flexible single policy papers. Based on the organization’s white paper mentioned above, developing more detailed policy position papers is amongst the most important of ip’s current activities.

In October 2008, a commission for platform elaboration (“Programmkommission”) was created which is in charge of coordinating the work of several thematic working groups each of which is due to concretize, differentiate, and substantiate one of the central chapters of the white paper.⁶ The policy papers to be issued by these working groups will either deal with fundamental questions or with issues of high day-to-day actuality and are scheduled to have gone through the internal revision process by summer 2010.

The members of these working groups have largely been recruited during ip’s first two nation-wide gatherings (on November 14th 2008 and Mai 9th 2009) in Bern. Through open invitations to all who consider themselves competent in the respective field, surprisingly resourceful and effective “think tanks” on integral consciousness, integral society, integral economy, integral education and integral peace policies have emerged. As an example, the working group on economics shall be briefly presented.

Economy surely is one of the areas where integral approaches have only begun to be worked out. While Kevin Bowman (IntegralLife) has recently outlined what it means to perceive

⁵ Hans-Peter Studer, Das Einfache wird nicht einfach sein – oder doch? Interview in: Zeitpunkt, No. 96, July/ August 2008, p. 18-19.

⁶ As of today, IP has working groups on integral consciousness, integral society, integral education, integral economy and distributive justice, integral health, climate and energy, migration and integral peace politics (see the chart at the end of this article).

economy from the four quadrants and from different stage perspectives,⁷ answering the question on how these perspectives could enter a productive dialogue and what actual integral economic solutions could look like, is much less obvious. In this respect ip's starting point is, on the one hand, its integral anthropology, conceptualizing humans as potentially ever-developing beings with at least four basic needs (material-biological, emotional-affective, mental/intellectual and spiritual) and on the other hand the idea of common welfare. Generally, ip strongly pleads in favour of reintegrating the economic sphere into society as a whole.

For that purpose, ip holds a self-organizing market economy to be indispensable which, however, has to be embedded in effective and commonly backed rules to prevent it from becoming self-sprawling. This means that not only do the so-called external, social, and ecological costs of production and consumption have to be internalized, but, even more important, that the increasingly destructive dynamics of the modern money system would also have to be tamed. "ip" therefore suggests to define limits to the maximum achievable income and revenue, combined with a guaranteed basic income, in order to establish a market economy with a high creative potential, and with revenues more equally shared by all members of society. For the same purpose, ip proposes to establish rules by which concentrated capital would be periodically reallocated in order to offer similar economic chances especially to all young people when commencing their professional careers. According to ip's economic concept, this will lead to a more locally oriented economy based on small and medium-sized companies that would both be free from the pressure of constant material growth and from the one-sided financial interests and influences of some mighty few.

In view of making this vision understandable also to those people who until now have not reflected on the principles, culture, and effects of today's economy in similar depth themselves, ip is fully aware that its vision has to be outlined and explained carefully. And of course, intermediate measures have to be defined, helping to implement the greater vision step by step. Right now, ip's working group on integral economics is in the process of discussing and substantiating its central ideas which is being experienced as a very fruitful and sometimes also controversial endeavour, since the group consists of members with rather different backgrounds: professors, economists, managers, entrepreneurs, engineers as well as people with just a general interest in integral economics and business.

It is therefore no scarcity that in one or the other working group, conflicts arise both with regard to the design of substantial policy suggestions and, for example, to integral leadership and the coordination of the groups themselves. In this respect, some of them have already experienced difficult moments of personal and relational tension. To this point, however, similar situations were always resolved through transparent dialogue, combined with careful self inquiry and communication which, as a rule, not only leads to the deepening or even renewal of the respective member's commitment to the group and its working project, but also to processes of personal and collective transformation.

The working group on integral economics, for example, has recently worked out a conflict on several fundamental issues through taking all the necessary time to carefully listen to all opinions

⁷ Kevin Bowman, Integral Economy. Part I: Our economic institutions, www.integrallife.com, November 2008.

and to actively speak with those voicing minority positions until a common understanding or even consensus was found. In this case, several advisory votes were held in the course of the discussion. In the end, a (former) representative of a minority position even agreed to write a text from the perspective of the majority argument. The principle of consent (within which an issue is discussed until no more legitimate objection is raised against a particular solution) is indeed one of the central elements of ip's working culture.

How Does ip Operate?

As the however-scant glimpse onto ip's working group on integral economics has shown, the modes and culture of cooperation within ip are probably as important as the substantive aspects of policy development. In fact, this is true for all of ip's units or "holons" on all levels. With regard to ip's internal functioning, three interrelated aspects can be distinguished: the association's general working culture, the procedures of developing contents and the emergence of structures and mechanisms adequate to an integral organization.

Firstly, the meetings both of the core group and of any other thematic working group are not merely intellectual processes, but also integrate moments of silence and meditation, shadow work, physical exercise, and dance. Integral political culture as practiced within ip is understood as addressing all senses, turning political commitment into an experience of meaningful activity, and an expression of joy, ease and celebrating life. Rituals are used to create awareness and centring and to foster individual, as well as collective transformation. Emerging conflicts are carefully looked at and thoroughly solved. This usually happens through creating spaces of awareness allowing to bring in and to voice all aspects appearing relevant from perspectives of the people involved. These perspectives are then balanced out until some sort of consensus or consent is found providing sufficient common ground for further activities. Within ip, the president is not entitled to put his or her foot down and lay down the law in cases of conflict.

This ongoing experience strengthens the group's collective identity, often engenders transformative processes, and sometimes leads to surprisingly creative solutions. As a result, a specific kind of integral working culture, based on a set of guiding rules, practices, attitudes and habits has evolved over the past three years. It can be described as a culture of presence and awareness, of silence and creativity, of conscious dialogue and transparent conflict resolution which continues to define and shape ip's work.

In order to support the necessary but sometimes difficult processes of collective shadow work, several roles and bodies have been created. Besides the principle of consent (see above) and the continuous emphasis on inviting individual perceptions, objections, and feelings, one of the central roles in all of ip's internal processes is the so-called "process observer (Prozessbeobachter)." For any working session, one of the participants is assigned the role of carefully watching how the others interact with each other and to report his impressions in the end. In case of perceived tensions, the process observer can interrupt the session and call for resentments to be resolved immediately.

In order to deal with conflicts and cases of discord that cannot be resolved through the practices described above, ip is continuously creating new bodies and mechanisms. Currently,

these are an ombudsman, individual and collective supervision, working groups for mediation and for giving feedback with regard to the quality of single processes as well as of the functioning of ip's internal dynamics in general. Even though some of these new forms still have to find their ultimate shape, in their totality they probably already do provide a suitable frame for quality control, as well as for further developing ip's integral working culture.

Secondly, during the substantial process of elaborating contents, all the thematic working groups follow similar schedules and practices which also go back to the early phase of the core group's work and are now supported by one of ip's members, a specialist in organizational development. The process of content development usually starts with the creation of a common vision, for example through techniques of "presencing" (i.e., creating awareness for oneself, the group, and the subject or situation in question) and of collective intelligence (i.e., inviting solutions and letting them "appear" from collective, transrational realms of consciousness). This vision is then broken down step by step into more concrete "real utopias" before elaborating single, concrete policy suggestions and projects in yet more detail. In the end, the respective processes are always critically reflected and their results appreciated in one way or another.

A considerable challenge to the quality of ip's working culture constitutes of the organization's rapid growth during the past year. In comparison to the time when ip was officially founded, it has experienced an enormous increase in membership after participating in the *Congress for Integral Politics* in August 2008,⁸ where for the first time it became visible to a larger audience. Within only 1½ years, ip grew from 20 to 326 members in May 2009. And between November 2009 and January 2010, 101 new companions joined the association, now counting 492 members (as at Feb. 18th 2010). This includes active, ideational, and sustaining members and has, by the way, been achieved solely by mouth-to-mouth propaganda, combined with strategic informational activities in like-minded contexts. More noteworthy public campaigns to make it known to a wider public have so far been strictly subordinated to a rather silent, organic growth and are envisaged by the association's leadership only after a certain number of members has been attained. If the steady growth process continues, however, it is hoped that in summer 2010, the quantitative basis will be sufficiently convincing to turn ip into a regular political party.

In order to nurture and perpetuate its working culture as the organization grows, the core group initiated a working group on internal culture, which is taking care of cultivating and fostering ip's basic rules and principles and of developing them further. Also, members are increasingly offered training and enhancement, both to experience and internalize ip's culture and to promote their own self-development.

⁸ The first Congress for Integral Politics took place in St. Arbogast/Austria from August 3rd to 10th 2008. It attracted over 100 participants from Germany, Austria and Switzerland and was completely sold out. During a whole week, five plenary lectures, dozens of workshops and other activities, from music to dance and project development, helped to shape an integral political spirit, which is supposed to be perpetuated in future follow-up conferences. For more information see: www.integrale-politik.org.

Holacracy avant la letter

Finally, ip's growth also constitutes a challenge with regard to its internal structures and organizational development. While for the first two years ip's activities were still quite easy to coordinate due to the limited number of 20 participants plus some well manageable working groups, its steady increase in membership has created the necessity of dynamically emerging new bodies and structures. Firstly, in order to disburden the board members, a permanent office was established in January 2008. It is run by a part-time worker and takes care of the day-to-day administrative business. Secondly, the newly arriving members had and continually have to be integrated, organized, and cross-linked on regional and local levels. Thus, in the period of a few months, regional groups emerged in Basel, Bern, St. Gallen, Glarus, Lausanne, Luzern and Zurich – with more to come – and large nation-wide gatherings are now held twice a year. This shows that ip is now also increasingly represented in the French speaking part of Switzerland.

Furthermore, new working groups and commissions continue to appear in view of the various emerging tasks and challenges. Besides the already mentioned bodies (such as the core group, the board and the commissions for platform editing and integral education/culture), the most recent creations are commissions for organizational development, public relations, finance and for coordinating regional activities. Also working groups on party formation, feedback and for mediation are about to be formed. Besides that, ip is currently inviting appropriate personalities to join the association's patronage and advisory board (see the organizational chart at the end of this article).

As a result, a rather differentiated structure has evolved which ip is thoughtfully and persistently optimizing in an ongoing process of feedback and reflection. In many respects, this structure and its underlying practices therefore correspond to holacratic principles as proposed by pioneers of integral organization like Gerard Endenburg, Brian Robertson, and others,⁹ even though these were not explicitly known to ip's members when they started their project in the first place. In the meantime however, holacracy has become a much-debated issue inside the commission for organizational development and might soon be adopted as an overall aim and guiding principle by ip's board. This concerns both organizational development and the quality of working processes. On the one hand, dynamic growth is invited, although it is carefully channelled and framed to ensure ip's overall substantial and structural coherence without any other general control being exercised from above. On the other hand, holacratic principles and practices such as the equal value of all participants' perspectives, the shifting of roles and competences, and the continuous observation, reflection and evaluation of ongoing processes have been in place since the beginning.

In particular, organic holacratic development is permanently reflected and facilitated by the commission for organizational development, while the future feedback group is supposed to look after eventual disruptions of the integral flow, for example by monitoring implicit and explicit conflicts and by promoting their careful, constructive and transparent solution in order to avoid new collective shadows from emerging. As indicated above, one of the reasons why careful self-reflection and shadow work are central to ip's working culture on all levels is that the experience

⁹ For a more detailed introduction please consult <http://soziokratie.org> and www.holacracy.org.

of unresolved problems with communication and personal as well as collective shadows inhibiting effective political work were among the main motivations to establish and organize ip the way it was in the first place. Meanwhile, the qualities acquired in the course of three years of integral politicising as described here seem to be part of ip's "Unique Selling Proposition" and one of the main sources of ip's success and attractiveness within the Swiss cultural creative sphere.

Of Whom Does "ip" Consist?

How can ip's membership be described and characterized? Although no systematic sociological data have been gathered until now with regard to the personal, professional, and motivational background of ip's supporters, we can give an intuitive analysis based on more or less long-term and intimate knowledge of the organization. From this perspective, ip's members, activists, and supporters are a colourful mixture of people from different age groups and various social and professional backgrounds. Most of them, however, can certainly be attributed to what Paul H. Ray and Ruth Anderson call the "cultural creative" sector of society.¹⁰

The age span of ip members reaches from about 25 to 85. About half of its members are women. ip's members are part of all social strata. Their professional backgrounds are quite heterogeneous, reaching from managers, professors and artists to farmers, craftsmen, and housewives and housemen. Many of them have an intellectual background and/or work in the fields of education, therapy, ecology, communication or health and quite a few are self employed.

With regard to the "upper left" characteristics, ip's supporters are generally rather conscious of cultural- as well as self-development, most have been following their own personal and spiritual growth paths from traditional through rational, critical to post-rational and integral levels for many years. Also, the individual portraits of the members of the core group, for example, show that the majority have already gone through major transformational experiences in their lives.¹¹

Among ip's members and supporters' community, there are people with long-term experience in social and political work and ones who preferred not to get involved with the traditional political business – that is, until they discovered ip. Since this organization is perceived and experienced as being different both in terms of its contents and its practices and behaviour, it functions as an umbrella for the cultural creative sector which until now has probably been under-represented politically and in some sense lacked an appropriate vehicle.

Moreover, ip gives its adherents the possibility not only to gather with likeminded people, but also to experience the joy of experimentation, collective creativeness and intelligence and of the transformational and sometimes even healing effect of an integral dealing with conflicts. In so doing, it offers chances for meaningful activity, allows for the emergence of common creative

¹⁰ See Ray, P. H. & Anderson, R. (2000). *The cultural creatives. How 50 million people are changing the world*, New York: Harmony Books.

¹¹ See http://www.integrale-politik.ch/d/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=48

projects of multiple kinds and helps to give the growing integrally-minded community a visible face and a clear-cut voice.

To what extent ip will be able to maintain its character or will to have to adapt to more traditional practices once it actually enters the day-to-day political business, is an open question. For the moment at least, most of ip's followers are basically interested in serving their common task as an expression of their spirituality rather than in making a career within the organization. But when the development of the association reaches the point where it will become a political party, qualified members will have to step forward as candidates for political duties, first on a local and cantonal, later also on a national level. In contrast to most other politicians, however, they might not do so with the intent of being re-elected, but to bring new impulses into society by using the available political vessels.

Why in Switzerland?

To our knowledge, Switzerland is the first country to see a party appear based on an integral worldview and explicitly calling itself integral, while elsewhere in Europe, either no efforts have been made in this direction or similar efforts have led to different results. In Germany, for example, which has a rather old and therefore differentiated integral community, part of which had organized itself under the roof of the "Integral Forum" about ten years ago, no integral political force has emerged thus far. The political party which probably comes closest to ip was founded in 2001 and calls itself "the violets – for spiritual politics" ("Die Violetten – Partei für spirituelle Politik"¹²). The "violets" have meanwhile taken part in several regional elections in Germany, as well as the elections to the European parliament and the Bundestag in 2009, where they received 48,000 (EP) and 32,078 (BT) votes respectively. However, even though the party cooperates with ip, for example in 2008 while organizing the Congress for Integral Politics, it has so far neither adopted an integral theoretical basis nor developed an internal "lower left" working culture comparable to ip's.

In contrast, France, another big neighbour of Switzerland, lacks a comparable integral community but has seen the foundation of "La France en action" (*France in action*), which seems to be the political force most similar to ip.¹³ It was founded as a party in 2004 and received over 265.000 votes in the European parliamentary elections in that same year. However, even though like ip, it aims at bridging the traditional left-right cleavages, the programmatic outlook of "La France en action" is primarily humanistic and ecological, with its main emphasis on ecology and biodiversity.

While ip does keep a loose relationship with "the violets" and other groups in Germany, there are, for the time being, no formal contacts with groups in France. Since earlier attempts to launch transnational and European initiatives had failed (see earlier section), ip has chosen to focus its resources and energy primarily on its own country in order to take root within Swiss politics and society before engaging in more ambitious partnerships again.

¹² See: www.die-violetten.de.

¹³ See: <http://www.lafranceenaction.com/index.php>.

It will be interesting to see how ip will take its place within the Swiss political landscape and develop relations with the existing political parties and relevant actors in Switzerland. In view of successfully launching integral political projects, it will certainly be helpful that the Swiss political system is a direct democracy and traditionally based on the principle of concordance, i.e., structurally integrating all political parties represented in parliament into the decision-making processes and all major parties into the government itself, the so-called Bundesrat (see <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konkordanzdemokratie>).

This means, first and foremost, that the highest political power is with the citizens themselves. They not only have the right to elect the members of the two houses of parliament, but also to cast their ballot on (changes of) laws, as well as of the constitution itself and, more so, to take initiatives in order to try and insert new political ideas into the constitution. A second important characteristic of political life in Switzerland is that even the strongest political party or parties can never dominate all the other forces but have to cooperate with them in a way that also respects the position and interests of the minorities in order to reach sustainable political majorities.

In other words, the Swiss political system itself in some sense already resembles a “holocratic structure” or at least incorporates quite a few holocratic principles. Above all, the tradition of concordance, giving individual (ideas) and small parties a much bigger chance to be heard by the main political forces and thus, to play their part in the political concert than in many other countries. This is further supported for example by the lack of a five-percent rule, by important positions being subject to direct elections, and by even seemingly small initiatives having a genuine chance to launch constitutional amendments. All of these factors are likely to make it easier for ip to bring new ideas into political discourse, as well as to gradually promote a wholly new political culture.

Another reason why Switzerland might be a fruitful ground for new political ideas is the fact that the country has always tried to stay independent and to pursue its own way. Furthermore, it is the richest country in the world. Therefore, an understanding that even more material growth will probably not lead to a higher quality of life and level of personal happiness but will rather cause more social and ecological problems might be stronger here than in other parts of the world. Finally, the high standard of living along with a good educational system and a well functioning infrastructure offers favourable preconditions to search for the new, more sustainable and more sensible way of social and economic development, which, as ip is convinced, a growing number of people are longing for.



At this point, it is premature to report about what differences an integral frame of reference really makes on a larger scale, since ip is not communicating substantially with “conventional” political parties so far. However, its general emphasis on a-perspectivity, on “as well as” in stead of “either-or” and on evaluating without (ad)judging implies appraising other parties’ positions for what they are rather than competing with them. It implies a new way of politicizing, of going up to meet other parties without engaging in aggressiveness or role-playing – and thus, a new culture of policy- and decision-making.

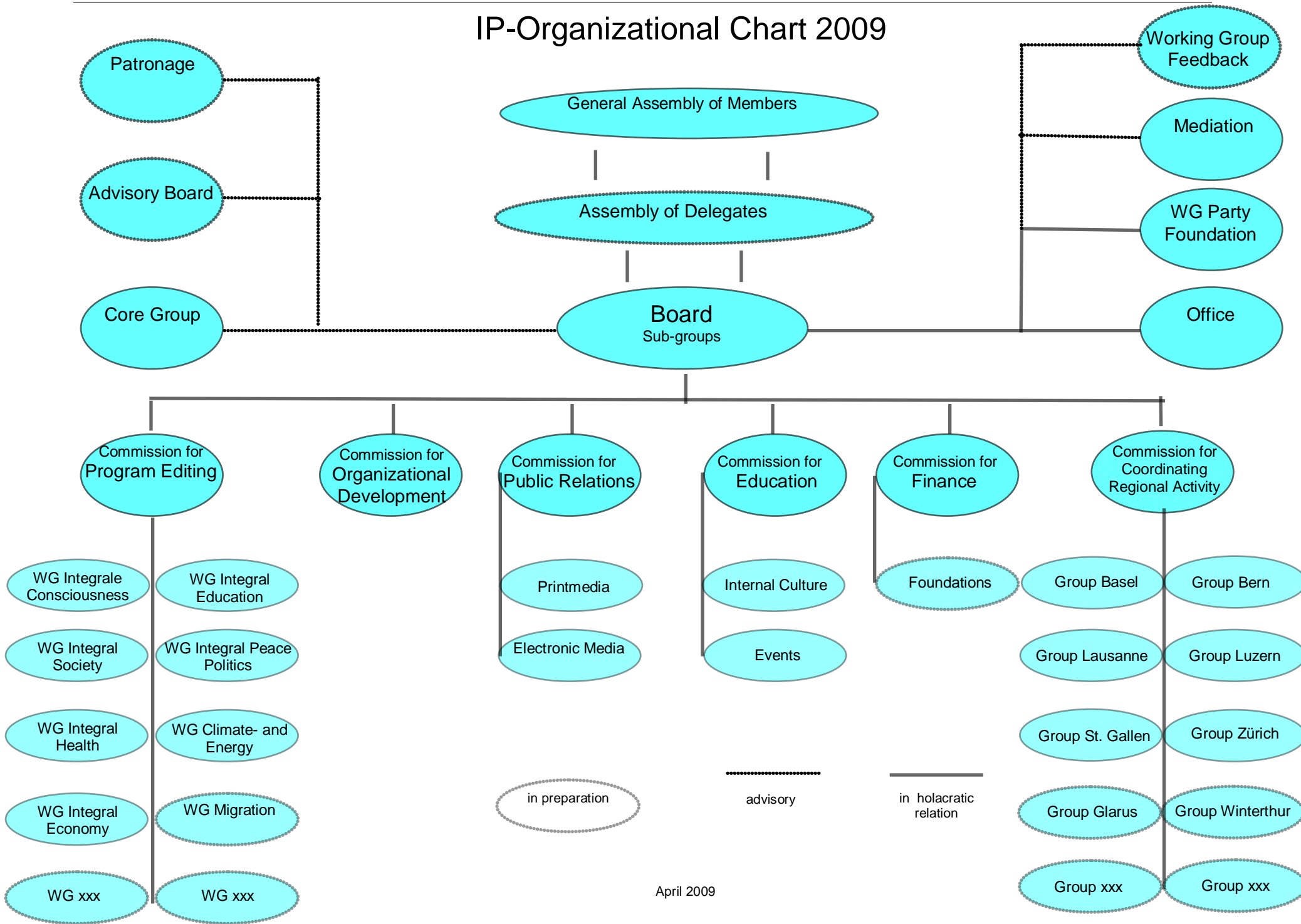
The starting shot of this challenging endeavour has recently been time-phased to September 18th 2010. On this day, ip plans to announce its official foundation as a political party with an integral ceremony of handing over its integral political vision to the Swiss people. The ceremony is to be held on the Bundesplatz (Federal Square) in Bern, just in front of the Swiss Parliament, and next to the central government buildings of the Swiss Federation and of those of the mighty National Bank, in other words in the heart of the country's capital.

For an audio-visual impression of ip's culture of self-presentation, see the Swissgerman-French video clip:

www.integrale-politik.ch/d/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=76&Itemid=93

For more information about ip, please confer to www.integrale-politik.ch (German website) or www.politique-integrale.ch (French website) or contact ip's office at: info@integrale-politik.ch.

IP-Organizational Chart 2009



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