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Landsgemeinde

The Landsgemeinde is one of the oldest and purest forms of direct democracy and is still practised in some cantons of Switzerland.

Eligible citizens of the canton meet on a certain day in the open air to decide on laws and expenditures by the council. Everyone can debate a question. Voting is accomplished by those in favour of a motion raising their hands. Historically, or in Appenzell until the ad-

Berne, a general assembly of all citizens had never been established and would also have been impractical. On district level, however, Landsgemeinden did also exist in centrally governed cantons: e.g. in the canton of Berne, there was a Landsgemeinde of the Emmental.

Controversy

Critics of the Landsgemeinde argue that the democratic fundamental right on anonymous voting by this form of democracy was not

day, in which case it is delayed by one week). All other cantons which once had implemented the Landsgemeinde on state level have abandoned it: as a general assembly of all citizens eligible to vote, it simply becomes impractical to hold when there are too many voters.

Current Usage

A general assembly system is still in use in many Swiss municipalities, especially smaller ones. The legislative competence of the municipal assemblies (*assemblée communale*, *Gemeindeversammlung*) is determined by the cantons. On district level, Landsgemeinden still exist in many cantons: many *Vereine* also call their general assembly a "Landsgemeinde".

Of all the Swiss cantons, only eight rural cantons once used the Landsgemeinde on state level.



Landsgemeinde in Glarus, May 2006

mission of women, the only proof of citizenship necessary for men to enter the voting area was to show their ceremonial sword or Swiss military sidearm (*bayonet*).

The Landsgemeinde has always been a political instrument of rural areas; in city states like for example Lucerne, Schaffhausen, or

ensured. For practical reasons, the Landsgemeinde has been abolished in all but two cantons, where it is still the highest political instance of the canton: in Glarus, it takes place each first Sunday in May, in Appenzell Innerrhoden on last Sunday in April (except when it would coincide with Easter Sun-

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