

SWISS WELTFORMAT



Irregularly sized display cases in Zurich rejected by the APG, 1924
Photo: Baugeschichtliches Archiv, Zürich (BAZ_101309)



Display stands in Basel (?) for uniform Weltformat posters approved by the APG, c. 1937
Photo: Allgemeine Plakatgesellschaft (APG)

In 1911, the Latvian-born Nobel Peace Prize-winning scientist Wilhelm Ostwald, together with the Swiss-born editor Karl Wilhelm Bührer, established an “International Institute for the Organization of Intellectual Work” in Munich, named Die Brücke (The Bridge; no relation to the artists’ group). Promoting the principle of international scholarly exchange crucial to scientific advancement, the institute proposed universal norms across a broad range of projects, including a system of standard paper sizes named “Weltformat” (World Format), in which each paper size (there were sixteen total) was double that of the next-smallest size.

Bührer rallied support for paper size XIV, in particular—the poster format (90.5 x 128 cm)—from the Zurich printer J. E. Wolfensberger and from the Geneva-based signage and distribution firm Allgemeine Plakatgesellschaft (APG). Under the directorship of Robert Beajon, the APG assumed almost exclusive responsibility for outdoor poster display in all the major Swiss cities between 1900 and 1938. It constructed stands for the presentation of Weltformat XIV posters only, thereby effectively eliminating random poster sizing in Switzerland.

Swiss commercial enterprise, in other words, realized standardization in this circumscribed domain. The Swiss Weltformat poster represents a vestige of universalizing ideals thwarted by the First World War, but its principle of each increasing size doubling the former was carried forward by the German DIN (German Committee for Standardization), which in 1922 introduced the A1–A6 paper sizes, still in use today.

DIE WELTFORMATE FÜR DRUCKSACHEN		
Format Nr.	Zentimeter	Bestimmung
VII	8 × 11,3	Format für Wertzeichen, Etiketten, Eintrittskarten, Exlibris u. s. w.
VIII	11,3 × 16	
IX	16 × 22,6	Taschenformat } für alle möglichen Zwecke. Werkformat }
X	22,6 × 32	
XI	32 × 45,3	Formate für Atlanten, Kunstblätter, Innenplakate u. s. w.

Chart showing Weltformat sizes VII–VI for smaller-sized printed matter, reproduced in Karl Wilhelm Bührer, *Raumnot und Weltformat* (Munich: Die Brücke, 1912), p. 6.