1   **Community Composition of Bacteria Isolated from Swiss Banknotes Varies Depending**

2   **on Collection Environment**

4   <u>Running title</u>: Variable Monetary Microbiome in Switzerland

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Abstract:

Humans interact constantly with surfaces and associated microbial communities in the

environment. The factors shaping the composition of these communities are poorly understood:

some proposed explanations emphasize the influence of local habitat conditions (niche-based

explanations), while others point to geographic structure and the distance among sampled

locations (dispersal-based explanations). However, the relative roles of these different drivers

for microbial community assembly on human-associated surfaces are not clear. Here, we used

a combination of sampling, sequencing (16S rRNA) and culturing to show that the composition

of banknote-associated bacterial communities varies depending on the local collection

environment. Using banknotes collected from various locations and types of shops across

Switzerland, we found taxonomic diversity dominated by families such as *Pseudomonadaceae*

and *Staphylococcaceae*, but with banknote samples from particular types of shops (especially

butcher shops) having distinct community structure. By contrast, we found no evidence of

geographic structure: similarity of community composition did not decrease with increasing

distance among sampled locations. These results show that microbial communities associated

with banknotes, one of the most commonly encountered and exchanged human-associated

surfaces, can reflect the local environmental conditions (in this case, the type of shop), and the

signal for this type of variation was stronger than that for geographic structure among the

locations sampled here.

Keywords:

microbiome, banknote, community assembly, 16S rRNA

Introduction

Humans encounter microbial communities constantly and we now know that they contribute, among other things, to food and drink quality (Wareing, 2016; Reese *et al.*, 2020), soil fertility (Fierer, 2017) and human health (Libertucci and Young, 2019). Understanding variation of microbial community structure (relative abundances of different taxa) is therefore an important challenge. As for other organisms and in the wider field of community ecology, the contributions of different drivers of microbial community assembly remain unclear (Chesson, 2000; Ebach, 2015). Selection imposed by local habitat conditions and biotic interactions (niche-based explanations invoking deterministic factors) (Macarthur and Levins, 1967; Diamond, 1975) is expected to result in communities matched to their local environments. Other possible drivers include more stochastic processes, ecological drift or dispersal limitation (Hubbell, 2011), which may result in geographic structuring of communities independent from the effects of local habitat conditions. There is evidence from microbes and other taxa supporting both types of explanation (Finlay, 2002; Fargione *et al.*, 2003; Whitaker *et al.*, 2003a; Horner-Devine *et al.*, 2004; Zhou *et al.*, 2013; Webb), and it is increasingly recognised that multiple drivers are in play (Chase, 2003a; Chase and Myers, 2011; HilleRisLambers *et al.*, 2012). However, we still lack a clear picture of their relative roles (Chase, 2010; Hanson *et al.*, 2012; Stegen *et al.*, 2015; Zhou and Ning, 2017). This problem is especially acute for microbial communities on surfaces that humans interact with in daily life. For example, a recent global study of microbial communities on metro and transit systems identified city-specific community composition linked to local conditions, albeit with a shared core microbiota across locations (Danko *et al.*, 2021). However, it is not yet clear whether such biogeographical structuring is also evident on other human-associated surfaces, or how strongly such microbiomes reflect local habitat conditions (selection) as opposed to other predictors such as geographic distance among sites.

One of the most important human-associated surfaces is cash money: few everyday objects

are as frequently, widely and actively exchanged among humans as banknotes. Paper-based

money has been in use for hundreds of years and is now commonplace around the world.

Despite the advent of credit cards and other cashless payment instruments, banknotes and coins

are still the most common payment option for purchases at the physical point of sale and for

person-to-person payments in the EU and Switzerland (Central Bank, 2020; Gehring *et al.*).

The rough surface of most banknotes lends itself well to the attachment of microorganisms

(Jalali *et al.*, 2015; Vriesekoop *et al.*, 2016), something first investigated in the late 19th century

(Schaarschmidt, 1884). Since then, tools such as metagenomic sequencing have enabled more

detailed description of microorganisms on money, including characterization of communities

on dollar bills in New York City (Maritz *et al.*, 2017), identification of pathogens and antibiotic

resistance genes on Rupees in New Delhi (Jalali *et al.*, 2015), and monitoring survival of

influenza viruses on banknotes (Thomas *et al.*, 2008). However, to our knowledge it remains

poorly understood whether banknotes collected in different places harbour microbial

communities that reflect their local environment, which would indicate a role for selection

(Hanson *et al.*, 2012; Zhou and Ning, 2017), and/or show biogeographic structuring (e.g.,

increasing dissimilarity with geographic distance).

Here, we aimed to quantify variation of the bacterial microbiome associated with banknotes

originating from different locations across a country, and to test whether this variation can be

explained by geographic distances among locations, or other characteristics of the local

sampling environments. We did this by collecting banknotes from each of ten locations in

Switzerland (Fig. 1A), visiting five different types of shops in each location. We hypothesized

community composition would vary among banknotes collected from different types of shops

(if there is an effect of local habitat selection on the monetary microbiome), and/or that

banknotes collected from more distant locations would harbour more dissimilar communities

82 (if there is biogeographic structuring in general). We studied the samples isolated from the 50

83 banknotes by (1) 16S rRNA sequencing to determine community composition, including viable

84 and non-viable, culturable and non-culturable bacteria, and (2) plating on chromogenic agar to

85 detect viable, culturable bacteria. Our results show that the composition of bacterial

86 communities isolated from banknotes – determined by both sequencing and by plating – varies

87 depending on the local environment (shop type) in which banknotes are collected. By contrast,

88 we find no evidence for geographic structuring of bacterial community composition across

89 banknotes sampled in Switzerland.

91 **<u>Materials and Methods</u>**

92 **Sample Collection**

93 We collected banknotes from ten locations in Switzerland. In choosing locations, we adhered

94 to several criteria: (1) countrywide distribution of sampled locations (Fig. 1A; (2) fewer than

95 10'000 inhabitants per location (because we expected any signal for geographic structuring

96 would be stronger among smaller towns due to their being, in general, less well connected with

97 each other and with other parts of the country (Chase, 2003b)); (3) all of the targeted shop types

98 (bakery, butcher, florist, kiosk/newsagent, and pharmacy) present at each location; (4) no

99 significant commuter traffic between locations (according to (Federal Office of Statistics,

100 2020); again we expected geographic structuring of microbial communities would be stronger

101 among less connected towns). The chosen locations were (Fig. 1A): Biasca (BIA), Brienz BE

102 (BRI), Frick (FRI), Klosters-Serneus (KLO), Langnau am Albis (LAN), Orbe (ORB),

103 Porrentruy (POR), Rorschach (ROR), Stein am Rhein (STE), Visp (VIS). We chose the five

104 shop types in an attempt to represent different environments, products and clientele. More

105 details on locations and shops can be found in Tables S1 and S2, respectivley.

On arrival in a location, we collected the banknotes from the different shops as follows:

donning sterile gloves before entering the shop; choosing an item for less than CHF 10; paying

the item with a CHF 20 banknote; folding the CHF 10 banknote received as change in half

twice and collecting it in a sterile Nasco Whirl-Pak® sample bag (product nr. 11701973; Fisher

Scientific AG, Reinach, Switzerland); storing the sample bag in a paper envelope. Once we

had the five banknotes of a given location, we transported the banknotes back to the laboratory

and did the initial processing as described below. All samples were collected by the same

person between March 12th and March 26th, 2021. Samples from different locations were

collected on different days. One sample (butcher-BIA) was classified as "butcher" even though

it came from a supermarket with a served meat counter (both butchers in Biasca (BIA) were

closed on collection day); this is discussed further below. We contacted all shop owners via

email to inform them about our project and gave them the option to have the banknote collected

in their shop removed from the study. No shop owner vetoed inclusion of the banknote

collected in their shop in the study.

Initial Sample Processing and Plating

We performed initial processing for all banknotes on the day of collection as follows: after

removing the banknote from the sample bag and placing it on a sterile surface, we swabbed the

front of the banknote (not exposed to the bag surface) along the width from top to bottom

(Maritz *et al.*, 2017), using a sterile cotton swab (product nr. 80.628; Sarstedt, Nürnberg,

Germany) moistened with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS; product nr. P4417-100TAB;

Sigma-Aldrich, Merck KgaA, Germany). Turning the banknote 90 degrees, we repeated the

procedure. With the same swab, we swabbed the back of the banknote according to the same

protocol. We cut the tip of the swab with sterile cissors and placed it in an 2mL Eppendorf tube

filled with 950µL PBS. We repeated the procedure with the other four banknotes, sterilizing

the surface between samples. As a negative control, we swabbed the interior of a sample bag

and followed the protocol just described. We vortexed all Eppendorf tubes for 5min at the

highest amplitude and removed the swab tips with sterile tweezers, squeezing out the remaining

liquid.

To screen for viable and culturable cells, we plated a 50μL aliquot of each sample on a

separate Chromatic™ MH agar plate (product nr. LF-611618; Apteq AG, Cham, Switzerland).

Chromatic™ MH agar is a chromogenic agar that allows for the identification of bacteria from

environmental and clinical isolates by differential colouring of colonies from different species

(manufacturer's   instructions   and   colour   guide:

http://www.liofilchem.net/login/pd/ifu/11618_IFU.pdf) . We incubated plates at 37°C for 24h

and stored the remaining samples at -20°C until further processing as described below. Note

that plating on chromogenic agar provides a relatively coarse-grained identification and only

for certain taxa, but we employed it here only to test (1) for the presence of viable and culturable

(i.e., colony-forming) cells and (2) whether the putative species identities of resulting colonies

were consistent with taxa identified by sequence analysis. More details on colony morphology

and colour can be found in Table S3.

Genetic Analysis

We used the DNeasy® PowerLyzer® PowerSoil® Kit (product nr. 12855-100; Qiagen, Hilden,

Germany) to extract bacterial DNA from thawed samples, according to the manufacturer's

protocol with slight adaptations. In brief: For each sample, we added 700μL to a PowerBead

tube (positive control: 700μL PBS plus *Escherichia coli* colony from agar plate; negative

control: from empty sample bag, see above) and centrifuged all PowerBead tubes at 13'000rpm

for 10min at 4°C. Discarding the supernatant, we dissolved the cell pellet by adding 750μL

PowerBead solution and 60μL Solution C1, and inverting the tubes 10 times. After incubating

the tubes at 65°C for 10min followed by incubation at 95°C for 10min, we performed bead

beating with a Bead Ruptor 24 (Omni International, Inc, Kennesaw (Georgia), United States

of America (USA)) with the following settings: cycle nr = 2, strength = 5.5, time = 45s, interval

= 0. After transferring the supernatant to clean 2mL collection tubes, we added 250μL Solution

C2, vortexed the tubes for 5s at the highest amplitude and incubated them at 4°C for 5min.

After centrifugation at 13'000rpm for 1min at 4°C, we transferred 600μL supernatant into clean

2mL collection tubes and added 200μL Solution C3. We vortexed tubes briefly at the highest

amplitude and incubated them at 4°C for 5min, followed by centrifugation at 13'000 rpm for

1min at 4°C. Avoiding the pellet, we transferred 750μL supernatant into clean 2mL collection

tubes, added 1200μL well-mixed Solution C4 and vortexed tubes for 5s at the highest

amplitude. We loaded 675μL sample onto MB spin Columns, centrifuged them at 13'000rpm

for 1min at 4°C and discarded the flow-through. We repeated this until the entire sample was

processed. After adding 500μL Solution C5, we centrifuged samples at 13'000rpm for 1min at

4°C and discarded the flow-through, followed by centrifugation at 13'000rpm at 4°C for 30s.

We placed the MB Spin Columns into clean 2mL collection tubes and added 70μL Solution

C6 to the centre of the filter membrane. Following incubation at 65°C for 5min and

centrifugation at 13'000rpm at 4°C for 1min, we discarded the MB Spin Columns and stored

samples at -20°C. The 50 samples were processed in three batches (consisting of randomly

selected samples) on different days, with a positive and negative control for each batch. After

sequencing, we did not detect an effect of extraction batch on either read counts per sample

(ANOVA: $F_{2,47} = 2.521$, $p = 0.091$) or community composition (PERMANOVA: $F_{2,41} = 1.711$,

$p > 0.1$).

We quantified the obtained DNA using the Quant-iT^{TM} dsDNA BR Assay Kit (product nr.

Q33130; Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, USA) in the Spark® 10M multimode microplate

reader (Tecan Group Ltd, Männedorf, Switzerland). We sequenced at the Genetic Diversity

Centre, Zurich, Switzerland, using the MiSeq Reagent kit v3 (600 cycle PE) (Illumina, San

Diego, USA) after library preparation with the Nextera XT 96 Index kit v2, Set D (Illumina,

San Diego, USA). The sequences of the four sets of primers used during library preparation

(limited cycle PCR) are listed in Table S4.

Bioinformatic Analysis

If not noted otherwise, raw sequence data were processed with USEARCH

(v11.0.667_i86linux64; (Edgar, 2010). After end trimming reads (if needed) and merging them

into amplicons (commands: *filter_phix*, *filter_lowc* (threshold 25), *fastx_truncate* (trim R1/R2:

25/50), *fastx_syncpairs*, *fastq_mergepairs* (min. overlap: 30; min. identity: 60%; min. merged

length: 100; min. merged quality: 8)), we trimmed reads for primers (command: *search_pcr*

(amplicon size range 100-600; number of mismatches: 2; coverage: full-length (no end gaps)).

We used PRINSEQ-lite 0.20.4 (Schmieder and Edwards, 2011) to check quality and size filter

(parameters: size range: 150-550; GC range: 30-70; min. Q mean: 20; number of Ns: 1; low

complexity: dust / 30). We clustered operational taxonomic units (OTUs) at 97% using the

UPARSE-OTU algorithm (number of OTUs: 2378), and used UNOISE3 algorithm to perform

denoising (error-correction) of amplicon sequence variants (zero-radius OTUs, number of

ZOTUs 100%: 4464), and to cluster ZOTUs at different identity levels (number of ZOTUs

99%: 3148; number of ZOTUs 98%: 2513; number of ZOTUs 97%: 2039) (Edgar, 2016b).

OTU annotation was carried out using ZOTUs 100% and the SINTAX algorithm (version

11.0.667; (Edgar, 2016a)) with Silva 16S (V128) as reference database (tax filter: 0.75).

After removing positive and negative controls and mitochondrial and chloroplast sequences,

and before filtering, denoised sequencing data (ZOTUs 100%) consisted of 50 samples with

14'900'848 raw reads in total, ranging from four to 6'752'341 raw reads per sample (mean

number of raw reads: 266'086.57; median number of raw reads 158'243). We filtered data in

two steps: (i) removing samples with low number of raw reads (<1000), resulting in the removal of eight samples from the analysis (florist-KLO, butcher-POR, florist-POR, bakery-STE, florist-STE, bakery-BIA, bakery-VIS, florist-LAN) (ii) removal of ZOTUs present at <0.1% of total sequencing depth (which can reduce the read sum for individual samples; total sequencing depth = 14'398'160). After filtering, we had 42 samples with 10'136'186 filtered reads in total, ranging from 138 filtered reads per sample for butcher-BRI to 6'167'513 filtered reads per sample for florist-BRI (mean number of filtered reads = 241'337.76; median number of filtered reads = 88'192; Fig. S1 and Table S5; numbers according to summarize_phyloseq() function in microbiome package (version 1.16.0, (Lahti and Shetty, 2012))). We had at least three samples per location and at least six samples per shop type.

The sequencing data have been deposited in the European Nucleotide Archive under the study accession number PRJEB45390 (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/ena; data will be made accessible upon publication of the study).

Statistics

We used denoised sequences (ZOTUs 100%) for all analyses, and conducted all analyses in R (version 4.1.2).

To quantify within-sample diversity, we used the alpha() function in the microbiome package (version 1.16.0, (Lahti and Shetty, 2012)) on filtered data to calculate several different diversity indices (Shannon diversity index; Gini-Simpson index; observed richness; Chao1 index). The Shannon diversity index H takes into account both richness and evenness; the Gini-Simpson index gives the probabilty that two random draws from the same sample (with replacement) are not from the same type (here, the same family); the observed richness counts the number of unique species (ZOTUs 100%) present in the sample; Chao1 index is a non-parametric estimator of species richness that assumes Poisson distribution of the data (Chao,

1984; Chao and Bunge, 2002). We used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test whether within-

sample diversity varied among locations or shop types (aov() function in the stats package (R

version 4.1.3; (R Core Team, 2021))).

Before analysing between-sample diversity and to account for different library sizes (Weiss

et al., 2017), we normalized filtered data with a regularized-logarithm (rlog() function in the

DESeq2 package (version 1.34.0; (Love *et al.*, 2014))), after comparing the two available

transformations offered in DESeq2 package, regularized-logarithm transformation and

variance-stabilizing transformation. We chose the regularized-logarithm transformation

because it (i) is recommended for smaller datasets and for cases with large ranges of sequencing

depths across samples (Love *et al.*, 2014); (ii) it performed better in the meanSdPlot generated.

As a first test of whether samples from different locations and shop types differed in terms

of bacterial community structure, we used permutational multivariate analysis of variance

(PERMANOVA; (Anderson, 2001; Zapala and Schork, 2006)) with the adonis2() function in

the vegan package (version 2.5-7; (Oksanen *et al.*, 2020)), with filtered-and-normalized data

and using Bray-Curtis dissimilarity (vegdist() function) to measure differences among sampled

communities. Next, to visualise any clustering among samples in terms of community

composition, we performed ordination of filtered-and-normalized data with the ordinate()

function in the phyloseq package (version 1.38.0; (McMurdie and Holmes, 2013)), with non-

parametric multidmensional scaling (*method* = "NMDS") and Bray-Curtis dissimilarity

(*distance* = "bray") as input parameters. We used NMDS as the ordination method because we

obtained a stress value of 0.11 for our data with NMDS ordination; stress values <0.2 generally

indicate good fit (Clarke, 1993). We visualised ordination results (Fig. 3) with the

plot_ordination() function in the phyloseq package (version 1.38.0; (McMurdie and Holmes,

2013)). To further characterise beta diversity, we used a heatmap (plot_heatmap() function in

phyloseq package version 1.38.0 (McMurdie and Holmes, 2013), relying on (Rajaram and

Oono, 2010), with rlog-transformed read data, *method* = "NMDS" and *distance* = "bray";

Figure S4) and hierarchical clustering (calculated with hclust() function in the dendextend

package version 1.15.2 (Galili, 2015), with a distance matrix based on rlog-transformed read

data and Bray-Curtis dissimilarity index and "ward.D2" as method; Figure S5).

We used a third type of analysis as an additional test for geographic structuring of microbial

community composition, by conducting a Mantel test. This allowed us to account explicitly for

the physical distance between individual sampling locations (shops), rather than testing for

average differences among locations (as above in PERMANOVA). We did this using the

mantel.test() function in the ape package (version 5.5; (Paradis and Schliep, 2019)), with the

vegdist() function in the vegan package (version 2.5-7; (Oksanen *et al.*, 2020)) for Bray-Curtis

dissimilarity of filtered-and-normalized data. We used the geodist() function in the geodist

package (version 0.0.7; (Padgham and Sumner, 2021)) to calculate geographical distance (in

metres) between individual sampling locations. We used the same functions when repeating

the analysis for sample sets from individual shop types; here and elsewhere, we accounted for

multiple testing using the Holm–Bonferroni method (sequential Bonferroni).

The core microbiome is defined as the species present above a certain threshold and shared

among a set of samples (Salonen *et al.*, 2012; Shade and Handelsman, 2012). We determined

the core microbiome, based on ZOTUs 100%, for each shop type as follows: Using filtered-

and-normalized relative abundance data (transform() function in the microbiome package

(version 1.16.0; "compositional" as input for *transform* argument) and subsetting data by shop

type, we applied the core_members() function in the microbiome package (version 1.16.0;

(Lahti and Shetty, 2012); *detection* = 0.001 and *prevalence* = 0.5) to filter out core ZOTUs for

each shop type. Then, as a fourth analysis of how microbiome structure varies among shop

types/locations, we drew a Venn diagram with the venn() function in the eulerr package

(version 6.1.0) and determined ZOTU identity with the format_to_besthit() function in the

microbiomeutilities package (version 1.00.16; (Lahti *et al.*, 2017)), followed by identification

of core ZOTUs with reduce() and intersect() functions (base package, R version 4.1.2; (R Core

Team, 2021)). We defined *shared core ZOTUs* as core ZOTUs that appeared in more than one

subset (e.g. three shared core ZOTUs in the butcher and in the pharmacy subset, Fig. S2); we

defined *unique core ZOTUs* as core ZOTUs that appear in only one subset (e.g. 13 unique core

ZOTUs in butcher subset, Fig. S2).

To test for an association between the abundance of viable-and-culturable bacteria

(presence/absence of colonies and number of colonies per plate, after plating samples on

chromatic agar) and shop type and location we conducted hurdle regression for count data via

maximum likelihood (hurdle() function in pscl package (version 1.5.5; (Jackman, 2020)), with

formula *number.colonies ~ location* or *number.colonies ~ shop.type* and negative binomial

regression (with log link) as count model). As our data contained several samples with zero

viable cells we adjusted the count table with a dummy variable (dummy species present at

count 1 in all samples; (Clarke *et al.*, 2006) to perform further analysis, being aware that we

cannot be sure that all empty samples had zero viable cells for the same reason. We used the

adjusted count table to perform PERMANOVA as described above.

The map of Switzerland with locations (Fig. 1A) was made with the mun.plot() function in

RSwissMaps package (version 0.1.0.1; (Zumbach, 2019)) with the following arguments (where

relevant): *bfs_id* = dt$bfs_nr, *year* = 2016, *boundaries* = "c". Other packages and functions

used in data processing and drawing figures: cowplot (version 1.1.1; (Wilke, 2020)); dplyr

(version 1.0.7; (Wickham *et al.*, 2021)); ggplot2 (version 3.3.5; (Wickham, 2009)); ggpubr

(version 0.4.0; (Kassambara, 2020)); microbial (version 0.0.20; (Guo and Gao, 2021)); ochRe

(version 1.0.0; (Allan *et al.*, 2021)); phyloseq.extended (version 0.1.1.6; (Mahendra, 2019));

phylosmith (version 1.0.6; (Smith, 2021)); ranacapa (version 0.1.0; (Kandlikar, 2021)); yarrr

(version 0.1.5; (Phillips, 2017)); VennDiagram (version 1.7.0; (Chen, 2021)); vsn (version

3.62.0; (Huber *et al.*, 2002)).

<u>Results</u>

Communities Isolated from Banknotes Include *Pseudomonadaceae* and

***Staphylococcaceae* in All Samples**

After filtering the raw data in two steps (see *Methods*), we analysed 42 samples (from originally

50 samples) with variable numbers of reads per sample (Fig. S1 and Table S5). We detected

some families of bacteria (Fig. 1B) in every banknote sample: *Pseudomonadaceae* and

Staphylococcaceae were present in all samples (42/42, 100%; Table S6). These are both

diverse families that include species closely associated with humans, e.g. as part of the human

skin, respiratory tract or gut microbiome (Cogen *et al.*, 2008; Fierer *et al.*, 2008; Murphy and

Parameswaran, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Fourquin-Gomez *et al.*, 2014; Robert-Pillot *et al.*, 2014;

Rock and Donnenberg, 2014; Delanghe *et al.*, 2021; Skowron *et al.*, 2021), but have also been

isolated from animal hosts and soil and aquatic environments (Cousin, 1999; Madhaiyan *et al.*,

2020). Other families were detected in significant abundance, but only in subsets of samples,

such as *Vibrionaceae* and *Lactobacillaceae* (in 21 and 30 samples out of 42 respectively). If

we plot the same data at the genus level, this supports the same conclusions (Fig. S3, Table

S7): the most abundant genera (*Pseudomonas* and *Staphylococcus*) belonged to the top families

(*Pseudomonadaceae* and *Staphylococcaceae*) and were present in all samples; *Photobacterium*

(family *Vibrionaceae*) was present in 21 samples. Note despite this broad agreement, the top

12 genera (Fig. S3) did not correspond exactly to the top 12 families (Fig. 1B), because some

families were represented by multiple genera. For example, the family *Micrococcaceae* is

represented by three genera in Fig. S3 (*Kocuria, Micrococcus, Rothia*), and consequently the

genera corresponding to *Lactobacillaceae* and *Brevibacteriaceae* (*Lactobacillus* and

Brevibacterium) are not shown, even though they were the 13th and 14th most abundant.

The same taxa that we identified as being relatively abundant above resurfaced when we

calculated the core microbiome for each shop type (taxa found in >50% of samples per shop

type at abundance >0.1%). We identified seven dominant core ZOTUs (Dawson *et al.*, 2017;

Cruaud *et al.*, 2020) shared between all shop types, attributed to the genera: *Corynebacterium*,

Propionibacterium, *Pseudomonas*, *Streptococcus* (n = 2) and *Staphylococcus* (n = 2) (Fig. S2;

detection threshold = 0.001, prevalence threshold = 0.5; Table S8). Thus, our sequence data

revealed that a small set of ZOTUs was shared among microbial communities associated with

Swiss banknotes from different shop types, but those communities were diverse and the relative

abundances of individual taxa varied among samples.

Within-sample diversity estimated by Shannon diversity index (Fig. 2) did not vary

significantly with either geographic location or shop type (ANOVA: effect of shop type – $F_{4,37}$

= 0.844, p = 0.506; effect of location – $F_{9,32}$ = 1.013, p = 0.45). We obtained the same

qualitative result with an alternative diversity index (Gini-Simpson index), and the two

diversity indices were highly correlated with each other (linear regression Gini-Simpson ~

Shannon: adjusted R^2 = 0.851). Similarly, within-sample species richness (taken as observed

richness (Fig. 2B) or Chao1 index) did not vary significantly among locations or shop types

(ANOVA observed richness: effect of shop type – $F_{4,37}$ = 0.326, p = 0.859; effect of location –

$F_{9,32}$ = 0.801, p = 0.618; ANOVA Chao1: effect of shop type – $F_{4,37}$ = 0.243, p = 0.912; effect

of location – $F_{9,32}$ = 1.041, p = 0.43) and was correlated with Shannon diversity (adjusted R^2

= 0.629 for observed richness and R^2 = 0.478 for Chao1). Thus, none of the tested within-

sample diversity measures varied significantly among shop types or geographic locations.

Community Composition Was Specific to Shop Type, but Not Location

Bacterial community composition was more similar among banknotes collected from the same shop type than from different shop types (PERMANOVA: effect of shop type – $F_{4,41} = 1.321$, $p = 0.03$). Visualising the similarities/differences among samples by ordination analysis (non-metric multidimensional scaling NMDS) further supported variation of community composition among shop types (Fig. 3). In particular, several samples from butcher shops clustered together in the top-right corner of the ordination plot (Fig. 3). Note one sample classified as "butcher" but separate from this cluster (butcher-BIA) was collected from a supermarket with a served meat counter but separate cash desk (see *Methods*). Consistent with the variation among shop types being primarily driven by the distinctiveness of butcher shop samples, if we excluded butcher samples from the analysis we no longer found significant variation among shop types (PERMANOVA: effect of shop type, excluding butcher samples – $F_{3,32} = 0.949$, $p = 0.584$); this was not the case when re-running the analysis excluding sample sets from all other shop types, except for florist samples which resulted in marginal non-significance (PERMANOVA: effect of shop type, without florist samples – $F_{3,32} = 1.287$, $p = 0.056$). Visualising the clustering of samples using a heatmap (Fig. S4) and hierarchical clustering (Fig. S5) supported a similar pattern, with several butcher samples clustering together.

Looking at the ZOTUs making up the core microbiome for each shop type again supported butcher samples as being distinctive: the set of banknotes from butchers (n = 9) had the greatest number of core ZOTUs, both in total and unique to a single shop type (31 core ZOTUs in total, 13 unique core ZOTUs; Fig. S2). The 13 core ZOTUs unique to butchers belonged to the following genera: *Photobacterium* (n = 3; family *Vibrionaceae*), *Streptococcus* (n = 2; family *Streptococcaceae*), *Brochothrix* (n = 1; family *Listeriaceae*), *Corynebacterium* (n = 1; family *Corynebacteriaceae*), *Kocuria* (n = 1; family *Micrococcaceae*), *Lactobacillus* (n = 1; family

Lactobacillaceae), *Lactococcus* (n = 1; family *Staphylococcaceae*), *Novosphingobium* (n = 1;

family *Sphingomonadaaceae*), *Staphylococcus* (n = 1; family *Staphylococcaceae*), *Veillonella*

(n = 1; family *Veillonellaceae*). This is consistent with our family-level analysis (Fig. 1), where

some of the families to which these butcher-associated genera belong were over-represented

among butcher samples (e.g., *Vibrionaceae*, *Lactobacillaceae*).

A comparison between core ZOTUs unique to butcher samples and NMDS scores (Fig. 3;

Table S9) provides further information about the taxa that drive the among-shop-type variation:

the *Veillonella* core ZOTU and one *Streptococcus* core ZOTU unique to butchers were among

the ten ZOTUs with the highest positive scores for NMDS1; the *Lactococcus* and three

Photobacterium core ZOTUs unique to butchers were among the ten ZOTUs with the highest

positive scores for NMDS2 (again consistent with families *Vibrionaceae* and *Lactobacillaceae*

being abundant and over-represented in butcher samples in Fig. 1). Taxa with relatively large

negative scores for NMDS1 (Table S9) were mostly those with low abundance (and therefore

not represented in Fig. 1B), although a *Pseudmonas* representative was among the 20 ZOTUs

with the highest squared-and-rooted scores for NMDS1 (Table S9). The samples at the left of

Fig. 3 are therefore poor in a combination of various taxa, but their similar position along this

axis was not explained by either shop type or location (the six points include samples from all

shop types and four locations).

We found no evidence that samples collected in different locations (towns) harboured

different bacterial microbiomes (PERMANOVA: effect of location – $F_{9,41} = 1.173$, $p = 0.067$;

Fig. 3). In a second test for geographic structuring of the sampled communities (Mantel test),

we quantified the association between pairwise similarity among samples in terms of

community composition and the geographic distances between sampling locations. This

revealed no significant association between the two distance measures, neither in the full

dataset (n = 42; Mantel test – $z = 39'978'433$, $p = 0.751$), nor when performed separately for

each shop type (Mantel test, five tests total with p-values corrected for multiple testing – p_{bakery}

= 1, $p_{butcher}$ = 1; $p_{florist}$ = 0.315; p_{kiosk} = 1; $p_{pharmacy}$ = 1). There was no association between

number of reads and location (ANOVA: effect of location – $F_{9,40}$ = 0.836, $p > 0.5$). Thus,

unlike for the variation among shop types observed above, we found no evidence that the

differences in bacterial community composition among samples increased with geographic

distance.

The observed variation in community composition among shop types was not explained by

variable numbers of reads among samples from different shop types (Fig. S1; effect of shop

type in ANOVA – $F_{4,45}$ = 0.792, $p > 0.5$). Consistent with this, when we exclude the sample

butcher-BRI, which had a very low read number (Fig. S1), our qualitative conclusions remain

unchanged (PERMANOVA minus butcher-BRI: effect of shop type – $F_{4,40}$ = 1.312, $p = 0.034$;

effect of location – $F_{9,40}$ = 1.054, $p = 0.277$; Mantel test comparing geographic distance and

community composition, minus butcher-BRI: n = 41, z = 38'407'749, $p = 0.691$).

Cultivation of Samples on Agar Supports Conclusions Drawn from Sequencing Data

When we plated aliquots of samples on Chromatic™ MH agar plates, we detected a total of

157 viable colonies across 24 of 50 plates (48%). The number of colonies per plate varied

among samples (Fig. 4), and was highest on average for butcher samples (count model in hurdle

regression model for shop type: butcher: z = 3.44, $p < 0.001$; all other shop types: $p > 0.05$;

Fig. 4). There was no significant variation of the number of colonies per plate among

geographic locations (count model in hurdle regression model for location: $p > 0.05$ for all

locations). Several plates produced no colonies, but presence/absence of viable colonies was

not predicted by either shop type or location (zero hurdle model in hurdle regression model for

shop type and for location: $p > 0.05$ for all shop types and all locations).

The identity of colonies (as determined by colony morphology and colour on Chromatic^TM

MH agar plates, see *Methods*) corresponded to key taxa identified by sequencing: *E. coli* =

Enterobacteriaceae; *Staphylococcus aureus* = *Staphlyococcaceae*; *Pseudomonas spp* =

Pseudomonadaceae; *Klebsiella spp.*, *Enterobacter spp.*, *Serratia spp.* = *Enterobacteriaceae*

(Fig. 1B Fig. 4). The exception to this trend was *Enterococcus faecalis* (3/157 colonies or 2%),

which belongs to the *Enterococcaceae* family. This was not among the most abundant families

in our sequence data (Fig. 1B), and we only found ZOTUs categorized as *Enterococcaceae*

prior to filtering the data, indicating it was present but at lower abundances than suggested by

colony formation data. For most of the other key taxa identified by sequence data that we did

not find on agar plates, prior information about these taxa suggests the growth conditions

(Chromatic^TM MH agar; 37°C; 24h aerobic incubation) are not conducive to colony formation.

For example, *Corynebacteriaceae, Lactobacillaceae*, (environmental) *Moraxellaceae*, and

Vibrionaceae have growth optima <37°C (De Angelis and Gobbetti, 2011; Vinet and

Zhedanov, 2011; Lonvaud-Funel, 2014; Tauch and Sandbote, 2014; Baron *et al.*, 2020). In

addition, several of the key taxa (e.g. *Brevibacteriaceae, Corynebacteriaceae*

Halomonadaceae, *Lactobacillaceae*, *Moraxellaceae*, *Vibrionaceae)* may have required

incubation times >24h (Vinet and Zhedanov, 2011; Argandoña *et al.*, 2012a; Forquin and

Weimer, 2014; Tauch and Sandbote, 2014; De Angelis and Gobbetti, 2016; Baron *et al.*, 2020),

or different media composition such as higher salt or nutrient content (*Halomonadaceae* and

Corynebacteriaceae, respectively, (Argandoña *et al.*, 2012b; Tauch and Sandbote, 2014)).

Therefore, the absence of these taxa from our cultured samples is probably because they do not

grow well in these conditions, and does not necessarily contradict our finding them in the

sequence data.

As above for our community-level sequence data, the relative abundances of different taxa

inferred from colony counts on chromatic agar varied among different shop types

(PERMANOVA with zero-adjusted Bray-Curtis dissimilarity (Clarke *et al.*, 2006): effect of

shop type – $F_{4,49} = 2.507$, $p = 0.003$) but not geographic locations (effect of location – $F_{9,41} =$

0.080, $p = 0.701$). Thus, banknotes yielded viable colonies and taxonomic identification on

chromatic agar, albeit relatively coarse-grained compared to our sequence data, supporting

similar conclusions (both in terms of which taxa were present and variation of community

composition with collection environment but not geographic location).

DISCUSSION

We found that Swiss banknotes taken directly from circulation harbour a variety of bacterial

DNA, with the key taxa (Fig. 1B) including families found before in humans and human-

associated environments, e.g. the human skin, gut or respiratory tract microbiome, or human

food production (Cogen *et al.*, 2008; Fierer *et al.*, 2008; Murphy and Parameswaran, 2009;

Oren, 2011; Fourquin-Gomez *et al.*, 2014; Delanghe *et al.*, 2021; Skowron *et al.*, 2021). The

evidence from our data set that community composition varied depending on the shop type in

which each banknote was collected is surprising: this suggests money has a microbiome

reflecting its local environment, even though we assume banknotes are only transiently

exposed to each habitat/shop type. By extension, we expect individual banknotes to have a

dynamic microbiome that changes during their "lifecycle" as they pass from one habitat to

another. By contrast, we found no evidence for geographic structuring, unlike some previous

studies with microbes in other contexts (Whitaker *et al.*, 2003b; Horner-Devine *et al.*, 2004),

but consistent with other observations of relatively weak biogeographic structuring in microbes

(Hillebrand *et al.*, 2001; Finlay, 2002; Zhou *et al.*, 2008). Our plating results corresponded well

with conclusions from sequencing, indicating that at least some taxa are present as viable,

culturable cells. Together these observations suggest, on the scale investigated here,

deterministic assembly processes (e.g., selection imposed by habitat heterogeneity) are more

important drivers of banknote-associated bacterial community composition than other

processes associated with geographic distance among sites, such as dispersal limitation (Chase,

2010).

The taxa we identified as being relatively more abundant on banknotes collected from

butcher shops (*Brevibacteriaceae*, *Halomonadaceae*, *Lactobacillaceae*, *Vibrionaceae*) are

known to include bacteria previously identified in "meaty" contexts. *Halomonadaceae* and

Brevibacteriaceae have previously been found in high-salinity environments and salty foods

such as poultry skin or Chinese pork cured with salt (Oren, 2011; Fourquin-Gomez *et al.*,

2014). *Brevibacteriaceae* and *Vibrionaceae* (including the genera within these families, such

as *Photobacterium*, which we detected at high abundance in some butcher samples) are

frequently found in samples from butchers, slaughterhouses, abattoirs (Sierra *et al.*, 1995;

Pennacchia *et al.*, 2011; Połka *et al.*, 2015; Nieminen *et al.*, 2016; Fuertes-Perez *et al.*, 2019;

Dourou *et al.*, 2021). Representatives of the *Lactobacillaceae* family are key species used as

starter cultures in production of, and have been isolated from, cured and fermented meat

(Deibel *et al.*, 1961; Samelis *et al.*, 1994; Cocolin *et al.*, 2011). This finding – that some

"meaty" taxa are overrepresented in butcher samples – supports the link between collection

environment and microbiome composition. However, it is important to note that members of

the same families have also been isolated from a wide range of other environments including

humans, plants, animals and foods (Walter, 2008; Oren, 2011; Felis and Pot, 2014; Forquin

and Weimer, 2014; Franz *et al.*, 2014; Leisner and Pot, 2014; Pot *et al.*, 2014; Takemura *et al.*,

2014)(Oren, 2011) . Therefore, while our results are consistent with past work finding these

taxa in "meaty" environments, they can also occur elsewhere. It is interesting in this context

that the sample butcher-BIA – classified as "butcher" but in fact originating from a supermarket

till due to the respective location's two butchers being closed on collection day – was relatively

impoverished for the taxa linked above to the other butcher samples (butcher-BIA: 0.45%

Brevibacteriaceae, 0.00% *Halomonadaceae*, 0.07% *Lactobacillaceae*, 0.00% *Vibrionaceae*).

At a broader level, the taxa we identified across all shop types are in line with previous

research into monetary microbiomes. For example, in a metagenomic analysis of dollar bills

from New York City (Maritz *et al.*, 2017) found representatives of several of the families that

were dominant in our dataset (including *Staphylococcaceae*, *Micrococcaceae*,

Streptococcaceae, *Corynebacteriaceae*, and *Moraxellaceae*). Similarly, an analysis of Chinese

RMB banknotes and US dollar bills (Lin *et al.*, 2021) revealed the most abundant taxa on the

family level were *Moraxellaceae*, *Pseudomonadaceae* and *Enterobacteriaceae* (all abundant

in our data set). Other studies of monetary microbiomes identified similarly overlapping sets

of taxa, including analysis of Indian Rupee banknotes (*Actinobacteria*, *Bacteriodetes*,

Firmicutes, and *Proteobacteria*; no lower-taxa resolution available) (Jalali *et al.*, 2015),

banknotes from Hong Kong (*Moraxellaceae*, *Micrococcaceae*, *Enterobacteriaceae,*

Vibrionaceae, *Corynebacteriaceae*, *Pseudomonadaceae*, among others) (Heshiki *et al.*, 2017)

and from Brazil (*Enterobacteriaceae*, *Staphylococcaceae*, *Lactobacillaceae*, *Moraxellaceae*,

and *Corynebacteriaceae*, among others) (da Fonseca *et al.*, 2015). Our results go beyond past

work on monetary microbiomes by showing that the relative abundances of different taxa

(families and ZOTUs) vary among collection environments (shop types), but not with

geographic distance within a European country.

A key implication of our results is that even temporary exposure of banknotes to certain

environments is reflected by the community composition of colonizing bacteria. This is

surprising because we assume the residence time of individual banknotes in a given shop is

short (hours, days or weeks). It also suggests high variability in temporal beta diversity in the

monetary microbiome. We found several taxa (ZOTUs) that were unique to particular shop

types, and at the family level it was also visible that some taxa were overrepresented in butcher

samples. Despite this, analogous to the core microbiome (Danko *et al.*, 2021) found in urban

mass transit systems, we found something akin to a core microbiome across our samples in that

two families (*Pseudomonadaceae, Staphylococcaceae*) were present in every sample.

Another important implication of our results is that many of the key taxa of the monetary

microbiome in Switzerland are also present as viable cells (culturable on agar). This raises an

interesting question about colonization dynamics in the monetary microbiome. If viable

microbes are present on banknotes, are they growing and interacting on the banknote itself?

We can speculate the rough surface of most banknotes not only allows attachment of bacteria,

but also human skin cells, secretions and remnants of food or products during handling.

Potentially, this could support bacterial growth after colonization. If the local

microenvironment influences the relative growth/death rates of different taxa, this could even

shape community composition and contribute to habitat-specific community composition as

we observed here. Alternatively, community composition may be determined primarily at the

colonization step, with different shop types harbouring different microbiomes in general (due

to local habitat selection), which are "sampled" by banknotes passing through the shop. One

avenue for future work aiming to tease apart these different potential drivers of the monetary

microbiome would be to experimentally colonize banknotes and track community abundance

and composition over time (longitudinal sampling of individual banknotes).

We emphasize strongly that our results do not address or make any predictions regarding

food hygiene or potential health hazards posed to humans. We were solely interested in the

microbial community composition on banknotes and how this relates to the sampling

environment. Finding distinct microbiomes in different shop types does not necessarily

translate to variable infection risk or indicate variable hygiene standards, only that the local

monetary microbiome reflects the local commercial environment. It is, for example, not

possible for us to infer how long the sampled bacteria have been present on the banknotes. One

limitation of our study is that the SARS-CoV2 pandemic has led to changes in customers'

payment behaviour (Kraenzlin *et al.*, 2020). This might influence the transfer of microbiota to

banknotes, because of increased hygienic awareness in customers and shop staff. For example,

we observed in one case a banknote being disinfected by shop staff (the sample extracted from

the banknote from this shop was removed in the initial filtering step due to low read counts,

see *Methods*). However if anything we would expect any effect of pandemic-related hygiene

measures to make our conclusions conservative: when hygiene standards are less stringent we

might expect even more exchange of microbiota between the local environment and banknotes.

In addition, further work would be needed to discover how the variation between banknotes

from different shop types arises, for example, whether it is correlated with the skin microbiome

of shop staff or other surfaces in the shops. Another limitation of our study is the spatial scale

and number of shop types. While our study design revealed significant variation among shop

types, the lack of geographic structure across Switzerland may differ from that across larger

spatial scales or across different currency types.

In summary, we found that the bacterial communities associated with Swiss banknotes can

vary depending on the environment in which the banknotes were collected and that, by contrast,

geographic distance between sampled locations does not predict variation of the associated

microbial communities. Our results also show that the most abundant taxa are not only present

in the form of cell debris and genetic material, but as viable cells that can form colonies during

in vitro cultivation. This raises the question of banknotes potentially being involved in

transmission of bacteria between people and the environment, and/or of genes, such as

antibiotic resistance genes, among bacteria co-occurring on the same banknotes. Therefore, a

key avenue for future work building on the link between microbial community structure on

banknotes and the local environment (shop type) identified here is to ask whether this translates

to variable infection risk or horizontal gene transfer.

Figures

A

Figure 1.

Figure 1 (p. 25). Bacterial community composition across sampling locations and shop
types. Panel A: Distribution of sampling locations across Switzerland. The map shows the 10
municipalities, highlighted in dark green, in which banknotes were collected. Panel B: Relative
abundances of the main bacterial families identified by amplicon sequencing from banknotes
sampled in each shop (lower *x*-axis) and location (upper *x*-axis, indicated by three-letter
abbreviations). *Unknown* contains non-assigned ZOTUs; *Other* contains assigned ZOTUs not
belonging to the most abundant families. Abbreviations in both panels: BIA = Biasca, BRI =
Brienz BE, FRI = Frick, KLO = Klosters-Serneus, LAN = Langnau am Albis, ORB = Orbe,
POR = Porrentruy, ROR = Rorschach, STE = Stein am Rhein, VIS = Visp.

Figure 2. Within-sample taxonomic diversity of samples from banknotes collected in various shop types across Switzerland. Panel A: The Shannon diversity index H takes into account both richness (number of species present) and evenness (how evenly do present species occur). Panel B: Observed richness gives the number of unique ZOTUs present in a sample. Colours indicate locations (abbreviations: BIA = Biasca, BRI = Brienz BE, FRI = Frick, KLO = Klosters-Serneus, LAN = Langnau am Albis, ORB = Orbe, POR = Porrentruy, ROR = Rorschach, STE = Stein am Rhein, VIS = Visp). Values are jittered on the both axes in both panels.

Figure 3. Ordination analysis. NMDS ordination based on Bray-Curtis dissimilarity between the bacterial communities isolated from banknotes (stress = 0.11). Symbols represent different shop types and are coloured according to location. Abbreviations: BIA = Biasca, BRI = Brienz BE, FRI = Frick, KLO = Klosters-Serneus, LAN = Langnau am Albis, ORB = Orbe, POR = Porrentruy, ROR = Rorschach, STE = Stein am Rhein, VIS = Visp.

Figure 4. Number and identity of colonies isolated from banknotes collected in various shop types across Switzerland. Each composite bar gives the number and identity of colonies detected in samples isolated from banknotes. The bar colour indicates species identity (based on morphology and colour on Chromatic™ MH agar, see *Methods*). Colonies classified as "unknown" had uncertain identity (regular-shaped, small size) or a morphology more commonly associated with yeasts/fungi (astral appearance, polychromatic, with spores/fruiting body-like structures). Abbreviations: BIA = Biasca, BRI = Brienz BE, FRI = Frick, KLO = Klosters-Serneus, LAN = Langnau am Albis, ORB = Orbe, POR = Porrentruy, ROR = Rorschach, STE = Stein am Rhein, VIS = Visp.

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892   **Author Contributions**

893   AMB, ARH   designed research.

894   AMB   performed research.

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896   AMB, ARH   wrote paper.