

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 16 (1989)  
**Heft:** 2  
  
**Rubrik:** Ticino - where is it going?

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 31.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**





# Ticino – where is it going?

*The Ticino is for many merely the picturesque sun-trap of Switzerland. However, the alpine canton which was once poor is today also a modern service centre and a central traffic route between north and south. How are these upheavals affecting its identity?*



Varied and contradictory Ticino

## A Canton different from the others

*Ticino, on the southern side of the Alps, is a surprisingly varied region. It is not far from the wild mountain valleys to the splendid lakeside scenery and to the gentle hills of the Mendrisiotto in the most southerly point of Switzerland. Ticino is not only a holiday resort, it is the (somewhat tight fitting) home and living quarters of 275,000 inhabitants, with an unstable balance between differing cultures, political groups and in its relation to the environment.*

Ticino is not a canton just like the rest. It is the only purely Italian speaking canton: It forms the Italian part of Switzerland (together with four Grison valleys). Ticino enjoys privileges as one of the three regions of Switzerland, but it also carries especially demanding burdens. The Swiss Italians thus have their own television and radio, as do the Swiss Germans, but for only 300,000 inhabitants as opposed to four million. This strengthens the inclination of the small language minority towards agreeable intro-

spection, to withdrawal into its own region. Radio and television are, at the same time, the largest culture makers. Whilst other Swiss cantons work together, Ticino often has to rely on itself because of the language – for example where the production of school books is concerned.

### From isolation to a bear hug

Not thirty years have passed since the Ticino people demonstrated in Berne for a road tunnel through the Gotthard, to release them from their isolation. They were not satisfied with the Gotthard railway line, the Ticino was to be accessible by car in winter too. However the tunnel also brought day trippers from the German part of Switzerland. Already during the first summer after the inauguration of the construction of the century, signs of a surfeit of tourists were to be felt. In other words: The mass of German speaking tourists was too much for many Ticino people.

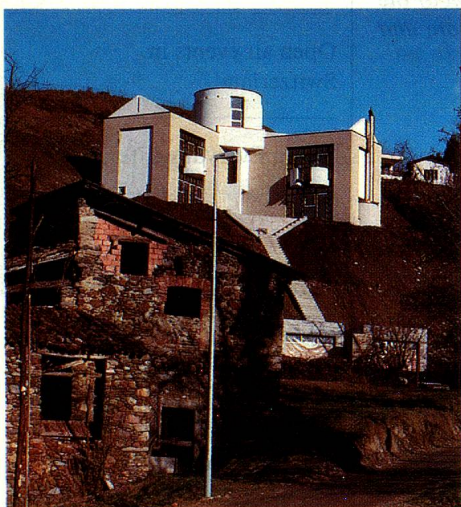
A knowledge of German is consequently often expected of the Ticino people in their jobs – not only in the banks, but also, for example, in the repair service of a washing machine factory: Today they are even spoken to in German in many cafés in the tourist centres. That's a bitter pill for the Ticino people.

Many will say that that is hardly worth mentioning compared to the economic advantages the Gotthard motorway has

brought. Increasing numbers of Swiss Germans are seizing the opportunity and taking advantage of the large market to acquire a holiday or weekend house in Switzerland's sun trap. This is making land and property prices soar: Only very few Ticino people can hold their own. That is no longer a joke, it cuts deep. The lack of reasonably priced accommodation and the second homes are the main social problems facing politicians in Ticino today. The Swiss Germans' embrace



started the money rolling in Ticino, but it has almost taken the locals' breath away. The tourism promoters are no longer interested in a second road tunnel through the Gotthard, as is being demanded by the large automobile associations. The tourist associations are, rather, trying to attract more tourists from the French part of Switzerland, France, Belgium and Italy. The German speaking holiday makers will remain in the majority even in the future. However, it would suit the Ticino population if the tou-



*The contrasting Ticino: Most modern architecture and traditional stone houses in Cadro, Sottoceneri. (Photo: G. Crivelli)*

*Photo above: A sunny winter's day without tourists makes Ascona, otherwise mundane, look quite idyllic. (Photo: Luca Martignoni)*





rists coming from other language groups were to increase. The Ticino central government and the established parties are pushing for a railway tunnel at the foot of the Gott-hard. However, through this the Ticino will become even more of a live line between the growing economic areas of Zürich and Milan, but can the Ticino take more business and more money?

Businessmen and politicians alike are still totally tuned to growth, even though every other employee is a foreigner. Ticino, which forty years ago was as poor as a church mouse, became affluent very quickly. Many Ticino people still remember the poverty only too well. One gets the impression that they are now making up for when times were hard by now eating beyond their hunger at their heavily laden tables. Although the income-per-head still lies roughly 15 per cent below the Swiss average, the motorisation in Ticino is second to Geneva and there are a particularly large number of expensive cars and sports cars.

Valuable agricultural land, vineyards and lovely lakeside slopes are being sacrificed to the building fever. The agricultural land is being threatened even in the Magadino plain, even though this marshland along the river Ticino has been improved for agricultural purposes in decades of hard work. The farmers sounded the alarm in 1988 and collected signatures for a popular initiative. The aim: The total agricultural area is not to be further reduced. It is uncertain, despite evident sympathy, whether the Parliament of Ticino will support the farmers.

## From words to deeds...

As far as ideas and intentions are concerned, the canton Ticino is the model pupil in regional planning. The Ticino government was not satisfied with working out the cantonal regional plan according to the federal directives, as was the case in many cantons. The regional plan, which establishes what may be built where, and where the countryside is to be left untouched, is decided in Ticino by parliament. The democratic right of co-determination goes as far as making it possible for the Ticino people to send the result of years of work down the drain in a referendum. It has not come to this so far. The Ticino Government presented the regional plan in 1984, and they have been working on it ever since, but it has not been submitted to parliament yet. The political will to make clear principles is lacking, as the number of landowners is indeed large. The planners must be satisfied with belatedly legitimising the spreading growth of the settlements and industrial areas.



*Agriculture has become marginal in today's Ticino. (Photo: Luca Martignoni)*

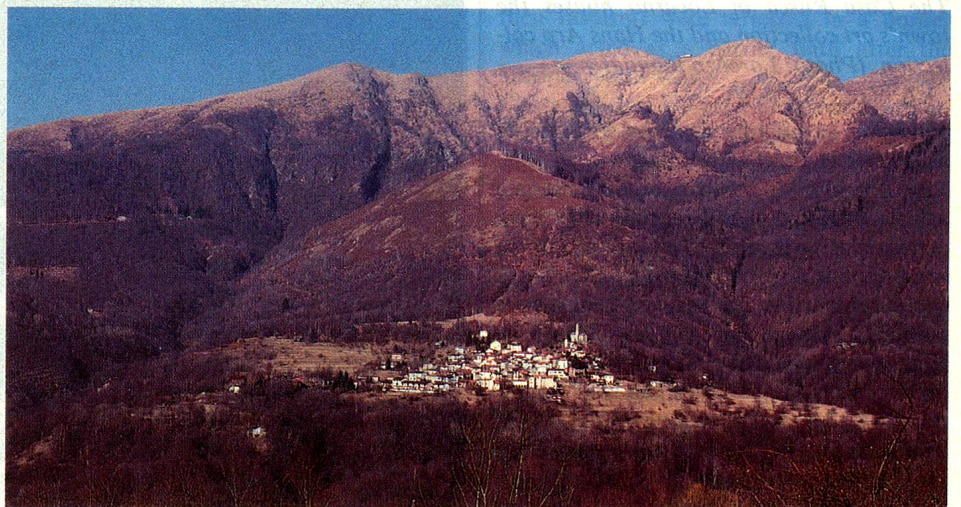
Ticino has thoroughly changed in the last forty years, as the article by Remigio Ratti on page 7 will show. The political structure dates back to the 19th century. It is out of place in the changing Ticino. The dividing line between the progressive and traditional forces separate the historical parties (Radical Democratic Party and Christian Democratic People's Party), which blocks large moves. The Partito Liberale Radicale – as the Radicals are called here – is traditionally the strongest party, closely followed by the Partito Popolare Democratico (the Christian Democrats). The historical opponents still fight today over matters concerning the superiority of the communes or over matters concerning religion – an ex-

ample being religious instruction in primary schools.

The political stability is great. The left wing has grown slightly, but the everlasting feud between the traditional Social Democrats and the young revolutionaries, who went their own way twenty years ago but who have in the meantime returned to a reformed path, is slowing the left wing trend. Nevertheless the hard fought battle during governmental elections in 1987 had as its result that both socialist parties surprisingly won a seat in the five body government, whilst the Christian Democrats lost their second seat for the first time in sixty years, which made feelings run high. The proportional electoral system which had been worked out by a Christian Democratic politician in the twenties, and which ensures a seat for the minority, was suddenly ripe for abolition in the eyes of the Christian Democrats. They launched a popular initiative to alter the proportional electoral system, to be able to keep the second seat without a fight in the future. That is a regression into the 19th century. In those days there were perpetual hefty political fights between the Radicals and the catholic conservatives over electoral systems. The small difference lies in the fact that today the Christian Democrats have won the Radicals as allies.

## Smog – more stubborn than debts

There is a new tradition: At Christmas-time the Department for the Environment proclaims the pre-smog alarm for south Ticino. The smog is chiefly a consequence of the large transport network of south Ticino with its Milan agglomeration. Heavy labour in the open air is discouraged. Children



*Rural Ticino: The intact landscape near Breno in Malcantone. (Photo: Giosanna Crivelli)*



should not play outside and adults are advised to use their cars for urgent matters only (the public transport offers, however, a very sparse service). Such breathtaking events move the Parties a lot less than the loss of a seat, and they do not try to tackle the problem too assiduously.

However, the Ticino politicians have reason for satisfaction: The Government has nevertheless cleaned up the cantonal treasury under the leadership of the Radical Treasurer,

Claudio Generali. The state debt has shrunk from 1.6 billion francs to 500 million in six years, thanks to the strong increase in tax revenue. In 1988 the cantonal account even realised a record surplus of 300 million francs. It would be nice if the ecological stability could be re-established as easily and as swiftly.

*Beat Allenbach, 'Tages-Anzeiger' correspondent for the Italian Switzerland*

## Ticino cultural scene

# Not just a pretty face

Ask a tourist on the street why he loves Ticino: whether on Lugano's promenade, under the arcades of Locarno or on the footpaths overlooking the lakes, the sort of answers you will get are likely to be the same everywhere: The sun, the mild climate, the merlot wine and maybe even the ...pizza,



*The Casa Rusca in Locarno houses the town's art collection and the Hans Arp collection. (Photo: Lorenzo Bianda)*

which has as much in common with Ticino as Wienerschnitzel with Rome.

The 'Boccalini' in comparison have become a little outdated. Until recently they were almost like the symbol of a kind of tourism which one is now trying to face-lift. Thus, those responsible for tourism today have started pushing a more cultural side of Ticino such as a land of artists and avantgarde architects. Is the image of the most southerly Swiss canton changing? For several years the intellectuals and authorities have been trying to re-establish an identity for Ticino, which has already been lost for some, and which others would maintain never existed. Endeavours towards change

cannot be ignored despite differences in opinion. The first thing to attract one's attention is the activity in the exhibition sector: Great efforts have been made over the past five years to escape from cultural isolation. The museums in Mendrisio, Bellinzona and Lugano have virtually sprung up from nothing, and the Locarno museum has been created from a valuable inheritance, which had been left to fate in a damp castle for many years.

Nowadays, throughout the year these museums are showing the works of internationally renowned artists, such as Graham Sutherland, Felix Vallotton, Ennio Morlotti, Mark Tobey and Paul Klee. Also the buildings which house these museums are renowned: town villas or patrician houses, and a former convent, which the authorities have saved from ruin and have

transformed into cultural centres. It is still too early to draw any conclusions about these costly initiatives. They occur in a canton in which those interested in culture have, in the meantime, become accustomed to commuting between Zürich and Milan, with the occasional excursion to Paris and London for those who can afford it. This, in a canton in which the interest in the humanities in school is slight, and where school visits to museums are by no means a matter of course.

At least now we can say that an important first step has been made with the creation of the infrastructure and the aim of initiating a fruitful discussion about art. This new trend makes it possible for Ticino artists (some of whom are well-known abroad) to gain the recognition of their own population.

On the other hand, top class summer events, like the Locarno Film Festival and the Ascona Music Festival Weeks, are winning widespread acclaim. Their increasing popularity is such that the organisers are faced with space problems with each new festival. After the decline in interest in the seventies, the Film Festival has once again found its function as an interesting platform for less well-known producers, as well as for the insatiable film lovers whose numbers are steadily increasing. It would, though, be wrong to talk of a genuine interest of the general public in the cinema. Often it is rather a matter of the mundane rather than the cultural event: Apart from the festival days (and with the exception of Lugano), Ticino cinema programmes are way behind those of the cities north of the Alps, and the audiences sparse. Quite the opposite to the sold out concert halls of the Ascona



*The world famous clown Dimitri in action.*



Music Festival Weeks. Thanks to a massive presence of big names they have recently reached a level which can be compared to the most renowned auditoria in the world. Smaller set-ups – almost family businesses – are working somewhat more modestly, but with no less enthusiasm, like, for instance, the Dimitri-Theatre, which recently moved to Ascona, where the Theatre San Materno is also active. The theatre of the famous clown with his white face and broad smile takes turns with performances of the

Verscio theatre school with those of foreign artists and of Dimitri himself. Besides numerous musical presentations, the San Materno Theatre, housed in the former theatre of the great Russian dancer Charlotte Bara, organises an annual international puppet festival. This is chiefly thanks to the limitless energy of its animator, the puppetier Michel Poletti. A final mention must go to the Monte Verità, where many twentieth century artists lived and worked. Harald Szeemann

has been trying to reawaken this magic for years. Besides the big exhibition of 1978, he has managed to convince the authorities to turn the houses Selma and Annatta into museums, and he organised the exhibition of Baron Von der Heydt's collection. So there is something happening in this drowsy Ticino, and if this display of goodwill continues, one will soon be able to say: not just a pretty face.

Christina Owens-Foglia

## The Economy

### On the way to a new centre?

*Practically no Swiss canton has changed as drastically as Ticino since the Second World War. Professor Remigio Ratti, Director of the Institute of Economic Research in Canton Ticino, uses three models to illustrate the new reality and demonstrates that several well-loved clichés about Ticino ought to be changed.*

The ever increasing attention being given to Ticino makes it seem advisable to look at the only Italian speaking canton in Switzerland from a different perspective. This approach far exceeds the traditional image of a peripheral and isolated Ticino. The Financial Times, for example, devoted a three page Special to the Ticino on 8 March 1985 entitled 'Ticino: more than a pretty face'.

The 'open region Ticino' is a quantifiable fact. The population of the canton has increased by two thirds over the last forty years. Its labour force has doubled in the same period. Ticino is now a region of immigration, rather than one of emigration, which provides jobs for 32,000 border workers from Italy as well as for nearly 700 commuters from the Grison area of Mesolcina. With its total population of 275,000 people (4.2 per cent of the national population) the economic potential of Ticino corresponds to a region having about 350,000 inhabitants.

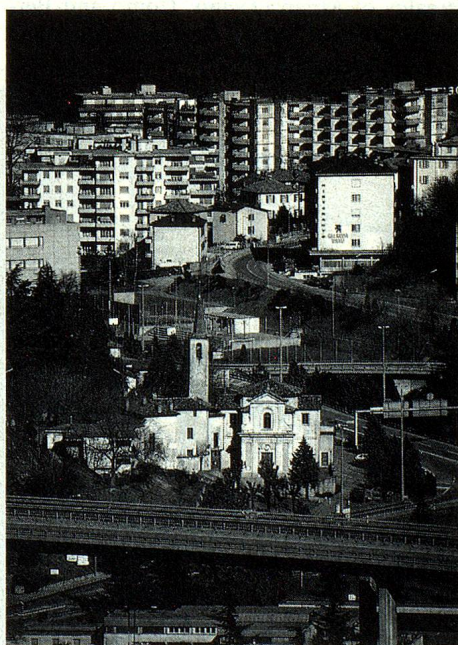
These figures illustrate the far reaching development of the territorial organisation of the canton. Ticino, one of the most mountainous regions of Switzerland, is today also one of the most urbanised (76 per cent of the population live in the four agglomerations of Lugano, Locarno, Bellinzona and Chiasso). It differs from the other Swiss Cantons through its new transborder reality: Approximately 650,000 people live in a strip 10 km wide on each side of the border.

I will give three model ideas in this article

which are suitable to question the image people, even unconsciously, have of Ticino:

#### Model Nr. 1: A peripheral region

The traditional image of Ticino portrays the small dimensions of an alpine canton, cut off by the Alps and the border to the south, and sees the reasons for its unsuccessful and precarious development mainly in geo-



Urbanised Ticino: 76 per cent of the population live in the agglomerations. (Lugano, photo: Giosanna Crivelli)



Protest against car commuters in Malcantone: 'Let's fill the cars and not the streets.' (Photo: Ely Riva)

graphical and political invariants. (Bottinelli 1984).

Unfortunately, this situation lasted for more than a hundred years. The formation of effective national borders between Switzerland and Italy, the economical and political fluctuations in Italy (first protectionism, then fascism) were reflected in a border which acted as a barrier until after the Second World War.

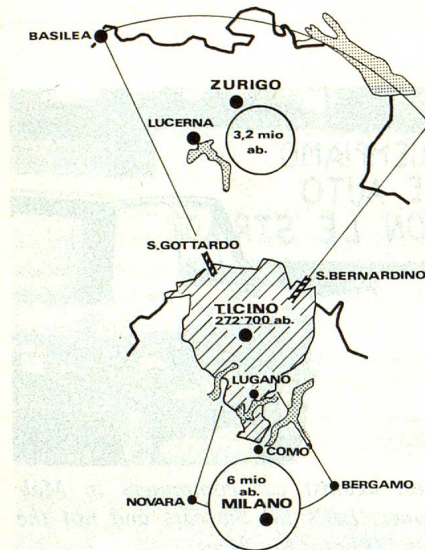
Characteristics of pre-railway and pre-industrial Ticino were a spatial organisation with closed areas and the lack of a true centre. There was no fixed political capital until 1878 and the cantonal administration changed periodically between Bellinzona, Locarno and Lugano. This image portrays Ticino at the time of the emigration, firstly to California and Australia and then to the aspiring industrial cities of Switzerland north of the Gotthard.

But even if the opening of the Gotthard-Railway Tunnel (1882) provided Ticino with a central link between Airolo and Chiasso, it did not enable the canton to achieve real integration into the Swiss economy. This was quite clearly a dualistic phase: One part





of the canton continued to live relatively self-sufficiently, whilst the development of cities such as Lugano and Locarno, which were linked to the growth of tourism and economy, was chiefly due to outside factors. This was to be the first indication, although still unclear, of the attraction of the lakeside areas. Subsequently, industrial subsidiaries of companies north of the Alps, looking for an abundant and cheap workforce, settled in Ticino. This function is today essentially satisfied by the frontier workers.



*The demographic weight of Ticino compared to the neighbouring regions.*

## Model Nr. 2: An integrated periphery

This image is illustrated above by the picture showing an open Ticino which is directly linked mainly to North East Switzerland (Approx. 3 million people) and to the southern region of Lombardy (nearly 6 million people). It becomes evident that the principal role of Ticino is to be an economical, political and social intermediary between the regions north and south of the Alps. This connecting function could, unfortunately, not become reality until the phase of economical liberalism in the post war era, when Ticino and Lombardy became more easily accessible to one another through road and motorway connections. Relating to this, I would like to draw to your attention the fact that the main economical effect of the N2 motorway came more from the south and through the connection between Milan and Lugano, than from the link up to the north, symbolised by the Gotthard motorway tunnel (1980). The picture of Ticino as an integrated, or rather, as an integratable periphery with

respect to the centres to the north or to the south becomes clearer when considering the development of the tertiary activities. According to the results of the 1980 census, two thirds of the active Ticino population worked in the service sector compared to 55 per cent for Switzerland as a whole. In Sottoceneri, i.e. the two southerly districts of Lugano and Mendrisio-Chiasso, this figure was as high as 72 per cent. The growing activities in the banking, finance and advisory sector were decisive for the rise of Lugano in the hierarchy of Swiss cities. The success of the regional Crossair flights departing from Lugano shows the strength of the attraction and integration of the tertiary sector within the Ticino economy. The transborder region of Ticino has become very open with the general use of cars: 650,000 and 1.2 million people live in the 10 and 20 km zones on either side of the border respectively. The new situation as a connecting area and integrated periphery makes it necessary to introduce a new transborder politics as do, for example, the regions of Basle and Geneva.

## Model Nr. 3: An emerging peripheral development centre?

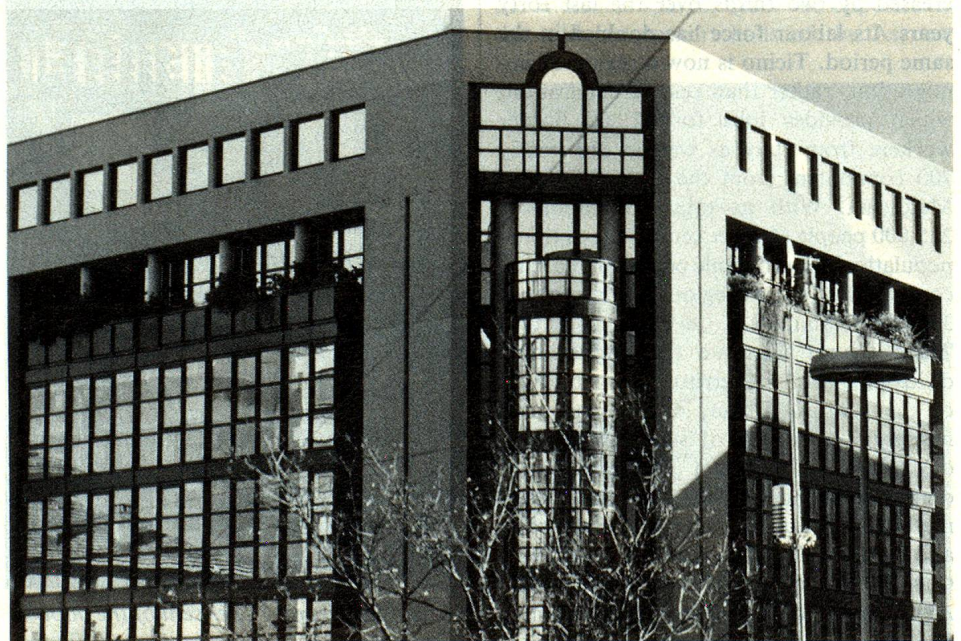
The Geography Department of the University of Geneva has recently published a map showing the alpine regions which could become locations for small and medium sized high-tech industries (emerging peripheral development centres). Of special interest are the following regions: the Prealps of Milan (Ticino, Como and Bergamo), the regions of Grenoble and Nice,

the transborder region of Geneva, the triangle Lucerne, Zürich and St Gallen, the Bavarian Prealps and the Austrian region of Linz. The new technologies do indeed create certain privileged peripheral regions (good residential location, availability and adaptability of the workforce, presence of educational and research centres) with the possibility of taking on and establishing new small and medium-sized companies. It should be remembered that several large agglomerations and traditional industrial centres have felt the negative effects of their growth and are now undergoing a restructuring process. This makes a phase of relative decentralisation possible.

A survey shows that innovatory activities have emerged and developed within the chiefly traditionally structured industrial sector of the Ticino economy in the last few years. Contrary to the traditional model of Ticino economy as being only a branch of Swiss industry, the new openness and the attraction of the canton have made it possible for about forty companies to become integrated in the present development dynamic.

Besides this, the relationship between Ticino economy and Italy, which had for long been hindered by the barrier characteristic of the frontier, has now taken on a change for the better. A survey has shown that research and development companies do not discriminate between the regions of Lombardy, the German or the French speaking parts of Switzerland. Who would have been able to prophesy that even a decade ago?

*Remigio Ratti*



*Lugano, the banking city. (Photo: Luca Martignoni)*