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Ticino – where is it going?

The Ticino is for many merely the picturesque suntrap 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 Mendrisotto 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-

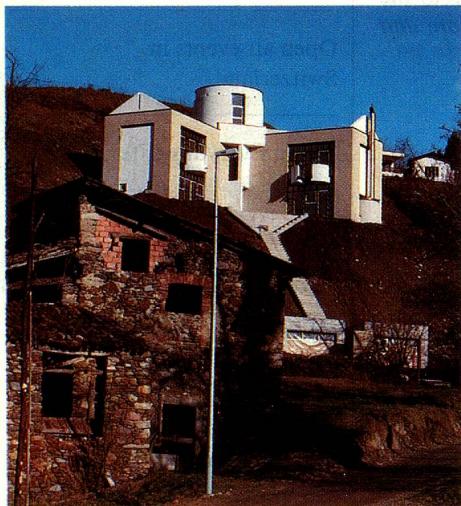
spection, to withdrawal into its own region. Radio and television are, at the same time, the largest culture makers. Whilst other Swiss cantons work together, Ticino often has to rely on itself because of the language – for example where the production of school books is concerned.

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



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

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-

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

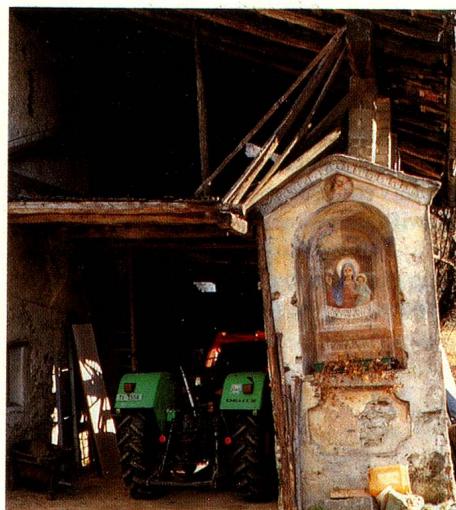
rists coming from other language groups were to increase. The Ticino central government and the established parties are pushing for a railway tunnel at the foot of the Gotthard. However, through this the Ticino will become even more of a live line between the growing economic areas of Zürich and Milan, 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)

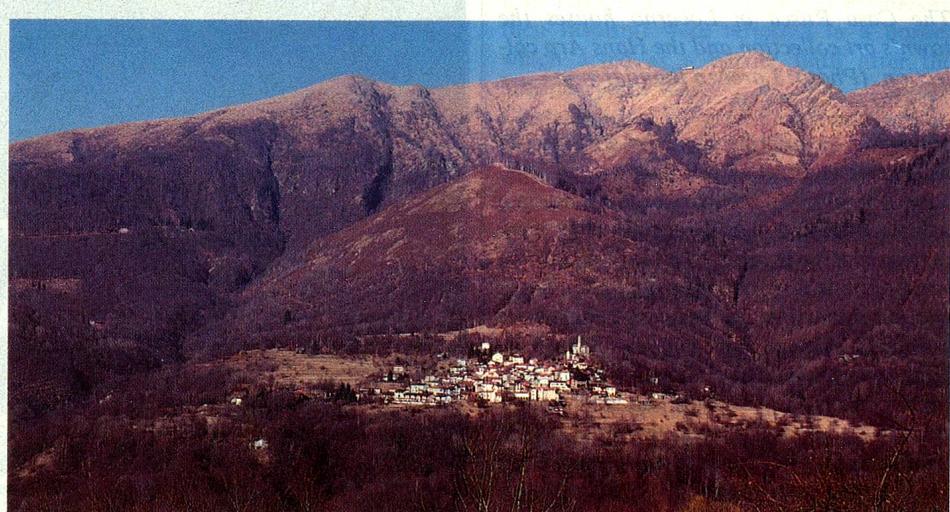
Ticino has thoroughly changed in the last forty years, as the article by Remigio Ratti on page 7 will show. The political structure dates back to the 19th century. It is out of place in the changing Ticino. The dividing line between the progressive and traditional forces separate the historical parties (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

Now that the political leaders have finally got their act together, it is time to look at the 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.

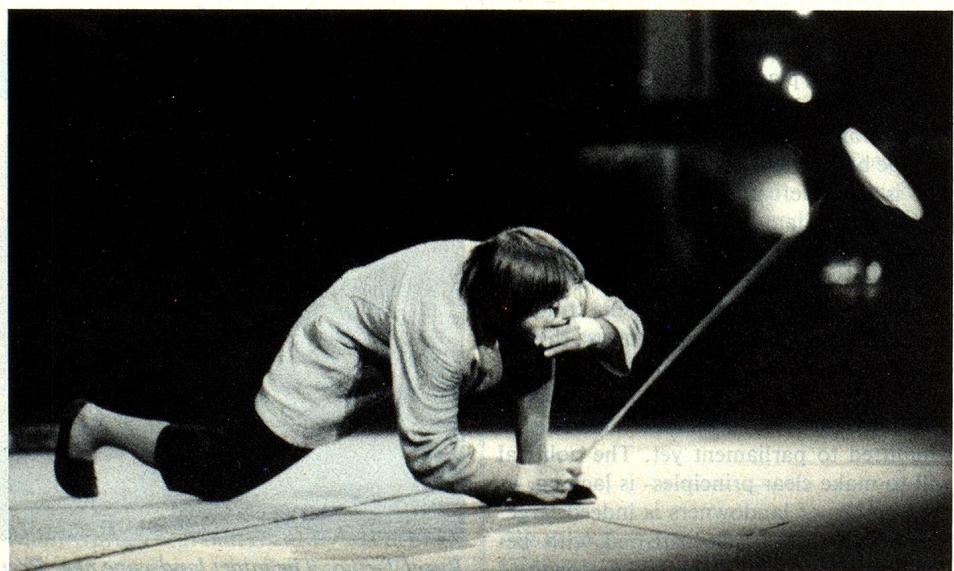
The 'Boccalini' in comparison have become a little outdated. Until recently they were almost like the symbol of a kind of tourism which one is now trying to face-lift. Thus, those responsible for tourism today have started pushing a more cultural side of Ticino such as a land of artists and avantgarde 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.