

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 16 (1989)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Ticino cultural scene : not just a pretty face
Autor: Owens-Foglia, Christina
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906435>

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: 17.04.2026

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



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,

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

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

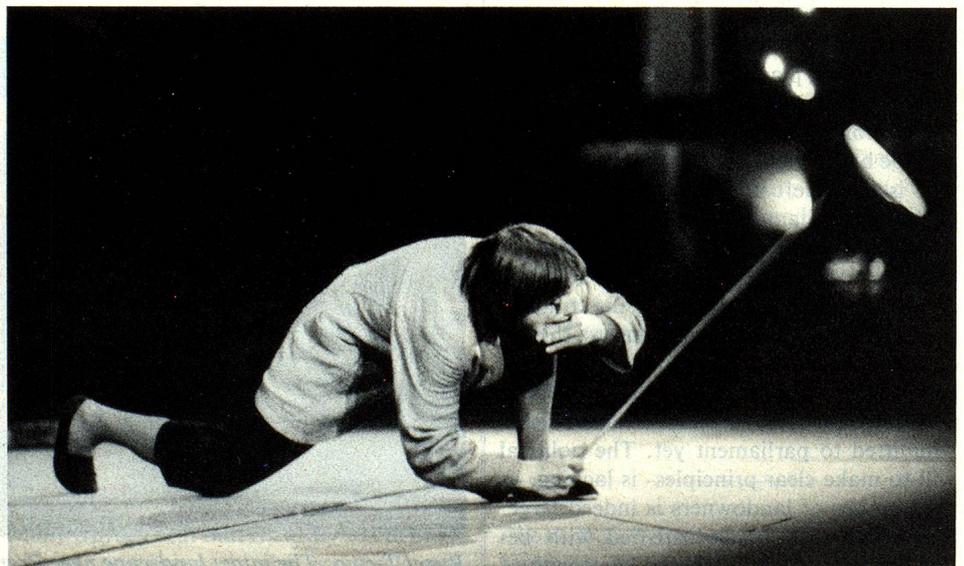
cannot be ignored despite differences in opinion. The first thing to attract one's attention is the activity in the exhibition sector: Great efforts have been made over the past five years to escape from cultural isolation. The museums in Mendrisio, Bellinzona and Lugano have virtually sprung up from 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.

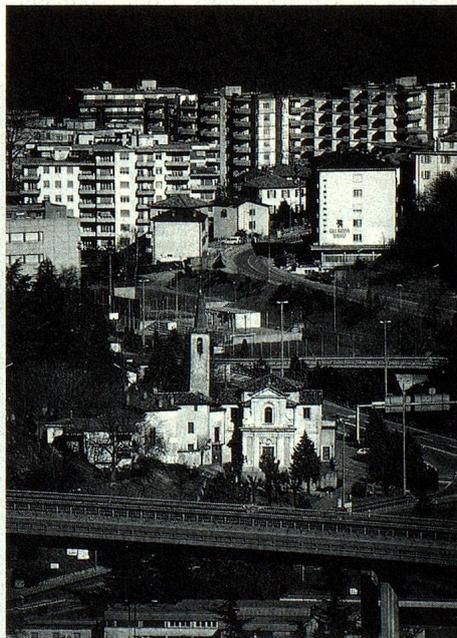
These figures illustrate the far reaching development of the territorial organisation of the canton. Ticino, one of the most mountainous regions of Switzerland, is today also one of the most urbanised (76 per cent of the population live in the four agglomerations of Lugano, Locarno, Bellinzona and Chiasso). 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