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Editorial

"You only have one environment – look after it"



In his talk during Bellinzona's celebration of the Confederation's 700th anniversary Professor of Literature Jean Starobinski pointed out that "a very precious part of the world's beauties is entrusted to us", and Marco Solari, the Federal Council's delegate, emphasised: "What unites Swiss across linguistic and cultural differences is the mythology of the mountains."

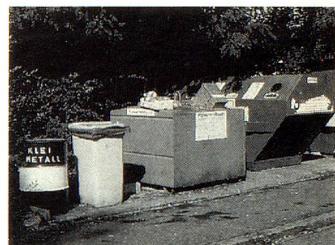
The roots of the association between nature, mountains, landscape and beauty go back a long way. We know that the mountains were "discovered" as early as the 18th century, and this meant that Switzerland became a major object of a new approach. The mountains took on the quality of the sublime, and wild, menacing nature was gradually transformed into the picturesque. From then on the mountains were a desirable destination. Travellers discovered the simple, rugged life of the mountain-dwellers and painted an idyllic picture of their happiness. Gradually the Swiss, too, adopted this image, which blended with the patriotic spirit of the times. Besides this more contemplative attitude, however, the last century also saw campaigns aimed at promoting the protection and preservation of our natural heritage. Thus, in 1878, the edelweiss became the first plant to be placed under protection. Although the emotional relationship with the landscape played an important role quite early on and there has long been an awareness of the effects of human activity on the environment, this resulted until recently, as in other western countries, only in very selective measures. Awareness of the environment in today's ecological sense did not develop until the Seventies, inspired, among other things, by the energy crisis of 1973 and by fear of an energy shortage, of overpopulation, of insufficient land and impoverishment of the soil.

So, have the Swiss now become an environmentally aware people? A study carried out in the framework of the national litter campaign run by the Research Institute of the Swiss Society for Marketing reveals that protection of the environment is "definitely a topic of conversation" among the great majority of Swiss. Those questioned even knew a surprising amount about the manufacture, use and consumption of individual products. Of course, they expect wide support in tackling the task not only from industry and commerce but also from the service sector and the state. And even though awareness of environmental problems has greatly increased in recent times, many Swiss still lack the necessary knowledge and, let's face it, the will to take appropriate action. To remedy this deficiency, then, is the purpose of the large-scale publicity campaign mounted by the Federal Office for Environment, Forests and Landscape under the slogan "Everything becomes litter". Anyone who cuts down litter is now no longer a "Bünzli" (narrow-minded prig) was the message of this campaign's advertising spot on television.

Anne Gueissaz

Anne Gueissaz (Editor of Official Communications)

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