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Italy in Switzerland

We explore Campione d'Italia, a working model of confusion in an idyllic location

Boyd Mistear



Looking down on Campione d'Italia with Lugano in the distance.

Photo: Steve Buck

Map of the area. SNL

Campione d'Italia is, as its name suggests, part of Italy – but it is an Italian enclave (or an enclave in the Ticino) as Switzerland surrounds it. First it helps to look at a map. When Ticino chose to become part of the Swiss Confederation in 1798, the residents of this 1.6 sq.km.area chose to remain part of Lombardy. However, in 1848 during the wars of Italian unification, the population of Campione had a change of mind and petitioned Switzerland for annexation, but this was rejected due to the Swiss desire to maintain neutrality. Today this tiny pocket of land is a part of the Province of Como. The “d’Italia” was added to the name of Campione in the 1930s by the then Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, and he ordered that an ornamental gate to the community was built – actions that were an attempt to assert the enclave’s Italian-ness!

Campione d’Italia today is politically Italian (although it is not actually in the European Union), but economically Swiss. The common currency the Swiss Franc, and although wages are paid in Francs the residents have to pay their Italian taxes in Euros. The 2,300 people who live there are Italian citizens, but have unhindered access to Switzerland. However, they cannot work in Switzerland, but can work in the EU even though their community is not part of it. Prior to the Schengen Treaty they had to show their passports to enter their own country, having passed through Switzerland to get there. Due to Campione’s special status as a ‘grey area’ between different legal systems it has become home to a large Casino complex, which also is the venue for conferences, concerts, etc. This is by far its major employer and also funds the running of the Municipality who own it. Campione residents who work there may not participate in any gambling, but

their fellow Italians may. The huge modern Casino dominates Campione’s lakeshore.

The community is subject to Swiss hygiene and recycling regulations, but its refuse (and recycling) is collected by an Italian organisation. Gas and water supplies come from Switzerland. The electricity supply comes from Italy – but has to be paid for in Swiss Francs. Medical facilities, the ambulance service, and the fire service are Swiss, but law enforcement is in the hands of the Italian State Carabinieri and the local Polizia. The Carabinieri are not based in Campione so when they travel across Switzerland to go on patrol, they have to leave their side arms at the main Italian frontier as the Swiss prohibit the carriage of these weapons on their territory. Motor vehicles based in Campione have to be registered in Switzerland and carry Ticino (TI) number plates. The telephone system is almost entirely operated by Swisscom with a Swiss dialling code, but the postal system is run by Italy, using Italian stamps. However, they have a Swiss Post Code (CH-6911) as well as their Italian one, I-22060. Public transport is provided by the Società Navigazione del Lago di Lugano (SNL) a Swiss company that, apart from running vessels that make calls at Campione’s pier, also run bus services, including Line 439 (Kursbuch 62.439) that connects Lugano with Campione d’Italia almost every hour. SwissPasses are valid on this entire route, even though it partly operates in Italy.

Although all the above seems a recipe for total confusion the residents obviously seem to cope with all the anomalies, as in practice it is probably less confusing than living in Italy itself!