

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
February 2022

Switzerland's Alpine dams are a source of electricity – and tension

Maggi – the Swiss-made seasoning that became a kitchen staple around the world

Albinen – the Alpine village opening its wallet to attract new residents

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840,000 tonnes of concrete

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The Spitalamm dam built in 1932 closes off a small rocky gorge in the Bernese Alps. Behind it lies the five-kilometre long Lake Grimsel. Over the years, the dam has evolved into 840,000 tonnes of concrete in the shape of a 114-metre high monument, a reminder of when Switzerland met its growing demand for energy by damming up mountain streams and turning them into lakes providing water to power the turbines in the valley below and generate electricity.

The Lake Grimsel dam does not currently look quite as undisturbed as it appears on our cover. A new, leaner arch dam is being constructed just in front of the old one. On its completion, probably in three years, the old dam will be flooded. Then the new construction will have to hold back the lake’s considerable water pressure. Lake Grimsel will thus remain a reliable source of electricity production over the coming decades.

Times have changed since 1932. Nowadays major hydroelectric projects are harder to get off the ground in Switzerland. Conservation and landscape preservation groups strongly oppose plans to erect new mountain dams or to use free flowing rivers for electricity generation. The use of hydropower has attracted growing criticism over the years. People are now more aware of how hydropower can exert a negative impact: dam construction is detrimental to nature, it submerges landscapes, takes water away from rivers, changes the natural hydrology. This edition’s Focus article (from page 6) explains how hydropower expansion in Switzerland is being limited for those reasons.

This raises an issue, given that Switzerland is looking to increase its use of renewable, CO₂-free energy sources, i.e. water, wind and sun. The conversion process is proving to be anything but straightforward. While Switzerland has a tradition of constructing all types of large power plants, it is less effective when it comes to decentralised, small-scale solar energy use. The gap between knowledge and action in this area is sobering to say the least. In fact, many Swiss municipalities have accurately calculated how much solar energy shines onto the existing rooftops. This often exceeds the needs of the municipality’s inhabitants. In spite of that, new constructions can still be erected without solar panels on the roof. It is this type of inertia that makes the lack of support for new dam construction in Switzerland more understandable.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: The Spitalamm dam on Lake Grimsel in the Bernese Oberland was built over 90 years ago.
Photo: 13 Photo AG, Claudio Bader

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Priya Ragu conquers the music world



Thank you for your article on Swiss/Tamil artist Priya Ragu. Every success story involving an immigrant to Switzerland or their children, whether refugee or not, is another step towards more tolerance in our society. Ms Ragu's story is particularly interesting for us.

RAOUL IMBACH, SWISS EMBASSY, SRI LANKA

Advancing the cause of music is always a good thing, whatever type it may be. You will realise your dream of having a music festival in Jaffna. Here's to making the most of your opportunities!

DIDIER MEHENNI, CRANS MONTANA, SWITZERLAND

This is very beautiful in the journey she is on, the music, the positive forward movement, and all the inclusiveness. May we all see and encourage the merits in each of us, and the common humanity we have that binds us beyond all other differences.

LOUISE GOGEL, VERMONT, USA

The Swiss arms industry is on the defensive



Switzerland should think more about where it buys weapons for its own army and less about its arms exports. Switzerland's military exports are somewhere between modest and insignificant. As you point out, Switzerland is not allowed to

export arms to countries at war, or that occupy other countries and abuse human rights. But what about the arms imports? How can a supposedly neutral country like Switzerland buy Israeli drones and F-35 fighter jets from the US? And that's not all, the F-35s technically remain under US control, although Switzerland has paid the full purchase price.

WALTER GASSER, USA

I've always found it immoral that Switzerland sells arms, even after the easing of the rules governing exports to countries experiencing civil war, and each time a popular vote rejects a more restrictive proposal, I tell myself that every voter is responsible for deaths in different countries throughout the world. It's totally unacceptable for a neutral country.

SERGE LEUBA, ALTEA, SPAIN

The golden jackal appears in Switzerland



Thank you for the great article. I always like to hear about a new type of animal appearing in Switzerland. It shows just how resilient some animals are. With so much agricultural land and construction everywhere, there isn't much left for the wildlife. Unnatural living space in new developments means the animals are losing their habitat.

URSULA DOUGHTY, USA

Switzerland's paradoxical love affair with cash

Once again, we see the needs of the Swiss Abroad being completely overlooked. It would have been helpful if our National Bank would have come to an agreement with banking institutions in other countries about taking over the notes withdrawn from circulation. Many Swiss Abroad have not inconsiderable sums stashed away because Swiss banks dissolved their accounts. There are also other ways in which money could be exchanged in any given country. It is both impossible and unreasonable to expect the Swiss Abroad to travel to Switzerland with their money.

HANS PETER STEINER, MAKOTRASY, CZECH REPUBLIC

Cash is freedom and independence.

JIRI CETTL, SWITZERLAND

I read about the banknotes in "Swiss Review" on 15 December, but the banknotes were recalled in April. That wasn't ideal. We still have some francs in cash, so we can make minor purchases on arrival in Zurich. But we haven't been able to travel because of the Corona pandemic.

LUTZ VENZLAFF IRVINE, CALIFORNIA, USA

Editor's note:

Some readers have expressed concern that their eighth-series banknotes are now worthless. That is not the case: they can still be exchanged at the Swiss National Bank and its agencies. See: [revue.link/banknotes](https://www.revue.ch/link/banknotes)

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Hydropower has lost its clean image

Hydropower has traditionally been the cornerstone of Swiss electricity. Logically, it should be underpinning the country's switch from nuclear and fossil fuels. However, it first needs to deal with the damage to its reputation in recent decades.

JÜRIG STEINER

Are the planks under foot shaking in the stiff breeze, or is it mountains that are moving? You are never quite sure which of the two it is on the Triftbrücke – the windy suspension bridge in the Bernese Oberland that spans the mouth of the green Triftsee glacial lake at a dizzying height of 100 metres.

The Triftbrücke is situated in a side valley above Innertkirchen (canton of Berne), 1,700 metres above sea level in one of Switzerland's most tranquil Alpine areas. Anyone with the nerve to stand halfway along the 170-metre-long pedestrian bridge will see a rugged water-soaked mountain basin, at one end of which hangs the remainder of a once-mighty glacier high above. It is a thought-provoking place, because this natural amphitheatre epitomises the controversy surrounding hydropower.

Rapid transition from glacier to lake

The Trift Glacier, which used to fill the entire basin, receded all of a sudden due to climate change, leading to the formation of the Triftsee lake. Because hikers were no longer able to use the glacier to access the Trifthütte (a mountain hut belonging to the Swiss Alpine Club), the aforementioned suspension bridge was built in 2005. However, the retreating glacier also left behind a unique, pristine mountain landscape.

The Triftsee is attracting consider-

able interest. Local hydropower company Kraftwerke Oberhasli (KWO) would like to use the young body of water to create a reservoir with a 177-metre-high dam that would supply electricity to around 30,000 households.

Will Switzerland run out of electricity?

Will Switzerland have sufficient and uninterrupted power supplies in future? This question is on many people's lips. Continued growth in electricity demand seems inevitable, with energy group Axpo predicting a 30 per cent rise by 2050.

Conceivably, the switch from nuclear and fossil fuels could drive this growth. Using heat pumps instead of oil-fired boilers to heat buildings, or driving electric instead of petrol cars – this means lower CO₂ emissions but greater electricity consumption. It is hard to gauge the extent to which efficiency gains and behavioural changes can curb demand.

According to a new study by the Federal Office of Energy, Switzerland could experience brief winter power outages from 2025 onwards due to electricity demand outstripping supply. The Federal Council has exacerbated the situation with its decision to abandon talks with the EU on a framework agreement. Consequently, the EU refuses to conclude the electricity agreement that it has already negotiated with Switzerland. As it currently stands, Switzerland will find it harder to obtain emergency supplies from the European grid as a result.

This has opened up a can of worms. KWO plans to produce zero-carbon energy – the type of power needed to cut greenhouse gas emissions. But it would have to desecrate virgin mountain terrain in the process. A small, dogged group of conservationists has raised objections to impede the project, albeit in the knowledge that Switzerland has high-emission gas-fired power plants on stand-by to cover any gaps in power supply – which, in turn, is counter-intuitive to the aim of combating climate change.

There appears to be no way out of this conundrum. Hydropower, once the clean-energy mainstay of Switzerland's self-styled "reservoir of Europe", is having to fight for its green credentials. How has it come to this?

Driving the economic boom

Switzerland lacks its own natural coal, so hydropower has always been the major energy staple. Yet hydroelectricity only really came into its own in Switzerland during the economic boom of the post-war years. Enormous dams sprang up in the Alps, providing a stable electricity supply that underpinned economic growth.

Thanks to audacious feats of civil engineering in remote corners of the Alps, Switzerland achieved a certain degree of energy independence. Indeed, hydropower accounted for around 90 per cent of Swiss energy in 1970, before the first nuclear



power plants had begun producing electricity.

Amid the hydro zeitgeist of the 1970s, families would drive down to Valais, maybe stop in Sion, then head up to the Hérémece Valley to gawp at the enormous Grande Dixence Dam. The dam's imposing 285-metre-high wall remains the highest building structure in Switzerland. It weighs an incredible 15 million tonnes – more than

the Great Pyramid of Giza – and is enough to withhold the several-kilometre stretch of water in the adjacent lake. Imagine if it burst.

Hydropower gained its appeal thanks to a number of illustrious civil engineers who turned dam construction into a high-performance discipline. For example, the Ticinese Giovanni Lombardi – father of politician Filippo Lombardi (The Centre), who

The Trift Glacier has melted away to reveal a new, pristine Alpine landscape. A local energy provider wants to build a hydroelectric dam on this very spot. Photo: Keystone (2009)

also happens to be the president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad – made a name for himself in 1965 with the elegantly curved Verzasca Dam, which was pioneering on account of its slimline design. The dam became iconic after James Bond bungee jumped off it in the opening scene of the 1995 film “Goldeneye”. Lombardi, who later built the Gotthard Road Tunnel, provided the benchmark for other spectacular civil engineering feats until his death in 2017.

The unifying effect of water levies

Besides cementing national pride, hydropower was also the inconspicuous glue that bound Switzerland together. This is because dams generate significant revenue for the Alpine regions, with the municipalities in which they are situated receiving remuneration for use of their water resources – a total of around half a billion Swiss francs a year.

These water levies help to transfer wealth from the economically strong Central Plateau region into the mountains, enabling the Alpine cantons to invest in infrastructure and counteract depopulation. To see how effectively hydropower is able to transcend the urban-rural divide, one only needs to travel to the Bregaglia Valley, where the Zurich-based utility company EWZ, which built the Albigna Dam in the 1950s, remains one of the biggest employers.

Fierce opposition

However, it is sometimes easy to forget amid the fanfare that hydropower projects were subject to fierce local opposition in the early days. The story of



Heavier than the Great Pyramid of Giza – the enormous Grande Dixence Dam is the highest building structure in Switzerland. Photo: Keystone

Marmorera is legendary. It was only after several expropriation proceedings that this Grisons village situated on the Julier Pass was destroyed and flooded to make way for a dam of the same name.

From as early as 1920, there were plans to flood the entire Urseren Valley in the canton of Uri and turn it into a dam. Prompted by power supply shortages, the project got up and running after the Second World War. But the valley community violently resisted, hastening the project's eventual demise.

“Nuclear subsidiaries in the Alps”

But it is 1986 that is the key year in understanding why hydropower lost its aura. Back then, utility company Kraftwerke Nordwestschweiz scrapped its plan to turn the Greina plateau between Grisons and Ticino into a reservoir – after years of strong resistance from a coalition of conservationists and countryside campaign-

ers on the one hand and local opposition on the other managed to bring this remote Alpine highland to the attention of national policymakers.

Greina became a symbol of environmentalist objections to the hydropower industry's practice of prioritising profits, which had led to a dalliance with the contentious nuclear industry. The drill is as follows. Inexpensive, surplus nuclear energy during off-peak hours is used to pump water up into Switzerland's reservoirs. Hydroelectric plant operators can then produce expensive electricity during peak hours and maximise their profits. Do profit-oriented “nuclear subsidiaries in the Alps”, as critics dub the hydropower plants, justify selling off the country's last natural mountain and river landscapes?

Limits to growth?

Proponents and opponents of hydropower development have disagreed on this fundamental question for over 30 years. The Federal Supreme Court sometimes has to intervene, as in the case of the Grimsel Pass Dam, where attempts to raise the dam wall have been blocked until now.

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 95 per cent of Switzerland's technically feasible hydropower potential is already being exploited. Although the federal government has imposed stricter environmental controls on residual water flows, Switzerland has “long passed” the critical point. The WWF adds that 60 per cent of the country's native fish and crab species have died out or are close to extinction. And yet



hundreds of hydropower upgrades and new builds are still being planned, much of these small-scale. The biggest and therefore most hotly debated of these has been earmarked for the site of the recently shrunk Trift Glacier.

Increased pressure on hydropower

Since Greina, the picture has become even more complicated. There are two new challenges. Firstly, climate change and glacial melt now mean that water run-off mainly occurs more in the spring than in the summer. Secondly, Swiss policymakers ratcheted up the pressure on hydropower by deciding in the aftermath of the Fukushima reactor disaster to phase out nuclear power and replace it with renewable energy – as part of their commitment to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Is it at all possible to gain even more from hydropower, which currently accounts for just under 60 per cent of Swiss electricity production,



without crossing the environmental red line? “Essentially, yes,” says Rolf Weingartner, professor emeritus of hydrology at the University of Berne. Weingartner has broken down the problem into its constituent parts and put them back together again in order to lend objectivity to an emotive subject.

A new role for hydropower?

Given that hydropower is virtually CO₂-neutral, it continues to play an indispensable role in preventing power shortages, particularly in winter when solar power plants are less productive. Global warming is also making us re-evaluate the importance of reservoirs, he explains, because the contribution of meltwater to run-off, mainly in the summer months, will decrease as glaciers recede. Summer water shortages will be the consequence.

In future, overall water run-off will remain more or less at current annual levels. But the seasonal distri-

bution of run-off is becoming less favourable, because both glacier melt and snowmelt are diminishing. “This means we must replace natural Alpine water sources with artificial ones,” says Weingartner. In other words, existing hydropower reservoirs can also help to deliver a sustainable approach to water management in the climate change era by providing a source of water in the hot, dry summer months for things like farm irrigation.

Meanwhile, large-scale photovoltaic plants are now being installed on the walls of dams. The solar panels at Mutsee in the canton of Glarus, for example, will produce electricity all year round because they are at high altitude above the low clouds. Consequently, hydropower has more than one role to play. “Hydropower should not only serve the purpose of generating energy but also help to provide a sustainable answer to water supply issues. This includes the environmentally responsible use of residual wa-

The Greina plateau situated between Grisons and Ticino was a turning point on the Swiss hydropower map. Conservationists prevented it from being flooded into a reservoir, scuttling a power plant project in 1986. Photo: Keystone

ter,” says Weingartner, adding that the practice of pitting environmental and economic interests against each other every time there is a new dam project in the pipeline is unhelpful. Weingartner therefore favours a new, holistic approach, not least because glacial melt due to climate change will result in over 1,000 new Alpine lakes that could potentially be used as resources. “We should take it upon ourselves to identify priority areas,” he says. The federal government should divide the Swiss Alps into different zones according to priority: energy production, environmental protection, tourism, or agriculture. This would ensure a physical separation of interests and quell controversies.

Weingartner knows that his hydro peacekeeping vision could be difficult to sustain amid the rough and tumble of Swiss realpolitik. Initially, at least. But as long as its energy consumption continues to rise, Switzerland will have to change tack sooner or later.

How Julius Maggi took kitchens by storm

Liquid seasoning, stock cubes, instant soups – Maggi, a success story that began over 150 years ago in the canton of Zurich, revolutionised eating habits worldwide.

THEODORA PETER

When 23-year-old Julius Maggi inherited his father's flour mill in 1869 in Kempthal (canton of Zurich), the milling industry was in crisis. Industrialisation and the advent of steamships and railways meant that increasing amounts of cheap grain and corn were being imported to Switzerland. Forced to come up with something new, Maggi invented a range of instant soups made from protein-rich legumes. "Leguminose" was aimed at improving public nutrition and preventing malnourishment in the Swiss workforce. However, the newfangled artificial broths failed to catch on. The lower classes still preferred potatoes and ersatz coffee, while the middle classes turned up their noses at what they viewed as tasteless slop with a curious name.

The young man's breakthrough came in 1886 with the invention of an umami-rich, plant-based liquid seasoning that immediately made the soups taste (and sell) much better. It would become world famous. Julius Maggi not only loved creating these and other products. "He also recognised the importance of marketing," says historian Annatina Tam-Seifert, who has researched the origins of the Swiss food industry. "Customers were unable to touch or smell instant food products such as these, so packaging played an important role." Maggi was pioneering in this regard. He designed the liquid seasoning's

iconic mini bottle with its yellow and red label himself. The design has barely changed ever since.

Advertising slogans written by a poet

Maggi's company was one of the first to set up its own advertising depart-

ment, relying on new innovations such as posters, signs, bonus point schemes, collectable picture cards, and tastings. The boss also penned the slogans himself at first, before hiring the then unknown poet Frank Wedekind in 1886, who obliged with the necessary rhyming jingles. Here is an example in German: Das wissen

Still an iconic design – Maggi isn't Maggi without the bottle.

Photo: Archives Historiques Nestlé, Vevey





selbst die Kinderlein: Mit Würze wird die Suppe fein. Darum holt das Gretchen munter, die Maggi-Flasche runter – which loosely translates as, “children know seasoning improves the soup, so Gretchen goes to fetch the Maggi bottle”. But the young bard quit the job after eight months because, as he wrote in a letter to his mother, he felt exploited. The collected original manuscripts of Wedekind’s ad copy are now kept at the Aargau Cantonal Library.

Maggi was already influencing tastes back then. The liquid seasoning was soon to be found in cooking recipes, including the reference works of the iconic German cookbook author Henriette Davidis. However, the exact recipe for making Maggi remains a well-guarded company secret to this day. Its basic ingredients are vegetable protein, water, salt, and sugar. Flavourings and yeast extract are also used. No lovage is included, despite many people associating its taste with Maggi. This is why German speakers often refer to the herb as “Maggi-Kraut”.

Maggi has also been known to inspire artists. Joseph Beuys used a bottle of it for his 1972 artwork “Ich kenne kein Weekend” (I know no weekend),

while painter Pablo Picasso immortalised the iconic Maggi stock cube in his 1912 “Paysage aux affiches” (Landscape with posters). Indeed, the stock cube also became a worldwide hit after being launched in 1908.

Largest Swiss landowner

Julius Maggi not only had to make his instant food appeal to consumers, he also had to win over farmers who would supply him with his raw ingredients. “He found it difficult to find enough vegetables for his products in the vicinity,” Tam-Seifert explains. The farmers first had to be convinced of the benefits of new, mechanised growing methods. They were also sceptical of the food industry. In the end, Maggi decided to grow the ingredients himself. He bought out smallholders, whom he often then appointed to work at his rapidly growing factory in Kemptthal. With over 400 hectares of fields, Maggi went on to own more land than any other private individual in Switzerland at the beginning of the 20th century. His company, meanwhile, developed independent factories and distribution networks in Germany, Austria, Italy and France.



Julius Maggi, circa 1890.

Photo: Archives Historiques Nestlé, Vevey



On the left: Factory workers wrapping Maggi bottles in white paper before delivery.

On the right: Farm workers planting vegetables near Kemptthal. Julius Maggi was one of the largest landowners of his time

Photos: Archives Historiques Nestlé, Vevey

Julius Maggi died in 1912 aged 66, after which his firm was transformed into a holding company with branches in various countries. During the Second World War, the German subsidiary was the biggest food producer in the Third Reich and a major supplier to Hitler’s armies. Regarded as a “model National Socialist operation”, the factory in Singen also used forced labour.

Maggi has belonged to food group Nestlé since 1947, and Maggi liquid seasoning is now exported to 21 countries around the world. The company also has production plants in China, Poland, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire and Mexico.

Recommended reading (in German):

– Annatina Seifert: Dosenmilch und Pulversuppen. Die Anfänge der Schweizer Lebensmittelindustrie. Verlag Hier und Jetzt, 2008.

– Alex Capus: Patriarchen. Über Bally, Lindt, Nestlé und andere Pioniere. Verlag dtv, 2007.

The Alpine villages paying outsiders to move in

Various Alpine municipalities in the canton of Valais are trying to combat depopulation. Two of these – Albinen and Zeneggen – are now offering cash incentives to attract families.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Pierre Biege sets off for work every morning in the canton of Valais, arriving in Berne two hours later. A very long commute by Swiss standards. But Biege, who runs a fashion label, is perfectly happy. “I use the time on the train to work,” he says.

Biege lives in Albinen, a small village situated 1,300 metres above sea level on a sunny south-west-facing slope near the well-known spa resort of Leukerbad. With its closely packed, sun-faded buildings, this Alpine settlement amid the pastures of the Pfyng-Finges nature reserve is regarded as quite a gem and therefore enjoys protected status.

Living in a tiny house

Biege lives in a so-called tiny house on the edge of Albinen with his wife and two children. Comprising a mere 27 square metres, this abode is the only custom-built, downsized living space in Albinen. Building a tiny house is not an easy thing to do in Switzerland, given that micro homes fall outside the normal statutory framework. Many municipalities have banned tiny houses, not least because of their visual impact. Albinen, on the other hand, gave the green light to Biege’s unusual house. After many years of living and working in different Swiss cities, Biege has consequently returned to the village of his childhood. “Our dream has become reality,” he says.

Albinen proved amenable on account of its concerted efforts to attract families who are seeking to

build or buy a new home. The village wants to stop the exodus of residents and bolster its population, which has been slowly falling since the 1940s – from 370 back then to the current figure of 250.

Since 2018, Albinen has tried to attract new inhabitants by paying a housing grant to every individual moving into the village. Adults receive 25,000 Swiss francs each, provided

Beat Jost, president of Albinen municipality: “We received inquiries from all over the world.”

Photo: Keystone



they are aged under 45. They receive an additional 10,000 francs for every child they bring with them. That makes a grand total of 70,000 francs for a family of four, for example. This cash is contingent on recipients using

the money towards the cost of buying, building or renovating a property worth at least 200,000 francs. New residents must also remain in Albinen for at least 10 years – otherwise they have to pay the money back.

An initiative by the young – for the young

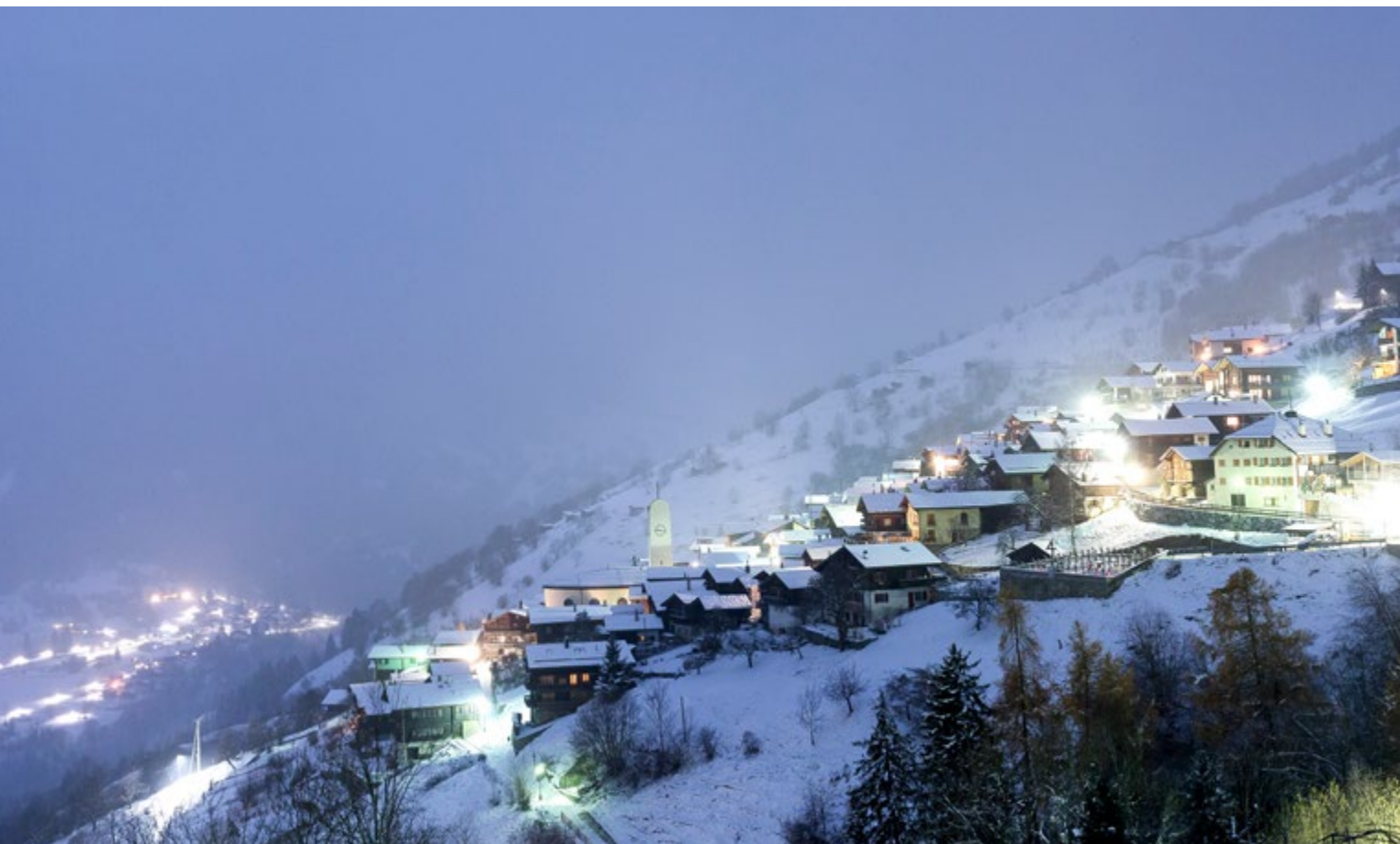
This proactive approach to enticing families is down to the initiative of a group of young residents, whose efforts have clearly paid off. Since the scheme began in 2018, 19 grant applications have been submitted, accounting for a total of 38 adults and 11 children. The young incomers – individuals, couples and families – hail either from the canton of Valais or from other parts of Switzerland. Albinen has now approved cash payments totalling 880,000 francs, facilitating 6.6 million francs of investment in the process.

“Around 70 per cent of people in the canton of Valais live in their own home. Only 30 per cent rent flats or houses,” says the mayor of Albinen,

Albinen allows alternative housing: the micro house of Pierre Biege and his family.

Photo provided





Beat Jost. “Hence, it made perfect sense for us to promote home ownership, not least because the village has a significant amount of unused property and building land at its disposal.”

Concerns and misgivings

Despite the settlement scheme having proved a success to date, not everyone in Albinen was pleased at first. News of the village’s unusual plan spread far beyond Switzerland. “People contacted us from all around the world,” says Jost, adding that much of the foreign media coverage was misleading – to the extent that people from abroad arrived in the village believing they could get free cash and an apartment for nothing on top. In view of the many enquiries as well as the random visitors wandering around Albinen, some villagers feared that the floodgates would open. The municipality therefore published a letter in various languages, explaining that only foreign nationals with the necessary residence permit would have access to the scheme.

The furore seems to have died down since. But a new challenge awaits: Albinen no longer has its own school. “Eight out of ten queries that we receive from people considering a move to Albinen relate to this very issue,” says Jost. Any village school that the canton reopens must be of a minimum size, which is why the municipality is looking at the possibility of establishing an alternative type of school that would also be accessible to children in the valley below.

Cash incentives also elsewhere

Zeneggen is situated around 40 kilometres from Albinen. Its village school remains open for now, but the upper grades risk being shut down due to a lack of pupils. Although Zeneggen has not seen the same depopulation as Albinen in recent years, most new residents have no children. Now the village is resorting to cash incentives like its counterpart. Every family that moves to Zeneggen will receive 3,934 francs per child. (The village postcode is 3934.)

The currently very wintry Albinen municipality, 1,300 metres above sea level, is particularly concerned about the future of its village school. Photo: Keystone

Fernando Heynen is a father of five and one of the village councillors in Zeneggen, hence he has a stake in trying both to save the school and to attract new residents. “If the school closes, it will be even harder to get young families to move here,” he says. Unlike Albinen, Zeneggen only has a small number of properties for sale at any one time. So tenants are the answer. The village is currently building a complex comprising rental apartments designed for families. We already have expressions of interest – and we hope to start paying out cash awards soon, says Heynen.

Tiny house attracting attention

Meanwhile, interest in Albinen’s grant scheme continues unabated. In particular, the Biege family’s dwelling has pricked the curiosity of possible new residents. Pierre Biege would welcome anyone moving in next door with their own tiny house, but there is no sign of this happening yet. Irrespective of this, he and his wife are pleased to have moved to Albinen.



The public has voted to give nurses more than just a round of applause

Swiss nurses want better working conditions, more autonomy and greater recognition. The public has listened to them. The “Strong healthcare” initiative, championed by the Swiss Professional Association of Nurses (SBK-ASI), scored a historic referendum victory at the end of November. Implementation is the next challenge.

EVELINE RUTZ

“Applause is not enough” rang the slogan a few months ago, as nurses campaigned for better working conditions. The majority of Swiss voters share this view, after some 61 per cent approved the “Strong healthcare” initiative on 28 November 2021 (see also “Swiss Review” 5/2021). The Swiss Abroad were also clearly in favour, with 58.3 voting yes.

This result is remarkable in a number of ways. A trade union proposal has succeeded at the ballot box for the first-

ever time at national level. It is also only the 24th popular initiative that has been passed since the birth of the modern federal Swiss state, attracting an unusually high level of support and democratic participation. Voter turnout was 65.3 per cent – the fourth highest since 1971, when the electorate approved the introduction of women’s suffrage. The Covid-19 Act was another reason why so many people voted – this matter was also included on the ballot paper after being the subject of heated debate.

Covid numbers began to surge again before the polls, reminding voters of the important job that nurses do. This contributed to the resounding yes vote. Photo: Keystone



Yes in almost all cantons

Early opinion polls had shown that the public was very sympathetic to nurses' demands, but no one was sure whether the proposal would achieve the necessary cantonal majority – often a stumbling block in plebiscites. But the initiative easily cleared this hurdle. All cantons voted in favour apart from Appenzell Innerrhoden.

There was a general consensus that healthcare reforms are necessary. More and more nurses are reaching breaking point. Many are leaving the profession early, often at a young age. HR departments are finding it hard to recruit people – the additional nurses that Switzerland's ageing society will need in future. Without effective reforms, the shortfall in nurses is therefore likely to be around 65,000 by 2030, warn experts.

Pandemic brought the situation into focus

The "Strong healthcare" initiative, launched by the Swiss Professional Association of Nurses (SBK-ASI) back in 2017, also owes its resounding success to Covid. The media have reported extensively on the situation in hospitals and care homes, reminding the public of the job that nurses and carers do around the clock. Many people now realise that they or their loved ones may also need looking after one day. The situation with Covid worsened again in the weeks running up to the vote. Case numbers soared – just as reports of the new Omicron variant were about to come through. And by the time of the referendum, hospitals were saying they would probably soon have to resort to triage and make deeply uncomfortable life-or-death decisions on whom to treat.

Esteem and appreciation

"In moments like this, nurses demonstrate to each and every one of us how important they are," said Health Minister Alain Berset on the day of the vote. The emphatic yes at the polls was a collective show of esteem and appreciation, he added. Nurses celebrated the result, with SBK-ASI Managing Director Yvonne Ribi (see "Top pick", page 31) hailing public solidarity. The measures that had been passed would help to address the nursing crisis, she said. "What we now expect from politicians is that they take our wishes seriously and act swiftly."

No time to lose

Normally, the Federal Council would now make a proposal on how to implement the initiative. But the initiative com-

Voters back Covid-19 measures – again

The electorate has endorsed the pandemic policy of the Federal Council and parliament for a second time, with 62 per cent of voters giving their backing to the Covid-19 Act, which governs things like the Covid-19 certificate requirement and financial support for businesses. The "Fifth Switzerland" was even more clearly in favour, with 68.5 per cent voting yes. Commentators said it was a vote of confidence for the government's handling of the pandemic, after what was a fractious referendum campaign at times. The result was more emphatic than in June, when the Covid-19 Act was first put to the people. The yes vote accounted for 60.2 per cent then. Switzerland is the only country in the world that allows people to vote directly on measures to curb the pandemic. The referendum on the Covid-19 Act came after numerous rallies against the measures, some of them violent.

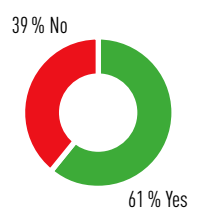
No drawing of lots to appoint judges

The Justice Initiative was decisively rejected by 68.1 per cent of the electorate. All cantons said no to the idea of drawing lots in future to choose the members of the Federal Supreme Court (FSC), with 65.3 per cent of Swiss Abroad also voting against. Political parties will therefore continue to influence the process of appointing FSC judges. Judges in Switzerland must belong to a political party, to which they pay an annual subscription fee.

(ERU)

mittee has suggested a different approach to get the ball rolling quicker: start investing in education and further training as soon as possible (as parliament unequivocally agreed) and just leave the remaining points to the Federal Council. New rules already established by parliament in line with a counterproposal to the initiative, governing when nurses can prescribe and invoice treatments themselves in future, should not be up for renegotiation either, say the referendum winners, adding that their introduction should not be delayed. The Social Democrats have submitted a motion to this effect. The Centre has not ruled out giving the motion its backing. One of its National Councilors, Ruth Humbel (canton of Aargau), nevertheless told Radio SRF that such a solution will also take time. "If everything goes well with this first, uncontroversial part, I can see the legislation coming into force in two to three years." Not so fast, say the centre-right and right-wing parties. Parliament made compromises in order to get the authors of the initiative to step back, noted FDP National

The people gave a resounding yes to the strong healthcare initiative. The "Fifth Switzerland" vote was similar with 58 per cent in favour.



Councillor Matthias Jauslin (canton of Aargau). These compromises are up for debate again. “The legislative process is at square one,” he said. Under the terms of the initiative, both chambers have four years to complete this process.



Health Minister Alain Berset sees the people's resounding yes as an expression of appreciation and gratitude towards the nursing staff.

Photo: Keystone

Unresolved questions on staffing and pay

The Federal Council's role in this two-track process is to flesh out the additional points within 18 months and, in particular, provide a roadmap to ensure greater job satisfaction and longevity in the nursing profession. For example, the federal government will have to address the issue of wages including overtime pay for night and Sunday shifts, not to mention specify nurse-to-patient ratios. Delivering solutions that command majority support will be anything but easy. Yvonne Ribic said the initiative committee would not sit back and watch parliament water down the initiative. “We will not let up,” warned the SBK-ASI boss. Meanwhile, opponents of the initiative have vowed to scrutinise costs. They will hold the Yes camp to the promise that these will not balloon.

Role of the cantons

When and how the proposals are to take effect not only depends on the government, however. The Federal Council only has the authority to provide guidelines. Responsibility for implementation lies with the cantons and partly with the municipalities. This federal structure makes it more difficult to push through reforms quickly and consistently. Hence, it could still take a few years before nurses notice any tangible improvement.

Switzerland in figures

Noisy cities, empty hotel beds

60

Geneva is Switzerland's noisiest city: 33 per cent of all its apartments are exposed to more than 60 decibels. That is equivalent to running a lawnmower permanently outside your front door. Lugano and Lausanne come in at number two and three, respectively. The cities in the German-speaking region are quieter. Berne is almost suspiciously quiet, with a mere 4.6 per cent of apartments exposed to a high level of noise.

279,248

People need to recover from all that noise. We wondered: if everyone in Switzerland wanted to holiday in a Swiss hotel for a year, would there be enough room? Swiss hotels have a total of 279,248 beds, which is enough to guarantee everyone almost two weeks' holiday.

72

The hotels would welcome a massive influx of tourists from within Switzerland, as visitors aren't coming from outside the country. In 2020, room occupancy was a mere 28 per cent, so 72 per cent of rooms on average stood empty. The last time that Swiss hotels were so underutilised was in the 1950s.

11:1

Spending more holidays within Switzerland would bring city and rural dwellers closer together. The notorious urban-rural divide would diminish. The rural communities claim the jumped-up city dwellers are imposing their political will on the country. This assertion has been put to the test and we discovered that, out of the 12 last hotly contested popular votes, the “rural side” has come through 11 times, compared to just once for the urban voters. Don't always believe what you hear.

41

Is this the place to comment on “Swiss Review”? Here goes: air cargo in Switzerland fell off a cliff in 2020. In April 2020, it contracted by 68% and 41% on average over the year. The post was particularly affected, as it is transported in the cargo hold on passenger flights. If the planes are grounded, the post will be days, weeks, even months late. We realise that you will have noticed this.

RESEARCH: MARC LETTAU

“All she wants is fairness”

In 1959, lawyer Iris von Roten lent a new and ultimately successful direction to female equality in Switzerland with her book “Frauen im Laufgitter” (Women in the playpen).

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“I wanted it all. Wild adventures to appealing, faraway places. Daring encounters. Independence. Freedom. Life in all its glory,” said the Basel-based lawyer Iris von Roten in a 1979 interview, when asked what she dreamed about as a young girl. Born in Basel on 2 April 1917, von Roten began rebelling against female stereotypes when she was at grammar school in Zurich. She studied jurisprudence to secure an independent life, but then threw herself into journalism with great conviction. “Writing a good article is more important to me than sleeping or eating.” But this elegant young woman was no bluestocking, and an encounter with Valais lawyer and aspiring politician Peter von Roten, who was one year older, marked the beginning of a love story which, through its highs and lows, provides one of the 20th century’s most fascinating examples of the stormy push-and-pull between man and woman. Although each afforded the other complete freedom, Iris von Roten converted her husband to her radical, forthright brand of feminism. And more than anyone else, it was her husband who encouraged and supported her in 1948 when she began to write a book in the USA. This work, a tour de force demanding complete legal, political and sexual equality for women, was published in 1958 under the provocatively humorous title “Frauen im Laufgitter”. “The book is a masterpiece,” said Peter von Roten. “Her thirst for equality is simply irrepressible. All she wants is fairness.” However, for Switzerland and not least for the meek women’s movement of the time, the book came 50 years too early. Despite pleasing a small minority of fans such as Laure Wyss, “Frauen im Laufgitter” mostly attracted public scorn and hatred.

This was a traumatic experience, but Iris von Roten was not deterred: she published her “Frauenrechtsbrevier” (Guide to women’s rights) in 1959 before stepping away from the issue for good. Von Roten subsequently drove to Turkey, North Africa, and the south of France in her own car, and in 1965 published a travelogue about her adventures called “Vom Bosphorus zum Euphrat. Türken und Türkei” (From the Bosphorus to the Euphrates. Turkey and the Turks). She later flew to Brazil, Sri Lanka and other countries – until the tour-

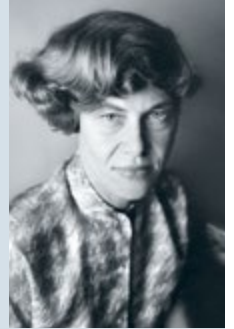
ist crowds got too much for her. In the end, she turned to painting and decided to create 100 flower still lifes, of which she ultimately completed 56. Von Roten was an uncompromising aesthete like no Swiss feminist before or after. “I have an unquenchable yearning for beauty every day,” she confessed.

Worn down by illness and insomnia, Iris von Roten committed suicide on 11 September 1990, half a year before “Frauen im Laufgitter” was rereleased and became a bestseller. This was her final radical expression of the very independence that she had championed all her life. “Just as a guest has to know when it is time to depart, a person should rise from the table of life while there is still time,” she wrote in a farewell letter.

Von Roten, whose feminism was neither bigoted nor dogmatic, has long since become a Swiss icon of women’s rights. In 2007, she and her husband were rehabilitated in Wilfried Meichtry’s wonderful biography “Verliebte Feinde” (Enemies in love). The book’s adaptation into a film in 2012 attracted fresh interest in the couple. Camille Logoz also published “Femmes sous surveillance”, a French translation of “Frauen im Laufgitter”, in 2021.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Iris von Roten, “Frauen im Laufgitter”, eFeF-Verlag, 2014

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH



“If we understand ‘interests’ to mean self-assertion and personal fulfilment at the expense of others, then political equality for women is directed against the privileges and, yes, the interests of men. Nevertheless, full democracy is also in the interests of men when viewed from a wider perspective. Having to stop and listen now and again runs counter to male self-assertion. But that is good medicine, because the obligation to listen brings him down a notch, making him more engaging and sympathetic.”



In the shadow of the largest railway tunnel in the world

The Gotthard Base Tunnel links Erstfeld (UR) and Bodio (TI) and stretches for 57 kilometres. It is the longest railway tunnel in the world. Its inauguration, in 2016, turned the spotlight on the two municipalities at either end. But the anticipated economic boom never arrived. Report.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

As they exit the little station of Erstfeld, visitors step out onto the historic road of the Gotthard Pass. On the left, the SBB staff canteen, which used to be open 24 hours per day. On the right, the Frohsinn hotel. At one time this hotel recorded 12,000 overnight stays per year, but nowadays it is closed to travellers. There is nowhere to stay overnight in this little commune of Uri, which saw the growth of a village of labourers and railway workers during the construction of the first Gotthard Pass railway tunnel, opened in 1882. “Erstfeld steht und fällt mit den SBB” – the commune lives and falls with the SBB – says Pia Tresch-Walker, the mayor. “I had no doubt that the opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel posed a risk to us. We have lost almost everything now. The number of jobs has fallen with the opening of the tunnel and Erstfeld has ended up a provincial town once again.” What’s more, the SBB’s hold on the commune’s land has restricted its real estate development, a situation that Erstfeld is trying to change by negotiating with the SBB with support from the canton.

Before 2016, the first year of the Gotthard Base Tunnel, Erstfeld and its large train depot welcomed over 600 SBB employees. Today, the centre for maintenance and security for the tunnel employs 80 people and the station only around 50. The commune has witnessed the closure of several of its restaurants and shops. The former mayor of Erstfeld, Paul Jans, knows this story off by heart. In 1949, his father bought the Frohsinn hotel; Jans went on to manage it himself until 2014. The Gotthard Pass line saw 300 trains go by per day. “The opening of the first tunnel brought running water and street numbering,” recalls Jans. There was at least one SBB employee in every family. The engineers who came to live in Uri took up roles in the communal council or on the school boards, contributing

their skills to the communities. “Today, the SBB doesn’t accept apprentices in Erstfeld,” laments Pia Tresch-Walker, whose husband is a train driver.

An invisible tunnel

At Erstfeld, the northern gate of the construction is blocked by barriers. Paul Jans takes us to visit it. From a distance, we can make out the sharp angles of the concrete opening designed by Ticino architect Flora Ruchat-Roncati. In fact, it is also possible to go to see the trains pass by from an access gallery located in Amsteg, which houses a special windowed area. But Covid-19 has put the brakes on this tourist activity.

In all honesty, hopes of prosperity for Erstfeld were extinguished from the moment the construction site was opened for the base tunnel by Alp Transit, a subsidiary of the SBB. Engineers and workers were grouped together in a space located outside the commune, further north. “It was like a sort of barracks, with 350 beds and a canteen. The workers, some of whom came from Austria, worked flat out for four days, then returned to their homes to rest,” explains Paul Jans. All Erstfeld received from this presence was a share of the withholding taxes taken from the workers’ salaries.

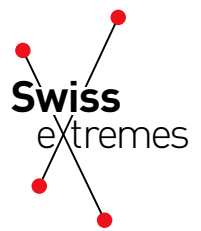
What’s more, the new railway line through the Alps does not even connect Erstfeld to Ticino. To get to Bellinzona, you first have to travel back towards Flüelen. But this doesn’t stop mayor Pia Tresch-Walker from using the connection approximately 15 times per year. On Sunday, the town’s inhabitants also head to Bellinzona to make the most of a low-cost buffet on offer there. The train takes them there in just 36 minutes.

What changes beyond the tunnel? “The mentality is more relaxed, the food is good, and the wine, too,” says the mayor, who also likes to take

Erstfeld: Pia Tresch-Walker, president of Erstfeld municipality (above left) believes Erstfeld has gone back to being a provincial village since the tunnel opened. Admittedly, it wasn’t exactly vibrant on the day of our visit.

Bodio: Stefano Imelli (left), the president of Biasca, wants to see at least some fast trains stopping in the municipality. The working day of train driver Cédric Jacob (below) still centres on the tunnel: he transports the maintenance staff to the tunnel tube at night.

Photos: Stéphane Herzog



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful? In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. Today: at the entrance to the world’s longest railway tunnel.

the “Bergstrecke”, the historic route and its 15 km alpine tunnel. She finds the people of Ticino more combative than on this side of the Alps. “In Ticino, there are strikes. Here, we wait.” Nevertheless, thanks to negotiations with the SBB, the mayor seems confident things will change. An agreement would allow the commune to win back the SBB land. It notably has plans to construct a bed & breakfast in Erstfeld station, and guarantees on maintaining SBB jobs are also up for discussion.

Bodio would like to see the train stop at Biasca

In Bodio, the shutters of the *Albergo Stazione* are lowered. “I close them to keep out the carbon dust,” explains Tiziana Guzzi-Batzu, the manager, pointing towards a nearby factory. We can hear the continuous whistle of heavy goods vehicles moving along the A2 motorway. Here in the Leventina, the arrival of the “Alp Transit”, as the locals have named the base tunnel, sparked hope. The construction was to help in the uphill road to recovery after two economic setbacks: the inception of the Gotthard motorway in 1980 and the closure in 1994 of the Monteforno steel plant. “But there was no upturn,” states Stefano Imelli, mayor of Bodio since 2016, who nevertheless has fond memories of the celebration for the tunnel’s inauguration attended by François Hollande and Angela Merkel.

The construction site for the base tunnel worked like a ghetto, recalls Marco Costi, the mayor of Bodio from 2000 until 2016. “We received very little. The municipality had to give up several hectares of land to the Confederation. There was smog, dust and noise.” During this period two bakeries closed. Long gone is the time when the commune boasted the highest number of restaurants per inhabitant in Ticino. The only positive point is that the pollution and noise levels have dropped. Imelli remembers the traffic on the Gotthard Pass. Three walkways allowed children to cross the stream of cars to go to school. There are many factory workers in the industrial park just above the village. They come

from northern Italy and Sardinia. Their life is punctuated by the events organised by Catholic associations, scouts and the football club. So, life in the commune is flourishing. “I have never heard people talking about us and them,” underlines the mayor.

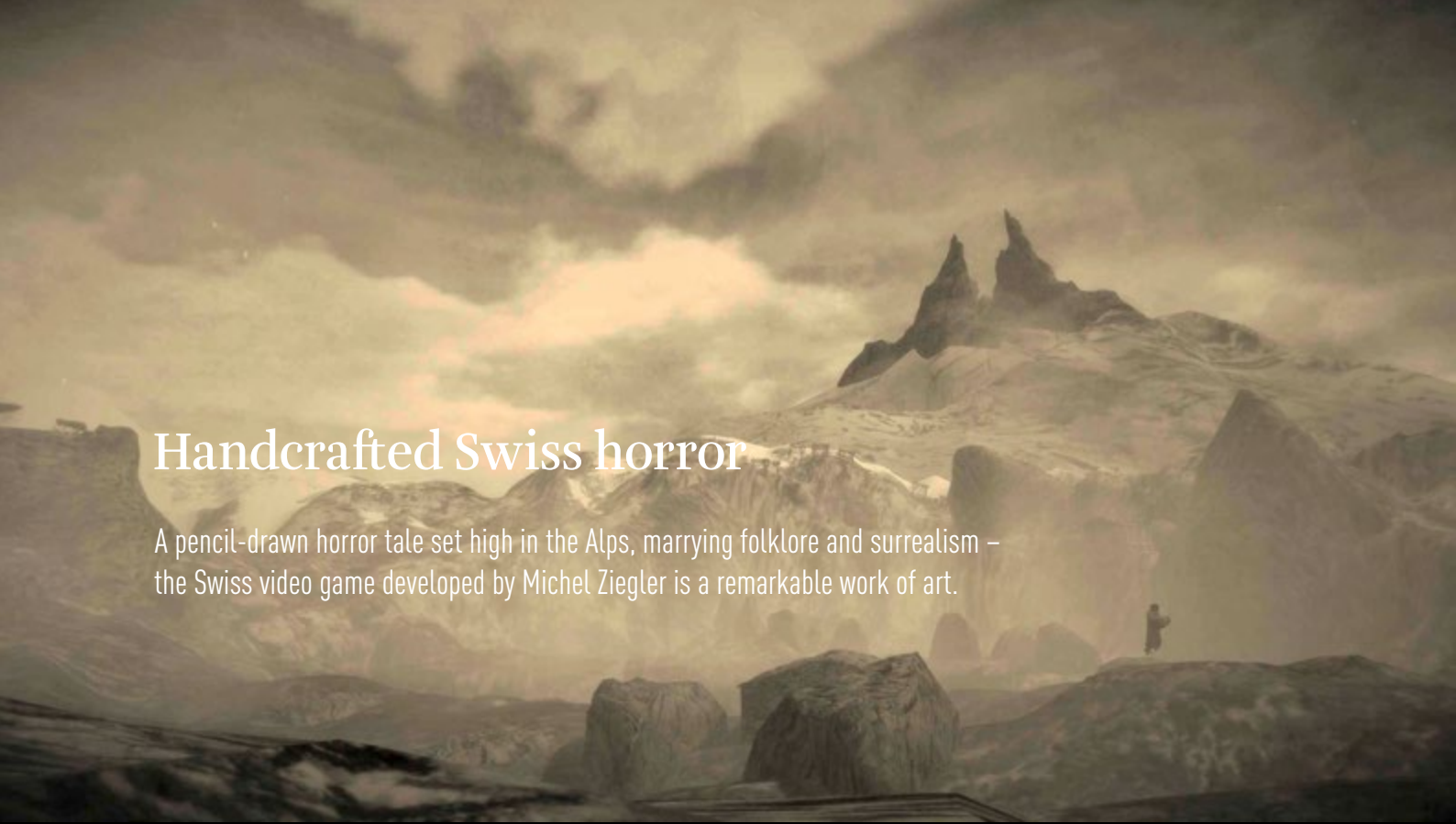
The absence of a tunnel symbol

Bodio, the town which already had to fight for its station to be reopened (which happened in 2018), is now asking for the SBB to permit certain high-speed trains to stop in Biasca (and no longer only Bellinzona). “As soon as there is a station, something happens,” explains Marco Costi. Interest in the north seems low amongst the people of Bodio. Imelli does not even know the mayor of Erstfeld. Has the base tunnel attracted tourists? “What is lacking is a symbol for this tunnel,” opines Costi, who mentions the abandoned project of an arch which would have overlooked the motorway and the railway.

For some, the tunnel is part of daily life. Take Cédric Jacob for example, an SBB train driver who transports technical employees to the heart of the two tracks that make up the base tunnel. His train, 22 metres long, holds an air-conditioned living unit, with a refectory, a coffee machine and a WC. There is also a workshop and a crane. Maintenance is done during the night. The workers and engineers work in temperatures ranging from 32 to 44 degrees, depending on the season. And the humidity levels are very high. Because of the risks everyone has to be on the alert. “SBB professionals have developed skills here that are unique in the world,” considers Jacob. Having lived in Ticino since 2016, this native of the canton of Valais has a good understanding of his adopted region. “The locals are mountain people. They have learnt to live in an environment which can be harsh and where space is limited.”

The north portal of the 57 km long Gotthard Base Tunnel at Erstfeld, with the Alps towering above.
Photo: Keystone





Handcrafted Swiss horror

A pencil-drawn horror tale set high in the Alps, marrying folklore and surrealism – the Swiss video game developed by Michel Ziegler is a remarkable work of art.

RAINER SIGL

Fair-weather visitors to the Alps know little about the darker side of Europe's most important mountain range. Many who live high up on the pastures could, on the other hand, tell you stories that would freeze your blood – countless myths and legends that often reveal a sinister wilderness above the treeline.

These grim tales are precisely what inspired the 39-year-old Lucerne-based artist and game developer Michel Ziegler to devote six and a half years to creating “Mundaun” – a video game that was released in spring 2021 and went on to scoop “Best Swiss Game of the Year” at the Swiss Game Awards in November.

“Mundaun” is a first-person horror adventure seen through the eyes of the main character, who is on the trail of a hidden secret in a secluded spot of the Swiss Alps. Following the mysterious death of his grandfather in a fire, the protagonist returns to the place where he spent his childhood, high above a cloud-covered valley under the gaze of twin mountain peaks. His grandfather's hut, nestled amid freshly mown pastures, is the starting

point of an adventure that quickly transitions from rustic idyll into surreal, scary and mythical mountain environment.

A world in sepia

The game has a unique atmosphere on account of its completely hand-drawn graphics. Ziegler has transported every texture, every scenic element, and every character from pencil into a three-dimensional world. This gives the game a distinctive sepia-toned feel that harks back to old photographs and black-and-white films.

Ziegler says he took inspiration from the rawness of nature, from old myths and tales, from photo albums and archives documenting Alpine life in Grisons, and, not least, from the old stables and houses of Platenga, a tiny hamlet in the Surselva region, where he spent his childhood holidays. Many locations – the little chapel, for example – have been taken directly from real life, he adds. The voice acting is also completely in Romansh, translated into subtitles. This, the graphics and an oppressive atmosphere underscored by the game's excellent music

“GAMES” Exhibition at the Forum of Swiss History in Schwyz

Most of us will have heard of Fortnite, Mario Bros. and Minecraft. Little wonder, given that 2.5 billion people play video games worldwide. The “Games” exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the 50-year history of electronic games. It traces the historical and technical development of video games and also explores aspects that are perceived as a concern. In addition, dedicated pods allow visitors to try out the games for themselves. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed on Mondays. www.forumschwyz.ch/games

and sound effects are what lend “Mundaun” its singular quality.

Seven hours of puzzles

“Mundaun” is by no means a walking simulator, that is, a game focused on aesthetics, with little in the way of action. The game offers a remarkable array of things to do. The gameplay, almost seven hours long, involves solving a myriad of puzzles and exploring a world of notable richness and scale. You can fight or bypass monsters. You can collect wood, water and coffee powder to make a brew that acts as an emotional pick-me-up. You can slide downhill through the snow on a toboggan. “Mundaun” is also a mesmerising horror story that builds tension right to the end.

Funding was key

Ziegler began working exclusively on the game, more or less on his own, in autumn 2014. It was only at the end of the development stage that he received assistance from the US-based independent video game publisher MWM Interactive.

The game’s backstory certainly has little in common with meteoric solo hits such as the legendary indie game “Minecraft” by Markus “Notch” Persson. After studying IT, Ziegler only got round to completing an additional degree in illustration in his late twenties. Access to development grants allowed him to finish his idiosyncratic project. He received a total of 120,000 Swiss francs from various sources over a number of years.

Without this funding and without the Swiss arts council Pro Helvetia helping him to attend the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco for example, a solo developer like Ziegler would have found it all but impossible to get a foothold in the gaming market.

The project itself was full of incredible highs and lows, he says. From a gamer point of view, Ziegler’s work has paid off, offering something which no one has in fact seen before. “Mundaun” is not only an impressive work of art, but also an entertaining horror game in its own right. One can only hope it attracts as wide an international audience as possible despite its almost radical local character.

RAINER SIGL IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST BASED IN VIENNA. ONE OF HIS SPECIALIST AREAS IS VIDEO GAMES.





Migros thinks the unthinkable

Migros has never sold any wine, beer or spirits since opening its first store almost 100 years ago. This could soon change. In June, the Migros cooperative's 2.2 million members will vote on ending the supermarket's no-alcohol policy.

THEODORA PETER

No alcohol or tobacco on its supermarket shelves? Outdated, say some. Part of the DNA of Switzerland's largest retail company, say others. Migros founder Gottfried Duttweiler (1888–1962) specified a ban on alcohol in the cooperative's articles of association in 1925. Although he himself had a penchant for wine and cigars, Duttweiler decided against selling these lucrative items in the interests of public health. Instead, he managed to get non-alcoholic beverages such as apple juice to sell like crazy by producing his own and then slashing prices. One can only speculate as to whether the former Migros boss would continue to ban beer and wine in this day and age. Sound recordings from the 1950s seem to suggest he had his doubts.

Alcohol already available online

Nowadays, Migros already circumvents its own ban by selling beer, wine and spirits via its official online shop, in Migrolino stores at railway and petrol stations, and at subsidiary Denner. Acquired by Migros in 2007, budget supermarket Denner is Switzerland's second-biggest wine retailer after Coop. This adds up to a lot of money. In total, consumers in Switzerland spent some 2.6 billion Swiss francs on alcohol in 2020 – this corresponds to around 8.6 per cent of all sales in the food and drink sector. It is unclear how much more Migros would earn from selling alcohol in its supermarkets. Sceptics point out that alcohol at Migros could hit sales at Denner.

Blue Cross, an NGO dedicated to preventing and treating alcohol and drug abuse, has criticised plans to end the voluntary abstinence. It believes the ban acts as a firewall for dry alcoholics, who it says are in constant danger of relapsing when they walk past shelves of alcohol. Migros risks losing its reputation as a socially responsible company, it says.

Unique selling point

Marketing expert Thomas Wildberger, who was behind the retail giant's "Migros belongs to the people" PR campaign, also has concerns. Choosing not to sell alcohol and tobacco is a unique selling point that has made Migros popular, he said in a newspaper interview: "The public loves Migros precisely for this point of difference." The supermarket would be well advised not to just give that away, he says.

In any event, the last word is still to come. In June, the retailer will let its 2.2 million cooperative members decide in a referendum whether to lift the self-imposed prohibition. The ten regional cooperative committees voted in favour of holding this plebiscite. Changing the articles of association requires a two-thirds majority in every region. Only then would Migros begin selling beer, wine and spirits from 2023 onwards.



Himself a bon vivant, Gottlieb Duttweiler (1888–1962), seen here in front of a Migros store in Oerlikon (canton of Zurich) in 1960, inserted the prohibition into the company's articles of association.

You can buy almost anything at Switzerland's largest retailer – except alcohol and tobacco. Photo: Keystone

Popular online language courses for young people to be repeated

Last year was the first time the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) offered online language courses to young Swiss Abroad aged 15 to 25. The courses were so popular that the OSA intends to offer them again this year.

Intensive two-week courses in German or French are available to young people aged between 15 and 25. Online teaching will give them the opportunity to learn a language or improve their language skills in an effective but creative way together with other young Swiss from all corners of the world, in a fun and social atmosphere.

The language courses will take place from 14 to 25 March 2022 and from 11 to 22 July 2022 and will be run by qualified teachers. With “Switzerland” as the dedicated theme, participants will be able to acquaint themselves with one of the official Swiss languages from the comfort of their own home, thus nurturing an attachment to their home country even if they live far away.

For further details on all OSA Youth Service offers as well as the relevant application forms, visit our website at www.swisscommunity.org > Youth offers.

MARIE BLOCH



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The “Rütli of the Fifth Switzerland” celebrates 30 years of existence

A small commemoration took place in Brunnen (SZ) at Lake Lucerne in November in honour of the Area for the Swiss Abroad set up in 1991. It represents a piece of home for all Swiss living abroad.

The 5,400 square metre area on the shores of Lake Lucerne is a place of “great emotional significance”, said Alex Hauenstein, at the celebration on 18 November 2021. Hauenstein, President of the Area for the Swiss Abroad foundation, recalled how many Swiss all over the world have a connection to the square: many of them contributed financially to the purchase of this small piece of Switzerland. The location is often referred to as the “Rütli of the Fifth Switzerland” due to its symbolism.

Petra Steimen, President of Schwyz cantonal government, also emphasised this significance in her address. She spoke of a “point of reference” and a “place of longing” for Swiss Abroad. Irène May, mayor of Ingenbohl (Brunnen, SZ, is in Ingenbohl municipality), also pointed out that the square contributes to the quality of life of Brunnen’s inhabitants too: children fly their kites, older people walk by the lake and partygoers let off steam there.

The Area was opened in May 1991, the 700th year of the Confederation. The choice of Brunnen as a location is also significant, as it is prominent in the emergence of Switzerland as a country. Leading figures from Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden met there a number of times. The gradual establishment and development of the Confederation thus began in Brunnen. The Federal Charter drafted in Brunnen on 9 December 1315, known as the “Morgartenbrief” in Swiss history books, bears witness to that



Petra Föllmi plays the accordion – and President Alex Hauenstein (left) and his deputy Norbert Mettler (right) appear in good spirits.

Photo: Josias Clavadetscher

At the event, Foundation President Alex Hauenstein also expressed his hope that the square in Brunnen would continue to represent the allegiance of Swiss Abroad to the Confederation and their connection to their home country as well as uniting the Swiss living in Switzerland with their fellow citizens in near and more far-flung foreign locations (PD/MUL)

www.auslandschweizerplatz.ch and revue.link/brunnen

What are FinTech companies?

Question: “I am a Swiss Abroad in France and have heard about FinTech company Yapeal in the media. What are FinTech companies? Are they also supervised by the Swiss authority? And what services can Yapeal offer me?”

Answer: FinTech stands for “financial technologies”. It is a collective term for modern technologies in financial services. FinTech companies offer financial services via the internet and mobile devices.

FINMA, the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority, supervises and monitors all the financial sector areas in its role as Swiss financial regulator. Financial services provided via digital channels are also subject to the FINMA regulatory framework. The FinTech licence as per Art. 1b of the Banking Act came into effect on 1 January 2019. FINMA is responsible for granting FinTech licences.

These licences enable public deposits of up to 100 million Swiss francs or crypto-based assets, provided they are not invested and no interest is paid on them. FinTech companies are subject to the Anti-Money Laundering Act, as are all other financial intermediaries.

According to Art. 1b para. 3 of the Banking Act, these companies expressly require adequate risk management and effective internal control mechanisms that, inter alia, ensure compliance with legal and corporate requirements (compliance).

Swiss Abroad often find it difficult to maintain their financial ties with Switzerland. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) has spent years working to change that. The new partnership with FinTech company Yapeal, which is recognised by FINMA, is part of the OSA’s ongoing commitment, in addition to the partnership with the Banque Cantonale de Genève (BCGE),

which has been in force for some years. These are two different service types: BCGE is a bank offering Swiss Abroad the full range of banking services. Yapeal, on the other hand, is a FinTech company focused on processing international payments and initially offering its services to those countries bordering Switzerland. A further 15 countries will be added to that group in the first half of 2022.

Jana Maletic, OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT



Yapeal offering:

yapeal.ch/auslandschweizer

Further information from FINMA:

revue.link/finma



Young, fresh, playful and forward-looking – new logo and website for the FYSA

Although the pandemic has played havoc with its schedule in recent months, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) has been anything but idle – using the extra time to work behind the scenes on a future-proofing project. This result was visible for all to see in January 2022, when the FYSA unveiled its new logo and website – showcasing a young, fresh, playful feel as part of its first visual revamp in over ten years.

Free spots on the summer holiday camps

You are warmly invited to visit the new website at www.sjas.ch and take a look at our offers for the year ahead. There are still a few free spots available on the FYSA summer holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad aged eight to 14. Taking place between the end of June and the end of August 2022, these camps are an opportunity for children to get to know Switzerland and its culture – and have a great time. Visit the new website for further details.

LOÏC ROTH


 Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer
 Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
 The foundation for young swiss abroad
 Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)

Alpenstrasse 24, 3006 Berne, Switzerland

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"The job as language assistant is perfect for me"

Isabelle Bucher, a Swiss living abroad, uses her English skills as a language assistant at a Swiss upper secondary school. Her class benefits from the young teacher from Australia – and she herself is getting to know Switzerland better.

INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

In Swiss upper secondary schools and vocational schools, native speakers enrich language lessons. They not only teach language skills, but also cultural aspects of their country of origin.

These language assistants, usually young students from abroad, come to work through the Movetia agency in cooperation with educationsuisse. Isabelle Bucher is one of them: The Swiss Abroad from Australia is currently working as a language assistant at the Kantonsschule am Burggraben in St. Gallen.

Isabelle Bucher, you grew up in Australia.

What were your motives for gaining work experience in Switzerland?

I was looking for a new, challenging job in Switzerland, also to get to know the education system better. The job as a language assistant, which I found through Movetia, is perfect for me. It allows me to gain experience in teaching English outside of Australia. At the same time, I have enough time to finish my bachelor's degree. I also like living in Switzerland.

So you are still studying?

Yes, I am completing my Bachelor of Social Science and Behavioural Studies online, which includes a lot of social pedagogy and psychology, at the University of Melbourne.

Were you able to settle in quickly at the Kantonsschule am Burggraben?

It was easy to settle in. The teachers are very welcoming and helpful. The students were at the beginning surprised to have a teacher all the way from Australia. We have good opportunities to

learn from one another's culture and language.

How do you cope with everyday life in Switzerland?

Switzerland is not entirely new to me, as I was already here as an au pair a few years ago. But certainly, at the beginning it is difficult to get along in a new country. Since I knew only a few people and like to do sports, I looked for sports clubs nearby to build up a network. That helped me! Now I play football and also rugby and touch football – both very popular in Australia and therefore a little piece of "home".

Are there any differences between Australia and Switzerland that strike you particularly?

I like the completely different lifestyle in Switzerland. For example, there is less pressure to get through the day quickly. There is the lunch break during which you can eat and chat with colleagues. Some people even go home to have lunch with their family! That would be unthinkable in Australia. There, we often eat while working at the computer and find therefore little time for rest. That's why I appreciate things like that in Switzerland. And Switzerland has a great landscape! However, it is very cold here and I miss the Australian weather and the beach, but I also find it nice to be in the mountains. It would be wonderful to have a white Christmas. We celebrate Christmas in summer with a barbecue and 35 degrees.

What are your plans for the future?

I would like to continue working in Switzerland in the field of education. I



have been glad to work as an English assistant and I feel confident in finding the next professional step for me in Switzerland.

Isabelle Bucher:
"It was easy to settle in."
Photo donated

What tips would you give young Swiss Abroad who would like to work in Switzerland?

I recommend this programme from Movetia to young people looking to gain professional experience but also for general life experience and immersing themselves in another culture and language. I found Movetia, educationsuisse and the school to be very supportive.

Educationsuisse offers counselling to all young Swiss Abroad on all matters related to education in Switzerland.



educationsuisse, education in Switzerland,
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04; info@educationsuisse.ch;
www.educationsuisse.ch

How “Marriage for all” affects same-sex couples

With the electorate having approved the “Marriage for all” proposal in autumn 2021, same-sex couples will now be able to marry from 1 July 2022 onwards. How does this change in the law affect people in other ways? Does the amendment also have implications for Swiss Abroad?

The Swiss electorate voted yes to the “Marriage for all” proposal in a popular vote on 26 September 2021 (see edition 6/2021 of “Swiss Review”). There will also be implications for Swiss Abroad when the relevant amendment to the Swiss Civil Code comes into force on 1 July 2022.

Same-sex couples in Switzerland have been able to enter into civil partnerships since 2007, but they have never been allowed to get married. This will change when “Marriage for all” comes into force on 1 July 2022. Same-sex couples will then be able to tie the knot in Switzerland too, while no new civil partnerships will be permitted.

The legal differences between civil partnership and marriage mainly relate to the areas of naturalisation, adoption, and reproductive medicine. Simplified naturalisation, the right of

Laura and Delia cutting their wedding cake in Regensdorf: after the people said yes to “Marriage for all” all same-sex couples in Switzerland can marry from 1 July 2022.
Photo: Keystone



adoption, and access to reproductive medicine are only open to married couples.

Here are the possible implications for Swiss Abroad:

- Unmarried same-sex couples can get married in Switzerland from 1 July 2022. Starting from this date, they will be able to submit the necessary application for preparation of marriage in Switzerland to the relevant Swiss representation abroad.
- Registered partners keep their status. However, same-sex couples who have registered their partnership be-

fore 1 July 2022 will be able at any time to convert their (civil) registered partnership into marriage by means of a joint declaration. The conversion declaration can be handed in at any registry office in Switzerland or at the couple’s local Swiss representation abroad. Conversion into marriage at a registry office in Switzerland can involve a ceremony, if the couple so desire. Partners who enter into a civil partnership abroad on or after 1 July 2022 cannot convert such a partnership into marriage. They can, however, get married in Switzerland.

Don't miss the statutory period

For same-sex couples who marry abroad before 1 July 2022 but have no prenuptial agreement, the “Marriage for all” amendment has retroactive implications with regard to the matrimonial regime. Under Swiss law, joint ownership of property applies retroactively to same-sex couples (instead of separation of property). For this reason, either same-sex spouse can inform the other spouse in writing between 1 January 2022 and 30 June 2022 that their existing matrimonial regime will continue to apply until 30 June 2022. This declaration must be personally signed. (FOJ)

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 Registrazione quando si viaggia all'estero
 Online Registration when travelling abroad

■ Same-sex couples who have married abroad and whose marriage has been recognised in Switzerland as a civil partnership can, from 1 July 2022, apply to the cantonal marital status supervisory authority of their home canton to have their entry updated in the Swiss civil status register. This is because foreign same-sex marriages are now recognised as marriages in Switzerland. The entry will also be automatically updated when a change of civil status (birth, death, etc.) has to be registered.

■ Foreign heterosexual civil partnerships are now recognised as civil partnerships in Switzerland. From 1 July 2022, couples in such partnerships can apply to the cantonal marital status supervisory authority of their home canton for their partnership to be entered in the Swiss civil status register.

■ Married female couples will now have access to sperm donations in Switzerland. Provided the sperm donation is conducted under the terms of the Swiss Reproductive Medicine Act, the wife of the childbearing woman will become one of the child's legal parents, and stepchild adoption will no longer be necessary. The donation of eggs and embryos as well as all forms of surrogate motherhood remain unlawful. (FOJ)

For further information in German, French and Italian, visit the Federal Office of Justice (FOJ) website: [revue.link/zivilstand](https://www.revue.link/zivilstand)

Couples with any questions on these matters can contact the registry office/supervisory authority of their home canton or their local Swiss representation abroad. List of registry offices: [revue.link/zivilstandsamt](https://www.revue.link/zivilstandsamt)

Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at www.admin.ch/votes or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

Popular initiatives

At the time of going to press no new popular initiatives have been launched.

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German, French and Italian at www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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www.fdfa.admin.ch Kuala Lumpur (2022)

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Outside forever



DORIS FEMMINIS:
"Fuori per sempre"
Marcos y Marcos,
Milan 2019, 352 pages,
EUR 18 / CHF 24
German translation:
"Für immer draussen"
Edition 8, Zurich 2022
272 pages, CHF 25

Giulia is a young woman from Ticino who grew up in a remote mountain village in the 1990s. The only one of her siblings to have gone to grammar school, she begins a university course far away from home. During a family visit shortly before her final exams, Giulia tries to take her own life. She is admitted to a psychiatric clinic, where she initially refuses all assistance and attempts to escape several times. It is thanks to considerable patience and dedication that the amenable house psychiatrist and her team of nurses manage to win Giulia's trust. The patient opens up and eventually starts talking about her problems and family history.

The three chapters in this book bear the names "Giulia", "Annalisa" and "Sanders". Annalisa is Giulia's deceased sister – or perhaps her alter ego who prefers to spend time in the

woods well away from other people. Sanders is the bolshie fellow patient who talks Giulia into escaping – or the embodiment of someone whom Giulia would like to become.

The novel deals with a time when there was still great poverty in Ticino's valleys and family roles were very traditional. But it also captures an era of change – symbolised in this case by Giulia, who first needs to work out her own way in life.

The various settings are vividly portrayed. But what characterises this novel the most is the ambivalence between the outside and the inside, or normality and insanity, as well as the contrast between urban life and nature. The middle chapter "Annalisa" is particularly well executed on account of its detailed prose.

Author Doris Femminis skilfully intertwines different narrative rhythms. She builds tension but leaves room for interpretation at the same time. This is a gripping story of notable depth.

"Für immer draussen" (Outside forever) is Doris Femminis' second book. Femmini received the Swiss Literature Award from the Federal Office of Culture in 2020.

The author was born in Ticino's Maggia Valley in 1972. She worked in a psychiatric clinic after training to become a nurse. Outside work, she and a friend used to keep a herd of goats. After studying and living in Geneva for a number of years, she now lives with her family in the Joux Valley in the canton of Vaud.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Dino Brandão and the voice of angels



DINO BRANDÃO:
"Bouncy Castle"
2021, Two Gentlemen

Those who have had the good fortune to hear Dino Brandão live will not forget it. Here is an artist gifted with an extraordinary voice, immersed in a peculiar world. You can see for yourself by watching the video for "Bouncy Castle", a hit from the Swiss singer's first album. The five songs from this mini-CD make up a psychedelic and melancholy collage. "My psyche is a bouncy castle, I'll let you jump in," sings Brandão, alternating between head voice and low tones. The 29-year-old Zurich artist has notably worked with one of the most prominent Swiss singers of the day, Sophie Hunger. Brought up in Brugg, he is the offspring of an Argovian and an Angolan. His father was a child soldier, and it

would seem that his son is still experiencing the shockwave of his father's bloody past. His lyrics express suffering. Dino Brandão's music perhaps serves to deliver him from a threatening shadow, a particular kind of schizophrenia with which he has been diagnosed. When he is composing, the artist hides away in his studio, amongst drums piled up to the ceiling. He works alone, compiling his recordings and his musical collages on his computer.

This self-taught musician's musical education is based on rap, but also mixed music, like that of Angolan artist Bonga, whose powerful and torn voice somewhat resembles his own. This would be a good time to listen again to the heartbreaking hit "Mona Ki Ngi Xica." Dino Brandão speaks good English, but also likes to sing in dialect. The album "Ich liebe Dich", released at the end of 2020, serves as proof. This creation is the result of his work with Zurich singer Faber, and Sophie Hunger, who were recording in the midst of the lockdown. Although a proficient skateboarder, Brandão moves as if he were possessed by a spirit, both on stage and in his music videos. The Zurich artist's peculiar gestures evoke those of the late Joe Cocker. On his website, rudimentarily created, Dino Brandão focuses on the essentials, listing mainly just the dates of his next concerts across Europe. You may be able to see him somewhere close to you.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Yvonne Ribi



Yvonne Ribi is managing director of the Swiss Professional Association of Nurses (SBK-ASI). Ribi recently pulled off a coup, when voters approved the SBK-ASI's "Strong healthcare" initiative (page 12) – the first time that a trade union proposal has succeeded at the ballot box. This victory was the work of many, Ribi emphasised. Indeed, rarely has there been such a groundswell among Switzerland's nurses – of whom women still account for over 80 per cent. Ribi nevertheless played a big part. History shows that acute staff shortages always precede improvements to the health system – the 45-year-old from Thurgau skilfully exploited this. The lack of nurses has become painfully apparent during the pandemic, although Ribi's mission dates back long before then. When she took on her leadership position in 2013, Ribi brought a new combative spirit to the SBK-ASI, an organisation that has been around for over 100 years. "Striking is not part of our DNA," she once said. "We feel we have an ethical responsibility to ensure that no one suffers." Affable and well briefed, Ribi chose the political route. As a qualified nurse, she had experienced the constant pressure of hospital work herself. After studying management, Ribi said goodbye to the wards and started lobbying instead. Despite initially banging her head against the parliamentary brick wall, she never gave up. In 2020, readers of the Medinside industry portal voted her the second most important person in Swiss healthcare. Ribi made the country realise that rather than "nurses" her erstwhile colleagues are highly qualified healthcare professionals on whom Switzerland depends. Voters will always remember this when it comes to the crunch.

SUSANNE WENGER

Ignazio Cassis chairs the Federal Council in 2022

On 1 January, Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis (FDP) became the president of the Swiss Confederation for 2022. The 60-year-Ticinese succeeds Guy Parmelin (SVP) after being elected by the Federal Assembly at the beginning of December. Cassis picked up 156 out of a possible 237 votes in the election – a mediocre return that likely reflects parliamentary disgruntlement about the foreign minister's EU policy. (MUL)

Swiss diplomat at the helm of the ICRC

Swiss Mirjana Spoljaric Egger will become president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on 1 October 2022. The top diplomat succeeds Peter Maurer, who has been in office for some ten years. Spoljaric Egger will be the first woman to hold the position in the 160 or so years since the ICRC was founded. Her previous roles were at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the UN. Commenting on her appointment, Spoljaric Egger said she would "strive to highlight the needs of the most vulnerable". (MUL)

Window into the universe

Switzerland is joining the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project – an international effort to build the world's largest radio telescope. This highly sensitive device will be used to study how the first stars and galaxies were formed. A large number of antenna dishes will be installed on site in South Africa and Western Australia as part of the project. Involvement in international research projects gives Switzerland direct access to experiments as well as the latest scientific data. (MUL)

Switzerland qualify for Qatar

Switzerland's footballers have shown that the Euros were no fluke by qualifying directly for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Murat Yakin's men won their qualifying group ahead of reigning European champions Italy. The surprising thing is that they managed very well without several key players in the final group matches, thumping Bulgaria 4-0 in the last game to clinch qualification. (MUL)

Late autumn sees sharp rise in Covid cases

Covid numbers soared again in late autumn 2021, with Switzerland recording over 33,000 new daily cases by 4 January 2022. This prompted the federal government to tighten restrictions again, with entry to events, restaurants, bars and night clubs throughout Switzerland limited to people who can prove they have been vaccinated or have recovered from Covid (the so-called 2G regime). (MUL)

I need my first head for heights.

Davos, Graubünden, © Adrian Assalve, Getty Images



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