

AUGUST 2022

Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



**The absolute top Swiss job –
the caretakers of the Jungfrauoch**

**Switzerland, a country of tenants –
where only the minority own property**

**Despite avalanches and mudslides –
the mountain village of Guttannen is not giving up**

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Title image: Erich Furrer and Daniela Bissig, caretaker couple on the Jungfrauoch. Photo: Franziska Frutiger

The top job



Where is Switzerland's undisputed top job? At a big bank? At a chemical company? In the corridors of political power? No, it is 3,500 metres above sea level at the self-styled "Top of Europe", the Jungfrauoch. It is on this lofty perch that Daniela Bissig and Erich Furrer work all year round. Bissig and Furrer are caretakers at the perennially snow-covered Jungfrauoch high-altitude research station. We paid them a high-flying visit (see page 10).

It is most fitting for two caretakers to be sitting atop Switzerland, surveying the view across the Alps and beyond. Caretakers play a key role in Swiss life. During our childhoods, they were the scrupulous background presence in the school building. And because the majority of Swiss do not own their home but live in rented accommodation, caretakers have remained lifelong companions for many of us. Caretakers are the guarantors of order in our apartment blocks. They clean the stairwell, make sure the house rules are observed and that the household waste is properly disposed of, mow the grass outside, keep the bicycles upright, and throw back any wayward footballs to the children next door.

Talking of apartment blocks, it is, incidentally, worth noting that no other European country has such a high proportion of tenants and such a low proportion of homeowners as Switzerland. The fact that most people in Switzerland rent has implications for our towns and cities, our everyday lives, the environment, and political life (see page 4).

We are a land of tenants, but that is not the fault of caretakers, I hasten to add. Indeed, I wish to extend an honourable mention to the best caretaker of them all. She would never refer to herself as a facility manager, and still sprightly at the age of 80 is in charge of looking after our six-apartment building. Endowed with the patience of a saint, she is the glue that binds us together, helping to maintain good karma among neighbours new and old. She still cleans the stairwell and is unfailingly friendly – even when someone has just walked up the squeaky-clean stairs in their muddy running shoes. Hurray for her! Life in our little neighbourhood would be a lot less congenial without our caretaker.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

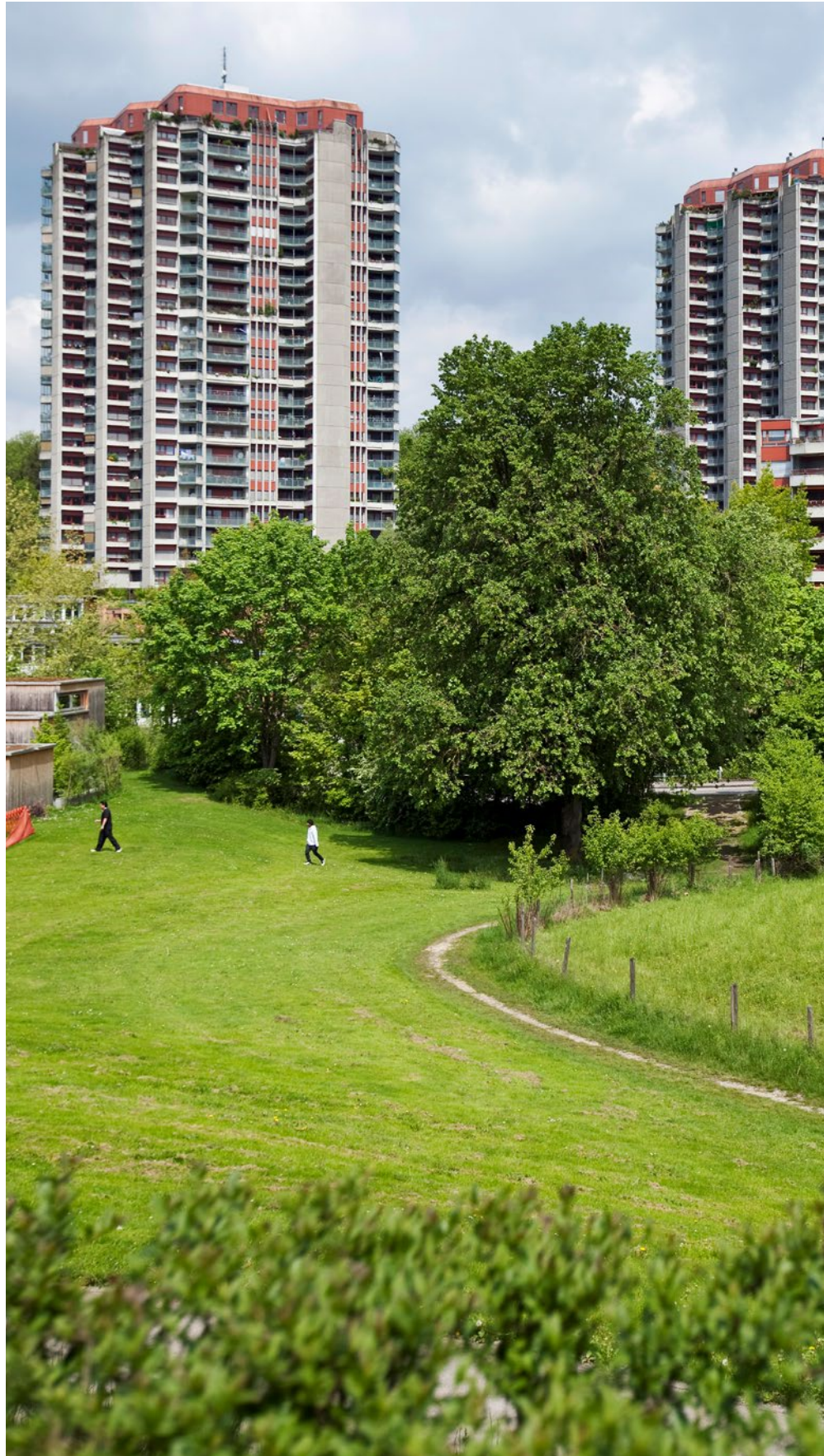
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**Swiss
Community**

Wealthy Switzerland is

The majority of people in Switzerland live in rented accommodation. This is quite unique compared with other European countries. Its implications affect our everyday lives, the environment, politics, and – it goes without saying – the rights of tenants. But not always in the way we would expect.

Everyday life in Switzerland – most people live next door to someone who also rents. A typical example is the Gäbelbach housing estate on the outskirts of Berne. Photo: Keystone



s a country of tenants



SIMON THÖNEN

Anyone who returns to live in Switzerland or moves to the country for the first time will most probably start renting accommodation in an apartment building. This is because Switzerland is a country of tenants. A clear majority of the resident population, 58 per cent, rent their homes. Such a high percentage is unusual.

Homeowners account for the majority everywhere else in Europe (Germany has the thinnest majority, at just over 50 per cent). The proportion of homeowners in Europe is routinely around two thirds or more. This certainly makes Switzerland a special case. But although our country normally revels in exceptionalism, such a high proportion of tenants is not necessarily something of which it is proud.

On the contrary, the media normally like to moan that so few live in their own home. “The dream of home ownership is an illusion for most people in Switzerland” was the headline of a recent article about rising house prices in the free daily newspaper “20 Minuten”. And the dream is not simply to own a flat, but “a house with a garden”.

But if the majority of Swiss live in rented accommodation, mostly apartments, is this really a problem? And how does it affect our everyday lives, the economy, politics, and the environment? Based on studies and what the experts and stakeholders say, there are various aspects to consider. These are not always what we would expect. In this article, we consider nine hypotheses.

Hypothesis no. 1:

A high proportion of tenants helps to combat urban sprawl

According to architect and local Green politician from Biel, Benedikt Loderer, a high proportion of tenants is not a bad thing at all. “Rental developments tend to be high density. This counteracts urban expansion,” he says. Loderer is a fierce critic of the extensive detached-housing developments often seen in Switzerland’s Central Plateau region. “If Switzerland’s entire eight-and-a-half-million population lived in detached houses, we would have no countryside left.” The dream of owning bricks and mortar on a patch of green land is an illusion anyway, he adds. “We know that most homeowners are not really homeowners at all. Their houses effectively belong to the banks issuing the mortgages.”

Hypothesis no. 2:

It is harder for tenants to do their bit for the environment

The landlord alone decides how a tenant’s apartment is heated and how well it is insulated. And the problem with politicians asking tenants to

turn down their radiators because of the Ukraine war and higher energy prices is that heating consumption in older apartment buildings is often not measured or calculated individually. Instead, heating costs are invoiced equally among all the tenants. If you are frugal with your heating, you end up picking up the tab for your wasteful neighbours.

Whether a higher home ownership rate would simplify Switzerland’s switch from nuclear and fossil fuels is another matter altogether. And ultimately one for referendums to decide. Homeowners tend to be against tougher rules, while tenants are more in favour.

Hypothesis no. 3:

A high proportion of tenants is a sign of prosperity

You would think that people in rich countries are more likely to afford home ownership. But precisely the opposite seems to be the case. Less-well-off countries have a higher proportion of homeowners. The statistics bear this out. In Albania and Romania, the home ownership rate is the highest in Europe at over 96 per cent. It is also very high in Portugal, Spain and Greece, at around three quarters. What do we learn from this? That people’s own four walls are more important for financial security in countries with shakier economies.



We see a similar pattern in Switzerland, where the highest home ownership rates are 58 and 54 per cent respectively in the rural cantons of Appenzell-Innerrhoden and Valais. In the economically strong cantons of Basel-Stadt and Geneva, homeowners only account for 15 and 18 per cent of the population respectively. Most people rent instead, as is generally the case in Switzerland's major cities and in prosperous cantons such as Zurich and Zug.

Hypothesis no. 4

Renting is a model that works – and it is often cheaper than owning your own home

Political geographer Michael Hermann has a surprising explanation for why the proportion of tenants in prosperous Switzerland is so high. “Essentially, people believe that renting is a concept that works,” he says, pointing out that collaborative and cooperative business models generally have a stronger tradition in Switzerland than in other countries. Take cooperative retail chains Migros and Coop, for example. Or the ubiquitous shared laundry room in your archetypal Swiss apartment building.

It is also cheaper to rent than buy – or at least it has become so recently, according to economists at bank Credit Suisse in a study published a short time ago. “Purchasers of an owner-occupied home have to pay more than for a comparable rental apartment,” they wrote. But only now is this the case again, because mort-

gage rates have rebounded. Previously, it was the other way round during the period of low interest rates that began in 2008. This reversal points to a certain degree of normality returning.

However, such studies tell us little about individual situations. Furthermore, the cost of housing – like the cost of living – tends to be very high in Switzerland compared to other countries. The price of renting also puts a huge strain on household budgets, particularly among the low-income demographic.

Hypothesis no. 5:

Life as a tenant is a varied and sometimes stressful experience

There is a high level of residential mobility in Switzerland. In statistical terms, one in ten people move home every year. It appears that it is less about changing location than a change in actual accommodation. In 2020, the average relocation distance in Switzerland was only 12.5 kilometres. However, almost three quarters of all moves involved upsizing into bigger or downsizing into smaller accommodation.

Obviously, many people resize according to their personal circumstances. It is no surprise that people who live in apartment buildings move twice as often as those who live in detached houses.

Being a tenant can therefore be quite a varied experience. By the time you reach middle age, you can easily have lived in a dozen or more apartments. But flexible living has its draw-

Moving is a popular hobby in Switzerland, a country of tenants. This means empty banana boxes are a prized commodity often in short supply.

Photos: Keystone

backs. In most cities, apartment hunting is a sport in itself. Good, affordable flats – a very rare thing – usually change hands on the quiet. Unless you have a secure income or good contacts, expect to live in the outlying suburbs or in unattractive spots such as noisy through roads.

Hypothesis no. 6

The Swiss tenants' association must have a lot of political clout

You would think that tenants are on to a winner in Swiss referendums, given that they make up the majority of the electorate. Not necessarily! On 9 February 2020, an emphatic 57 per cent of Swiss voters rejected the “More affordable homes” popular initiative put forward by the Swiss Tenants' Association (MV), which wanted no less than ten per cent of new builds to be used for “affordable” social and cooperative housing.

This is not the first time that the association has stumbled at the polls. In fact, the tenants' association has failed with all its popular initiatives to date – at least at national level. Is Switzerland a country of tenants who dream of home ownership and vote accordingly? Yes, if you ask the Swiss Homeowners' Association (HEV), which cited a survey of people searching for accommodation. The results of the questionnaire revealed that people in middle age are particularly interested in owning property “because they finally want somewhere to settle”. The MV general secretary, Green National Councillor Natalie Imboden, actually concedes the same



point: “Tenants dream of buying because they no longer want to live with the risk of being kicked out of their accommodation one day.”

On the other hand, it would be wrong to imagine that the MV has its work cut out compared to the HEV, given that the latter has also failed with all of its popular initiatives. Nevertheless, both organisations still carry a lot of referendum clout and are very well placed to torpedo any proposals that they dislike. Basically, they are good at blocking legislation but not so good at pushing through their own ideas. It is a permanent tug of war between the two camps.

Hypothesis no. 7:

Switzerland has a two-track renting system

Tenancy agreements in Switzerland tend to drill down to the minutest detail – such as stipulating the apartment heating temperature (20 degrees) or how much money tenants have to pay for repairs themselves (up to 150 Swiss francs). And the principle of cost-covering rent applies, i.e. rising costs can be the only justification for rent increases. But the market also has a big role to play beyond the landlord-tenant relationship, especially when it comes to new lets.

First of all, it is fair to say that the protections in place for tenants are quite good. Landlords can still terminate tenancy agreements if they wish, but legal safeguards mean that affected tenants usually have a good chance of having their stay extended – sometimes for several years. How-

ever, landlords letting new properties have considerable power. This creates a two-track system, whereby rents are much higher on the market than they are for existing leases. If you live in the same apartment for a long time, you pay less than someone would if they were starting to rent that property for the first time.

Hypothesis no. 8:

The balance between landlords and tenants is fair or unfair, depending on your perspective

Landlord and tenant rights in Switzerland represent a good compromise, according to the economically liberal think tank Avenir Suisse: “Regulation of the Swiss rental housing market is quite modest, meaning that good-quality accommodation is always available to rent.” This is the main reason why Switzerland has a high proportion of tenants, it says, adding that rental properties in other countries are squeezed out of the market by excessive regulation.

Natalie Imboden of the MV disagrees: “The rental market isn’t working in urban areas, where most people live.” Tenants need more protection from landlords cashing in without doing the actual work of a landlord. Not so, says the HEV managing director and SVP Cantonal Councillor for Basel-Landschaft, Markus Meier. “Our members are unable to build enough housing in urban areas, which is a bad situation for

them too.” The protections that the MV wants are excessive and will only squeeze the rental market further, in his view.

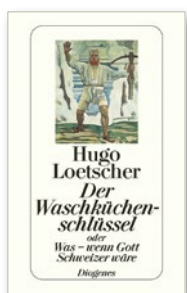
Hypothesis no. 9:

Tenants shy away from clashing with their landlords

There is a huge amount of money at stake in the landlord-tenant dynamic. According to an MV-commissioned study, tenants have paid 78 billion francs too much in rent over the past 15 years. By law, the cost of renting in Switzerland is linked to mortgage rates. Interest has fallen since 2008, but rents have continued to rise. This study is nothing but a red herring, the HEV retorts, because it fails to take increased running costs and investment into account. The MV begs to differ.

What is undeniable is that many tenants opt out of asking for a lower rent, despite the law working in their favour. Why? According to the MV, many are afraid of rocking the boat and clashing with their landlord. But Markus Meier of the homeowners’ association believes that the tenant-landlord relationship is not as bad as the tenants’ association makes out. He cites a federal government survey, which says that 63 per cent of the population are “fairly happy” or “very happy” with current tenancy law.

With mortgage rates rising again, the ball is now in the court of landlords. Property owners will soon be able to increase rents on the basis of these higher rates. Will they also exercise restraint to avoid upsetting tenants?



The go-to literary reference work for a better understanding of the Helvetic soul also addresses life as a tenant.

“Der Waschküchenschlüssel (oder was, wenn Gott Schweizer wäre)” is the work of author Hugo Loetscher and was published in 1988. Available in German.

Peter Maurer



Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) since 2012, is stepping down amidst a global storm. Announced last November, his resignation will now take place in September. Swiss diplomat Mirjana Spoljaric is poised to succeed him. And how will the former Secretary of State at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs be remembered? Opinions are mixed. Positive feedback is notably directed at the president's actions with regard to the weapons of the future and "killer robots". His decision to open the Geneva institution to non-Swiss citizens also garnered him praise.

Although the Berne native's diplomatic skills have been lauded time and again – he has shaken hands with Xi Jinping, Emmanuel Macron, Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin – the outcome of these meetings is a matter of some contention. Back at headquarters, staff members are happy to shift to a less diplomatic approach: one more focused on helping the victims of conflicts. They would have liked to hear their president denounce violations of humanitarian law more strongly. "He embodies the ICRC's tact and discretion, but it's the effectiveness of an action that counts," says an insider. The biggest blunder? Maurer's decision to join the Board of Trustees of the Davos World Economic Forum. This move was roundly denounced by elected officials and former delegates, who stated that "humanitarianism cannot collude with multinationals". During Maurer's reign, the organisation's budget has almost doubled to two billion Swiss francs. Should this be considered an achievement? Some believe that this increase is a double-edged sword, as it will prove difficult to sustain. The task of presiding over the organisation charged with upholding humanitarian law in an increasingly unstable world is most definitely a challenging mission.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Switzerland elected to the UN Security Council

Switzerland was elected to the UN Security Council for the first time on 9 June 2022. The election by the UN General Assembly was won with 187 out of the 190 valid votes – an outstanding result. Switzerland now has the right to participate in conflict resolution during 2023 and 2024. While the Federal Council hailed the election as a success and a vote of confidence in Switzerland, opponents at home criticised Switzerland for putting its traditional role as an independent mediator between hostile parties at risk by taking a seat on the Security Council.

(MUL)

Swiss National Bank raises key interest rate

In mid-June 2022, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) raised its key interest rate for the first time in 15 years, a reactionary move designed to combat current inflation. According to the SNB, the tighter monetary policy is intended to prevent inflation from spreading even further to goods and services. The increase to the key interest rate was surprisingly significant: 0.5 percentage points, i.e. from -0.75% to -0.25%. Although the rate remains slightly negative, the hike bodes well for savers. Banks are no longer as likely to pass on the burden of negative interest rates to their customers – or if so, only to a limited extent. Mortgage interest rates, on the other hand, could rise further, causing some apprehension among property owners regarding the consequences of the higher interest rate.

(MUL)

Switzerland is now a "cooperative" neutral country

At the World Economic Forum in Davos at the end of May, President of the Swiss Confederation and Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis surprised everyone with a new term: Switzerland is now pursuing the concept of "cooperative neutrality". What his attempt to redefine neutrality actually means in specific terms is not yet entirely clear. The new definition is essentially a reaction to the war of aggression against Ukraine. According to Cassis, even a neutral state must take a stance. "That is why Switzerland is joining the countries that will not stand idly by as mere spectators to this attack on the foundations of democracy." Switzerland supports the EU's sanctions against Russia in their entirety.

(MUL)

Covid-19 review – censure for the Federal Council

The parliamentary Control Committee has criticised the Federal Council for its political handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the committee's view, the Federal Council was not quick enough to recognise that the pandemic was a crisis of global proportions that would affect all sectors. The government is also accused of underestimating the pandemic's duration. Furthermore, during the course of the pandemic, responsibility for almost all tasks was assumed by the Department of Health, a decision deemed erroneous by the committee.

(MUL)



Switzerland to bolster its armed forces

Europe has begun rearming amid the war in Ukraine. Switzerland also wants to invest more in its armed forces and quickly procure new fighter jets.

THEODORA PETER

When Russia invaded Ukraine almost six months ago, many people spoke of a watershed moment. War in 21st-century Europe had seemed inconceivable until then, but the tanks and missiles unleashed on Ukraine have forced policymakers to rethink European security. Many countries are now strengthening their military capabilities. Germany alone is investing 100 billion euros in its armed forces and has pledged to spend two per cent of its GDP on defence. In Switzerland, parliament has decided to increase the country's military budget to 1 per cent of GDP by 2030. This would move defence spending up from the current level of five billion to around seven billion Swiss francs a year. A minority consisting of the SP and the Greens criticised the decision, calling it "blind militarisation" and warning that spending on education, agriculture, environmental protection, and development aid could suffer as a result.

Six billion francs for fighter jets

Defence Minister Viola Amherd wants to use a portion of the additional funds to equip Switzerland's ground troops with artillery. The Federal Council also intends to go ahead with the already approved purchase of new F-35 fighter jets. It aims to sign the relevant contracts with US manufacturer Lockheed Martin by the end of March 2023

– before the "Stop F-35" popular initiative is put to voters. The SP, the Greens and the Group for a Switzerland without an Army tabled the initiative, lamenting that the US fighter jet was a "complete overkill". Thirty-six F-35 jets including weaponry will cost a total of six billion francs. In September 2020, only a wafer-thin 50.1 per cent majority of voters approved the purchase of new fighter jets, as many readers will recall. No one knew back then what the actual aircraft model would be.

New debate on arms exports

The war in Ukraine has also reignited the debate on arms exports. It was only last year that parliament curtailed the Federal Council's authority to approve arms exports (see "Swiss Review" 6/2021). The War Material Act forbids arms shipments to countries involved in "internal or international armed conflict". Consequently, Switzerland has been rebuffing requests from friends and neighbours to re-export Swiss arms to Ukraine. This has to change, says FDP leader and National Councillor Thierry Burkart. In his view, allies who "share Switzerland's values" should receive exemptions in future. Parliament is set to debate the sensitive issue in autumn. Direct arms shipments to Ukraine are out of the question. As a neutral country, Switzerland cannot favour any warring party when exporting military equipment.

At the top of Switzerland's military shopping list – the F-35 fighter jet manufactured by US company Lockheed Martin.
Photo: Keystone

The 'highest' paid job in Switzerland? Custodian!

In February 2021, Daniela Bissig and Erich Furrer landed the job of a lifetime: custodians and facility managers at the Jungfrauoch High Altitude Research Station. Their days spent at an altitude of 3,500 metres are marked by five weather observations. A report.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

She was an HR manager for the Directorate of Public Works in the canton of Uri. He worked in a power station in Nidwalden. Since February 2021, Uri natives Daniela Bissig and Erich Furrer have been living in a different world altogether. Their new job? Custodians and facility managers at the Jungfrauoch High Altitude Research Station, a scientific platform perched 3,454 metres above sea level. "When we got the job as caretakers or 'facility managers', I called my two daughters to tell them that we had some important news. They thought we were going to emigrate to Norway!" laughs Daniela. When her children and the couple's former employers found out



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful? In search of somewhat unconventional Swissrecords. **This edition: The absolute top job in Switzerland.**

about the new job in the lofty heights between the Mönch and the Jungfrau, they weren't surprised. These two love the mountains and the snow. Daniela even has a snowflake tattoo on her right arm. And there's certainly plenty of the white stuff here on this spur between the northern and southern Alps. "In winter, we go out at 6am, before breakfast, to shovel the snow that has built up during the night," explains Erich. This daily task begins in front of the residential building and continues 100 metres higher up, on the Sphinx, the name of the rocky promontory where the station's observatory is located and which the custodians access using an old-fashioned lift. They start by clearing two large terraces,

which can be exhausting after a heavy snowfall, and then have breakfast.

Weather-watching rituals

Their second task is dedicated to weather observations. Either Daniela or Erich ascends the Sphinx five times a day to monitor the skies for 15 minutes. In summer, the weather vigil starts at 8am and ends at 8pm. Perched on a terrace at the station, overlooking the large platform for tourists arriving on the Jungfrauoch train, Erich or Daniela report on the weather conditions. Their observations are used by MeteoSwiss as a basis for weather forecasts. What is the snow quality like? Is it raining – some-





thing which didn't occur 20 years ago – or is there hail? The custodians also describe the visibility and cloud cover. Fog is present about 40 percent of the time on the Jungfrauoch. The cloud report is completed by dividing the horizon into eight slices. Ten different types of clouds are categorised. Cirrus clouds are the easy ones, as they form at 9,000 metres. The other heights can be measured by looking at the surrounding mountains: the Jungfrau, the Kleine Scheidegg pass and the Schilthorn. When the sky is clear, the view reaches all the way to the peaks of the Feldberg (Germany) or La Dôle, 150 kilometres away as the crow flies. "This is a central task that mustn't be neglected no matter what," says Erich, who since March has been navigating around the station on a makeshift scooter put together by a Jungfrau train employee after he broke his leg in Norway.

The station custodians are responsible both for the maintenance of the premises and certain equipment, as

Above: Erich Furrer and Daniela Bissig on the Jungfrauoch. Their job requires them to be ready for any weather. Their workplace is exposed to driving snow, frost and storms.

Photos: Franziska Frutiger, www.franziskafrutiger.com

On the left: The daily caretaking tasks at high altitude are by no means limited to shovelling snow. They also include observing the weather and recording meteorological data.

well as welcoming the researchers who come to carry out experiments in these facilities. In the maze of corridors and different levels of the Jungfrauoch, we come across a Zurich scientist from the Federal Laboratory for Materials Testing and Research. At the Sphinx, we meet a Belgian researcher who is taking part in an experiment launched 50 years ago on the gases contained in the atmosphere. The inhabited part of the station is built into the side of the mountain. Its floors are connected by a small lift in a shaft carved out of the rock. On the ground floor, there is the custodians' workshop, three laboratories and a laundry room. On the first floor, ten small Swiss-chalet-style rooms provide accommodation for the researchers. They can also relax in a beautiful wood-panelled lounge whose walls display photos of two foreign researchers who died in a crevasse in 1955 and a custodian killed by a falling rock in 1964. The kitchen is on the third floor with an adjacent living room. On the fourth

floor we find the library, used by the researchers as a workspace. The caretakers' flat is on the fifth floor. From the double bed, there is a view of the Aletsch Glacier, which slopes down to the canton of Valais.

Taking a break at lower altitudes

Daniela and Erich work in the heights and spend their time off far below in Erstfeld, a village in Uri at the northern end of the Gotthard Base Tunnel. Staff rotations take place every two weeks: when they come down, another couple head up. At the time of our visit, Daniela and Erich were preparing to welcome two new custodians. The previous couple lasted four and a half years. "It's a job that requires a spirit of hospitality and service," says Daniela, who would like to keep her position until she retires. The first couple who worked at the Jungfrau station didn't manage to stay together. The husband remained working there for 30 years, despite his wife's departure on the arm of a



A job in the sky

The Jungfrauoch research station offers the ‘highest’ annual paid job in Switzerland. The two couples who work as custodians at the station are employed by the International Foundation for High Altitude Research at the Jungfrauoch and Gornergrat (HFSJG). Founded in 1930, it represents scientific institutions from six European countries and China. The Swiss members of the foundation include the municipality of Zermatt, the Gornergrat and Jungfrau railway companies, the Swiss Academy of Sciences and the University of Bern. An average of 1,000 working days are carried out each year at this research site. The experiments conducted from the rocky outpost are now focused on the environment and climate. The station is home to approximately 50 experiments in fields as varied as meteorology, glaciology, biology and medicine. (SH)



The trip back down to the valley first leads through solid rock – a reinforced tunnel connects the research station with the summit stop of the Jungfrauoch railway. Photos: Franziska Frutiger

military man, so the story goes. The station is akin to working on a ship. Is there a risk of arguments? “We each work on our own for most of the day,” says Erich. The couple are reunited for meals and at night, and they also carry out the morning and evening weather observations (the most beautiful of them all) together.

At high altitudes, meals are large and the need to keep hydrated is imperative. The menus are put together in Erstfeld, and the food is then ordered from a shop in Wengen and arrives by train. “We spend less here because we order exactly what we need,” Daniela points out while offering visitors little chocolates in the shape of the Jungfrau. The custodian couple are well aware of the physical effects the altitude can have. “On our first day back, we make sure we move slowly. The first night we don’t sleep very well, but after that, we’re

completely acclimatised again,” she explains.

Solitude during the pandemic

It was in 2020 that our two hosts came to an instant agreement that they both wanted to apply for the job. “The only thing that worried us a bit was the financial side, since we would be losing about 30 percent of our income,” comments Daniela. Thankfully, in the end, the foundation that employs them (see box on the left) increased their working rates slightly. Erich, who accompanied one of Daniela’s two daughters up the nearby Mönch, is in his element here. “This is the job of my life,” he declares. At the height of the pandemic, the two custodians sometimes found themselves completely alone at the station. “It was like being in a bubble,” recalls Daniela.



A quiet evening spent in solitude with true rustic charm. Reading is a preferred hobby since the nearest entertainment is rather a long way off.

Swiss state pension — still a work in progress

Once again, Switzerland has a crucial decision to make about the future of its state pension system. In autumn, voters will give their verdict on the latest reform of the old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) scheme. But two contrasting popular initiatives are already calling for further changes to the system. Essentially, OASI very much remains a work in progress.

DENISE LACHAT

The old-age and survivors' insurance scheme, or OASI, is the Swiss state pension scheme. Practically all of Switzerland's inhabitants, Swiss and non-Swiss, along with many Swiss Abroad, are entitled to state pension benefits. Parliament drew up the scheme in 1947 in the aftermath of the Second World War, with OASI subsequently coming into force on 1 January 1948. Previously, welfare had been something of a lottery for the old and disabled, depending on how much money or assistance was forthcoming from family members, charities and the church.

OASI soon underwent further enhancements and face-lifts. It has been revised a total of ten times. The revisions came thick and fast, particularly around the end of the 20th century. This culminated in the final adjustment to date, when the retirement age for women was raised from 62 to 63 in 2001, and to 64 in 2005. Since then, it has also been possible to draw the state pension early, and the scheme has been adjusted in line with inflation.

People power

OASI has remained untouched over the ensuing couple of decades. Plans to alter it have invariably been torpedoed – either directly by the federal parliament or later at the ballot box. There has been no genuine reform of the state pension for 20 years. What are the social and political reasons for this logjam? Michael Hermann, political scientist and director of the Sotomo research institute, believes he knows the answer. Cost cutting is necessary due to higher life expectancy and a decline in the number of young people at work who are paying into the pension coffers. But getting the electorate to approve cost-saving measures, or an increase in the retirement age for that matter, has become almost impossible. Hermann: "OASI is unique because it concerns everyone, but older men and women really hold all the cards. Any reform would directly affect people in their 50s and 60s, who would wonder why they were being singled out." Older voters flock to the polls in higher numbers than younger voters. This applies to all issues. Logically, the older demographic would have a louder voice in any plebiscite concerning OASI.

Hence, the nature of Switzerland's political system is the factor preventing reform of the state pension, says

Hermann. He cites the Scandinavian countries, which have a strong social democratic tradition but no direct democracy. The retirement age almost everywhere in Scandinavia is 67, or about to be within the next few years. More often than not, the age of retirement is directly linked to life expectancy. Leader of the Young Liberals Matthias Müller thinks Scandinavia is the model to follow. His party has launched a popular initiative to bring the retirement age for men and women in Switzerland to 66 by 2032 and raise the retirement age more slowly thereafter, in line with life expectancy. According to Müller, policymakers have been unable to put OASI on a sustainable

'Jassen' is the all-time favourite Swiss card game, especially popular among older people. The never-ending political version of the card game is trying to deal the right hand for the future of the old-age insurance system. Photo: Keystone



footing over the last 20 years. “This impairs Switzerland’s ability to reform itself, and is particularly detrimental to young people like us,” he says, noting the disillusionment shared by many of his age.

Voters to give their verdict in autumn

But before the Young Liberals put their popular initiative to the electorate, there is another matter on the agenda. On 25 September 2022, voters will give their verdict on parliament’s latest reform package, OASI 21, which aims to balance OASI revenue and expenditure and secure the level of retirement benefits in Switzerland. OASI 21 would be funded by raising the retirement age for women from 64 to 65 and increasing VAT by 0.4 per cent. The reform would allow for greater flexibility in the retirement age and would also make it possible for pensions to be drawn gradually. Trade unions and left-wing politicians in particular are less than enamoured. Complaining that women will bear the brunt of OASI 21, they managed to collect the necessary number of signatures for a referendum in

‘Jassen’ sharpens your mental arithmetic skills. When it comes to retirement, relying solely on one’s OASI pension is making the wrong calculation. That’s because Swiss old-age insurance benefits are based on three pillars. Photo: Keystone

record time. Unions and left-wing parties want to increase pension benefits instead – and have submitted their own popular initiative to this end. People who have worked all their lives deserve a good pension, they say. Thirteen pension payments a year is the idea that they have put forward. But the Young Liberals are not happy with OASI 21 either, calling it “no more than a mini-reform or baby step”, to quote Matthias Müller. The youth wing of the FDP wants to go further by linking the retirement age to life expectancy. Whether it can convince older voters of the benefits of such a proposal is another matter altogether.

Two contrasting initiatives to be put to parliament

Which of the solutions is it to be? It is interesting that both popular initiatives will come to public attention when they are debated in parliament just a few weeks before the OASI 21 referendum. Will the electorate reject OASI 21 for fear that a yes vote would be interpreted as a signal for further hikes in the retirement age? Or will it endorse the reform and put paid to any pension increases? If opinion polls and previous referendums are anything to go by, voters are well aware that the state pension scheme is in questionable financial health.

This is a pivotal moment for the state pension, and the situation is becoming critical, says the left-leaning coalition championing a 13th OASI pension payment. Such a

How pension provision is structured in Switzerland

At present, the maximum OASI pension is 2,390 Swiss francs per month per person. The minimum OASI pension is 1,195 francs. Married couples can receive up to 3,585 francs in total. These sums lend considerable purchasing power in countries where the cost of living is low, but are insufficient to make ends meet in Switzerland. Two other pension pillars help to fill the gaps. Besides the state pension consisting of OASI and supplementary benefits (pillar 1), occupational retirement provision based on pension funds (pillar 2) was introduced in 1985 while private pensions regulated by law (pillar 3) have been available since 1987. This three-pillar system is enshrined in the Federal Constitution. Its aim is to maintain the individual’s customary standard of living in retirement or in the event of death or disability, for their own benefit or that of their survivors. However, people on low wages struggle to accumulate enough pillar 2 benefits and often lack the requisite income to build up pillar 3.

(DLA)



remark could easily have come from the opposing side. Depending on your political affiliation, possible remedies include working longer, drawing lower pensions, paying higher salary contributions, raising VAT, funnelling inheritance tax into the state pension scheme, or a combination of the above. Or we can fund OASI using money from the Swiss National Bank, say the SP and trade unions as part an additional popular initiative currently in the pipeline. Looking ahead to the autumn vote, the future outcome remains unclear. OASI is still a work in progress.

DENISE LACHAT IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST
BASED IN MORGES (CANTON OF VAUD)

Different approaches to reforming the state pension

Since 2014, the state pension fund has been paying out more money than it receives. The OASI 21 reform package is the Federal Council and parliament's attempt to balance OASI expenditure and revenue and secure the level of retirement benefits in Switzerland by increasing VAT by 0.4 per cent and raising the retirement age for women from 64 to 65. Under OASI 21, the decision as to when to draw a pension is also more flexible. Both men and women can draw their pension from the age of 63 at the earliest or defer it until they are 70 at the latest. Gradual pension withdrawal is also possible. Working beyond the reference age of 65 can increase a person's pension amount, thereby providing an incentive to work longer.

The initiative championed by the Young Liberals ("Making the retirement age more flexible") calls for the retirement age for men and women to be raised to 66 – and increased further thereafter, in line with life expectancy. It proposes developing occupation-related, flexible solutions and pension models for people unable to work up to the age of 66.

Trade unions and left-wing political parties have submitted the "For a better life in retirement" initiative, in which they call for a 13th OASI pension payment to be made to all pension recipients, without this having a detrimental effect on the level of, and entitlement to, supplementary benefits.

Trade unions and the SP have now gone one step further and presented an additional proposal that involves using a proportion of Swiss National Bank (SNB) profits to shore up the pension system. Their popular initiative is called "SNB profits for a strong OASI". (DLA)



Overview of all federal votes on 25 September 2022

Popular initiative to end factory farming

According to this popular initiative, the constitution must protect the dignity of animals within the animal husbandry industry, and intensive, large-scale livestock farming must be banned. The animal and environmental protection groups tabling the initiative want to end the factory farming of hens, pigs and cows, with the federal government defining criteria for animal-friendly housing, access to outside areas, and slaughter. But opponents believe the initiative is a waste of time. Farmers already take care of their livestock, while Switzerland's Animal Welfare Act is stringent enough, they say. More on pages 26–27.

OASI reform package – containing two proposals

To future-proof the finances of the old-age and survivors' insurance scheme (OASI), the Federal Council and parliament want to raise the female retirement age from 64 to 65. Women born between 1960 and 1968, whom the consequences of this age hike would hit the most, would receive supplementary pension benefits as compensation. To fund these offsetting payments, the government would increase VAT by 0.4 per cent from its current level of 7.7 per cent. Voters will decide on two items: a change in OASI legislation in order to raise the female retirement age, and a federal decree on additional funding that entails an increase in VAT. Trade unions and left-wing political parties oppose the reform package. They say that women will bear the brunt of the proposals, and warn of further plans to dismantle pension provision. More on pages 13–15.

Partial abolition of withholding tax

By changing the Withholding Tax Act, the Federal Council and parliament wish to strengthen the debt capital market and improve Switzerland's competitiveness. Specifically, this would involve abolishing withholding tax on interest income from Swiss bonds. The so-called Swiss transfer stamp duty would also no longer apply to Swiss bonds. The SP, the Greens and trade unions oppose the plan, which would result in an annual tax shortfall of several hundreds of millions of Swiss francs. They argue that only wealthy investors will benefit from the tax relief, which gives carte blanche to potential tax evaders. (TP)

E-voting – all hopes rest on Swiss Post

It is currently not possible to vote online in Switzerland. If everything goes according to plan, cantons will be able to start piloting e-voting again in 2023. Swiss Post should have its e-voting system up and running by then.

EVELINE RUTZ

We are making good strides. This was what the Federal Chancellery and Swiss Post essentially had to say about e-voting in April. They were reacting to a report in which independent experts, who had put the e-voting system through its paces, concluded that “significant” progress had been made. For example, e-voting documentation is now clearer, more comprehensive and better structured than it was in 2019. The source code has also attracted a great deal of positive feedback. But the experts have pointed out vulnerabilities as well. One of these is the

cryptographic protocol, which is used to verify the votes cast without violating the confidentiality of the voting procedure. The cryptographic protocol is an essential part of the security framework. Swiss Post has already heeded some of the findings and says that the project is now in the “next development phase”. It intends to complete this phase during the course of 2023.

E-voting has been a long-running saga

Switzerland has already been palpably close to delivering e-voting a few

times in recent years. But there have always been setbacks – a case of two steps forward, one step back. E-voting was first piloted in 2004. It was even possible in some cantons to vote in the national elections via computer, tablet or smartphone in 2015. E-voting was very popular among Swiss Abroad, with the “Fifth Switzerland” casting around a third more votes than normal.

Over 300 pilots took place in 15 cantons. This was until the Federal Council decided to abort the project in 2019, after the canton of Geneva and Swiss Post had pulled their IT solutions due to financial considerations and security flaws respectively. The federal government subsequently adjusted the parameters for a new attempt at e-voting. It wanted stricter security and an open-source strategy, while announcing that independent specialists would conduct reviews. The first such check has now taken place.

Three cantons intend to trial e-voting in 2023

Ariane Rustichelli, Director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), is cautiously optimistic. “We trust the process and hope that Swiss Post can quickly implement the requested improvements,” she says, noting that supporters of e-voting have already been left disappointed more than once. “But we will only believe it when we see it.”

Political willingness to facilitate e-voting in the foreseeable future is likely to have increased during the pandemic – a crisis that showed how valuable digital services can be. Rustichelli: “E-government helps to safeguard our direct democracy.” The OSA director reveals that some can-



“We trust the process and hope that Swiss Post can quickly implement the requested improvements.”

Ariane Rustichelli, Director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

tons are interested in rolling out pilots in 2023. These are Basel-Stadt, St Gallen and Thurgau. Grisons wants to start in 2024.

BFH has also developed a source code

The fact that all eyes are currently on Swiss Post is due to a lack of competition. Work on the e-voting system pioneered by the canton of Geneva has continued, albeit in just one area. A team at the Berne University of Applied Sciences (BFH) has continued to develop the source code since 2019. The team had already been consulted for the cryptographic specifications at an earlier juncture.

When its service contract ended with the canton of Geneva, it carried on working within the parameters of a federally run e-government project. “We were able to implement all security-related parts of the system in full,” says IT professor Rolf Haenni. Their efforts have paid off, with the publicly available code now reaching a high-quality level, he adds. Others will be able to build on this expertise. “But no company has yet come forward, unfortunately.”

Young people do a lot by smartphone

Developing an e-voting system is an extremely complex and expensive undertaking, in which Swiss Post has already invested a lot of time and money, says Rustichelli. “We hope that Swiss Post stays the course.” Swiss Post, for its part, is keen to stress the strategic importance of the project. Spokesperson Silvana Grellmann: “We are talking about the future of Swiss Post in an increasingly digital world, so what we have here is



“The biggest challenge is maintaining trust in our solution.”

Roberto Cirillo, CEO Swiss Post

an essential investment in the Swiss Post of tomorrow.” Surveys show that voters want an additional means of voting, and their voices will only get louder. “As far as young people are concerned, you can do everything on your smartphone. Try explaining to them in the near future that they can do everything on their phones, except vote.”

Swiss Post has underlined its intention to make an e-voting system available from 2023. However, it is prioritising security over speed. “The biggest challenge is maintaining trust in our solution,” CEO Roberto Cirillo recently told the media. The company is therefore being very open about how it detects and irons out flaws. In 2021, it published its source code and launched a bug bounty program. It has since received around 130 tip-offs from hackers and paid out a total of 97,000 Swiss francs in rewards. It has not disclosed how much it is spending on e-voting otherwise.

There will be another independent review once Swiss Post has improved its IT solution. Only when the results of this review are available can the

cantons get on with requesting approval for new trials. Depending on circumstances, they will have to change their infrastructure, existing processes, interfaces with other systems, and voter identification cards accordingly. “Based on various factors and deadlines, this integration work will take one to one-and-a-half years to complete,” says Barbara Schüpbach-Guggenbühl, chair of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Chancellors. This is why the plan to make e-voting available in time for the federal elections in autumn 2023 is ambitious, she adds. The chances of it happening are unlikely.

The 788,000 or so Swiss who live abroad will probably have to rely on postal voting. This would be regrettable, says Rustichelli. “Voting papers often arrive too late, so many will be unable to exercise their political rights.”

Hot, not so hot



30°

The so-called Ice Saints refer to five days in May which, according to popular belief, are more likely to have night frosts. “Cold Sophie” on 15 May is the best-known Ice Saint – and the reason why many of us wait until after mid-May before planting garden seedlings. Nevertheless, Cold Sophie forgot Switzerland this year: the mercury hit 30 °C on 15 May, the first properly hot day in 2022.

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Isn't it wonderful that roughly half of Swiss mayors are men and half are women? A shining example of gender equality! Sorry, we're joking. Only 16 per cent of Switzerland's 2,000 and more municipalities have a female mayor. The SP has the biggest contingent of female mayors among the political parties, while the SVP has the smallest.

7,800,000,000

The total volume of paid work performed in Switzerland last year amounted to 7.8 billion hours – up 2.5 per cent on 2020. Have we suddenly become workaholics? No. The simple reason for the increase is that Covid restrictions were lifted.

22.5%

Over a fifth, or 22.5 per cent, of Swiss teenagers smoke. And two thirds of adults who smoke started to do so when they were in their teens. The Tobacco Control Fund (TCF) is now investing 5.5 billion Swiss francs in anti-smoking campaign aimed at young people. Funding of the TCF relies on a levy charged on every packet of cigarettes sold in Switzerland. Yes, you read that correctly.



37

Perhaps you are less likely to dream of 12-cylinder engines during your mid-life crisis if petrol was never your thing in the first place. The smoking analogy in reverse! We compared May 2022 with May 2021 and, lo and behold, new registrations of electric cars increased by 37 per cent while those of fuel-driven cars fell by 25 per cent year-on-year.

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The children shining new light on a well-known artist

The Zentrum Paul Klee in Berne is hosting the first-ever Klee exhibition to be curated by children. It is a pioneering project that provides a fresh insight into the famous artist's work.

EVA HIRSCHI

"I had already heard of Paul Klee," says Angelina proudly. "My grandmother showed me some of his pictures. She paints pictures too – like an artist, but not a real artist." Angelina, nine years old, is part of a project at the Zentrum Paul Klee in Berne, in which children were allowed to create their own exhibition about the famous Bernese artist.

Around a dozen children aged eight to 12 met for workshops at the venue every Wednesday afternoon for seven months. Examining colours, shapes and poetic themes, they curated the artistic content and architecture of the exhibition – and composed their own written works. The children – or rather their parents – had got in touch with the museum after seeing an advert.

"It was the most fascinating experience," says museum curator Martin Waldmeier, who normally works on his own but had to collaborate from the outset this time. Waldmeier delib-

erately stayed in the background and let the children do their own thing. "We only had to intervene once or twice. They wanted a three-metre platform from which to view the exhibition, complete with drinks machine and gaming lounge. We said no," he laughs.

But when the children said they wanted a quiet place to meet and chill out, Waldmeier and his colleagues said yes. There is now a slightly elevated spot with multicoloured seating cubes in the middle of the hall, giving a good overview of the exhibition. Coloured partitions divide the exhibition into thematic areas. Poems that the children made themselves by sticking the titles of Klee's paintings together replace the commentaries that you would usually see.

Mysterious centrepiece

The exhibition, called "A Shining Secret", begins with its own centrepiece painting. "I was very surprised that

the children chose this particular picture," says Waldmeier. "Paul Klee often painted birds and matchstick figures. I would have expected them to have selected one of his more playful depictions." Instead, they picked "Glass Facade" from 1940 – one of the last paintings that Klee produced before his death. The work has a secret picture on the back.

"Materials were scarce during the Second World War, so Klee often used both sides of the canvas," explains Katja Lang of the Creaviva Children's Museum, which belongs to the Zentrum Paul Klee. "But Klee never finished the reverse side on this particular occasion. In the end, he painted over it in pink." The pink has peeled off over time to reveal the original picture, she adds. It shows a matchstick figure lying horizontally, with the following words written on the frame: "Mädchen stirbt und wird" (Girl dies and becomes). Lang: "We started investigating to see what the picture meant." Only now has the

Learning about art in the cellar of the Zentrum Paul Klee – children at the curating workshop select their favourite Klee from storage.
Photo: Martin Waldmeier



Zentrum Paul Klee found out the secret. The matchstick figure must have been Karla Grosch, the former girlfriend of son Felix Klee. The Klee family had a close relationship with the artist Grosch, who studied at the Bauhaus. When the Nazis closed the Bauhaus in 1933, Grosch emigrated to Tel Aviv – where she subsequently drowned while swimming in the sea. The exhibition recounts Karla Grosch's story, using audioguide commentaries recorded by the children themselves.

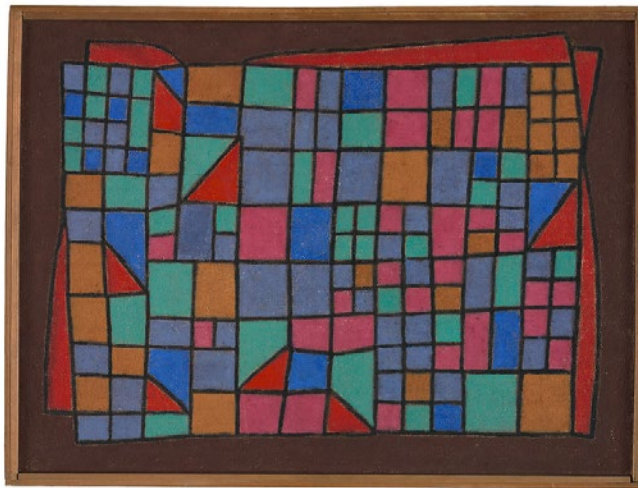
"I was amazed they chose such a tragic story as the theme," says Lang, who coordinated most of the workshops. "We wanted to shine a light on Paul Klee in various ways, without imposing a chronological or didactic straitjacket." Instead of focusing on Klee's place in art history, they favoured an intuitive, fun approach. "Nevertheless, I was moved by how seriously the children went about it."

Children star in the fringe programme

This creative process also forms part of the exhibition, which ends with a documentary giving an insight into the workshops and discussions that ensued. Various events starring the children themselves also take place during the exhibition. Their aim is to explain Klee through a child's eyes.

Angelina is looking forward to these events. "But it will be weird to see so many different people at once." She enjoys visiting the Zentrum Paul Klee all the same. But her favourite museum is a different one. "It's the museum with the dead animals."

"A Shining Secret. Kids Curate Klee" runs until 4 September 2022 at the Zentrum Paul Klee in Berne. Opening times: Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm



Paul Klee
"Glass Façade", 1940, 288
Wax paint on burlap on canvas
71.3 x 95.7 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern



Reverse side of Glass Façade":
"Girl dies and becomes", 1940, 288
71.3 x 95.7 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Paul Klee
 "Double", 1940, 236
 Coloured paste on paper on cardboard
 52.4 x 34.6 cm
 Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern



Paul Klee
 "Cemetery", 1920, 79
 Oil and pen on linen canvas
 17 x 25.5 cm
 Private collection, Switzerland
 Stored at the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern



Paul Klee
 "Untitled", (final still life), 1940
 Oil on canvas, 100 x 80.5 cm
 Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
 Donated by Livia Klee



Paul Klee
 "Stepmother", 1939, 497
 Watercolour and pencil on paper on cardboard
 27 x 21.4 cm
 Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
 Donated by Livia Klee



Guttannen won't give up

Guttannen in the Bernese Oberland is used to harsh winters complete with avalanches. Climate change now raises the additional spectre of debris flows, but the inhabitants of this Alpine village want to stay put.

THEODORA PETER

“The ground rumbled and shook. It was like an earthquake.” The now-retired Edi Schläppi was working as a road inspector on 22 August 2005, the day when 500,000 cubic metres of rocks and earth thundered down from the Rotlouwi ravine into the valley from the mountains above. It had been raining heavily for days, but no one in Guttannen was prepared for such a cataclysmic event, Schläppi included. “I can barely describe what it was like,” he says.

Schläppi was called out to inspect the cantonal road just above the village. An avalanche of rocks and mud had rolled several hundreds of metres down into the valley floor and on to the road. It had stopped the River Aare in its path – and redirected it towards the village. The water level in the church was one metre. A corresponding water mark and a sign reading “Die Aare kommt” (The Aare is coming) now commemorate what happened 17

years ago. The village church is today one of 28 stops on a theme trail called “Das Wetter und wir” (The weather and us). Inaugurated in 2021, the trail starts in front of the village hall and winds around Guttannen for almost three kilometres. The information signs contain a QR code for downloading audio content. In these recordings, villagers – including Schläppi – recount their personal experience of natural events and the local climate, e.g. avalanches in winter, debris flows in summer, and the föhn winds that blow for over a hundred days a year from the direction of the Grimsel Pass.

Melting permafrost

The theme trail also passes underneath the Rotlouwi. Since the 2005 debris flow, this flank of the mountain has been continually in flux. One of the reasons is climate change. Not only are rising temperatures accelerating the

In August 2005, the River Aare flowed through the middle of the village of Guttannen, flooding streets and cellars with mud.

Archive photo Grimsselfoto.ch

retreat of glaciers, but they are also causing the high Alpine permafrost to melt. Climate change is having a particularly stark impact on Switzerland's mountain regions, where the average temperature has increased by two degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era – almost twice as much as the global average.

The specific consequences for Guttannen are evident in borehole analyses conducted near the Homad Glacier 2,500 metres above sea level – namely, that the warmer it is becoming, the deeper the upper permafrost layer is melting. As a result, the Alpine bedrock is losing stability and the mountain slopes are starting to slip away. Such analyses also help to give early warning of imminent rock-fall.

The Spreitgraben on the other side of the valley is another issue. On the Ritzlihorn mountain above, 2009 saw a series of rockfalls and debris flows that filled the riverbed of the Aare on the valley floor with more and more material. This increased the risk of a part of Guttannen called Boden being covered by further debris flows. Thirty inhabitants even feared they would have to leave their homes for good. But in the end it was not necessary to move them. In 2014, experts said that the probability of a threat over the next 25 years was low. Nevertheless, some houses had to be vacated for good because they were too near to the danger zone.

More than just a “disaster zone”

Werner Schläppi-Maurer, who runs a joinery in the village, has been the mayor of Guttannen since 2019. “These natural events have brought all of us in the village together,” he says, deliberately referring to “events”, not “threats”. “We are surrounded by Mother Nature here and we know



“Natural events like this unify the local villagers”

Werner Schläppi-Maurer, municipal mayor of Guttannen



what she can do.” The 61-year-old is committed to ensuring a sustainable future for the village with its 260 inhabitants. He is critical of the media, whom he says refer to the village as a “disaster zone”. “Besides risks, we also see opportunities.”

Schläppi-Maurer also chairs Guttannen bewegt, an association that wants to future-proof the village and make it an attractive place to live. Another stated aim is to encourage ecotourism, with the theme trail “Das Wetter und wir” (The weather and us) only one of a number of projects launched recently. In the summer months, tourists can pay to stay overnight in the village ecocapsule – a self-sufficient, zero-carbon micro home situated in the middle of the village. The pod has integrated solar cells and a wind generator that provide the energy needed for power, heating and ventilation, and for processing rain-water into drinking water.

The village was also home to an ice stupa last winter – part of a University of Fribourg research project. An ice stupa is a conical-shaped ice heap used for preserving winter water for the summer. It is an innovation that orig-

The Aare's riverbed has been filling with increasing amounts of debris from landslides since 2009. This increases the risk of flooding in the village's lower 'Boden' district, which can be seen at the bottom right of the picture.

Archive photo Grimsselfoto.ch



More than 500,000 cubic metres of debris rumbled down the Rotlouwi ravine during the 2005 storm.

Archive photo Grimsselfoto.ch



Landslides exert enormous power – this immense rock was moved several hundred metres.

Archive photo Grimsselfoto.ch



The weather with all its challenges is omnipresent – a wind gauge on the "The weather and us" themed hiking trail.

Photo Guttannen-bewegt.ch



Plaques are used to immortalise the villagers' testimonies to the climate and weather – here is one about the föhn wind, which often blows with great force through the valley.

Photo Guttannen-bewegt.ch

Fresh legislation to combat climate change

One year on since voters rejected the CO₂ Act, Swiss parliamentarians have embarked on a new attempt to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. In June, the National Council approved legislation to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. The Council of States will consider the bill in September.

Specific, binding milestones will apply to industry, motorised traffic and buildings under the proposed new law. Financial incentives will also be created to ensure that factories, cars and heating installations emit reduced or no greenhouse gases in future. Two funding packages are in the pipeline – one worth around two billion Swiss francs to replace oil and gas heating, the other worth 1.2 billion francs to promote green industrial technologies.

The bill is parliament's response to the "Glacier Initiative" – a proposal, submitted in 2019, to make Switzerland climate-neutral by 2050 and ban fossil fuels like oil, gas, petrol, diesel and coal from 2050. The initiative committee – whose members include biophysicist and former Nobel Prize winner Jacques Dubochet – has stated a willingness to withdraw its proposal, so that the bill can quickly come into force. However, this offer is contingent on the Council of States not watering down the legislation.

The SVP is particularly opposed to a strict climate change regime. It prefers "voluntary" action to combat global warming. Hence, there is a distinct possibility of the issue being put to voters. (TP)

<https://gletscher-initiative.ch>

inates in the north Indian region of Ladakh, where rainfall is becoming increasingly scarce. Fribourg's academics used Guttannen's ice stupa to study freezing and melting processes. Their findings will help populations in the Indian Himalayas adapt to climate change.

Stopping the exodus

In 2016, Guttannen and the Grimsel region drew up their own "climate adaptation strategy". This paper contains a wide range of action areas, such as land-use planning, social and economic development, and protection from natural threats.

Besides climate change, Guttannen has also clearly felt the consequences of depopulation and demographic ageing. "People aged 30 to 45 no longer live in our village," says Werner Schläppi-Maurer. With fewer and fewer children being born as a result, the canton of Berne wanted to close the local pri-

mary school in 2019 due to a lack of pupils. To allow children to continue going to class, Guttannen has since funded the running of the school itself.

So that it could offer housing to newcomers and returnees, the village has bought empty properties that used to be lived in by employees of local hydropower company Kraftwerke Oberhasli. This has already paid dividends, with one family having now moved into the village. This is good news for Guttannen stalwarts like Edi Schläppi, who could never imagine leaving. "Guttannen is my home," he says.

Migros to remain alcohol-free

Migros supermarkets and restaurants have never sold wine, beer or spirits. Nor will they, after a resounding majority of cooperative members – almost 80 per cent – decided to uphold the retailer’s ban on alcohol sales.

THEODORA PETER

“Oui” and “Non” (yes and no) are the names of two beer brands that were created – one with alcohol, one without – to commemorate the landmark vote. It was an emphatic verdict. All ten regional Migros cooperatives said “Non”. The no to alcohol sales attracted up to 80 per cent of the vote in some cases. It was less clear-cut in the winegrowing cantons of Valais (60 per cent), Ticino (55 per cent), Geneva (65 per cent) and Vaud (69 per cent). Over 630,000 people around the country – or around 29 per cent of a total of 2.2 million registered cooperative members – took part in the plebiscite.

Alcohol available online

Colloquially referred to as “the orange giant”, complete with its abbreviated orange logo, the letter M, Migros has deliberately not sold alcohol for almost 95 years. Migros founder Gottfried Duttweiler (1888–1962) had this self-imposed prohibition inserted into the cooperative’s articles of association in 1928. Although he had a penchant for wine and cigars, Duttweiler decided against selling these lucrative legal drugs – tobacco as well as alcohol – in the interests of public health. But Migros has long been circumventing 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. This will not change.

Nevertheless, anti-addiction groups like the Blue Cross are relieved at the decision to uphold the voluntary abstinence in supermarkets. Otherwise, dry alcoholics are always in danger of relapsing when they walk past alco-



A referendum result becomes a brand. The alcohol-free ‘Non’ beer will soon be on Migros shelves. If the majority had voted yes, Migros would have added a ‘Oui’ beer with alcohol to its range. However, only 24.7% of the votes were in favour. Image provided

hol-laden shelves, and a no-alcohol policy constitutes a shot in the arm for disease prevention, they say.

Integrity more important than making money

The Group for M Values, spearheaded by former Migros CEO Herbert Bolliger, also campaigned against the alcohol ban being lifted. Bolliger, 69, expressed his delight at how clear the outcome of the vote was. “It sends an unequivocal message that certain values are more important than making money,” he said, adding that

non-alcoholic beverages also sell well and are currently in vogue. Indeed, the alcohol-free beer market is positively booming in Switzerland. “Non”, Migros’s new own-brand beer, will arrive on supermarket shelves in 2023.

In the words of current Migros boss Fabrice Zumbrunnen, alcohol is now off the agenda “for at least another generation”. Delegates of the Federation of Migros Cooperatives put it on the agenda a year ago, arguing that beer, wine and spirits could help grow sales. This ultimately proved very much a minority view.



Initiative against intensive livestock farming sparks debate — even in the organic sector

Boasting support from the Franz Weber Foundation and Greenpeace, the initiative against intensive livestock farming is calling for the Bio Suisse criteria to become standard. Farmers are divided, including organic producers. A report from the Jura.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Clouds are gathering on the horizon of Develier, a village located five kilometres from Delémont. Noël Saucy stands on the doorstep of his house. Offering his hand and a sincere smile, he gestures towards his home. The Saucy family has worked here for five generations. In 2002 they invested in a separate farming operation, located 200 metres further uphill, where we discover a four-metre-high shed with 180 square metres of floor space, inhabited by 2,000 laying hens. Nearby, Noël's wife, Agnès Saucy, checks and cleans the eggs moving past her on a conveyor belt. Each egg is dated and marked with a zero, a sign that it comes from a farm conforming to Bio Suisse standards. Between 1,600 and 1,900 eggs are laid here every day, before being sold on to a wholesaler for 47 cents each.

The Saucy family turned its back on conventional farming methods in 2002, as the village cheese dairy was about to switch over to organic. The transition took two years. Their farm already had 1,000 laying hens and by 2007 that number had increased to 3,000 over two buildings. An organic farm can keep a maximum of 4,000 hens, and a single coop is allowed half that number. In conventional farming, 18,000 laying hens may be kept in a single building, and 27,000 chickens for fattening can be kept together until they reach 28 days of age. "Organic farming is more demanding. We were proud to make a successful changeover. We're more aware now of certain elements as they relate to nature," says Noël, whose products can be found on the shelves of Migros supermarkets. Nevertheless, this fact does not stop the 57-year-old from being opposed to the initiative against

intensive livestock farming, which will be put to the Swiss population in a referendum on 25 September. "If everyone goes organic, our products will no longer stand out," he says, contrary to the views of Bio Suisse.

Animal feed and welfare at the centre of the debate

In Develier, the Saucy family's laying hens live in conditions that are very different from those of battery hens, which have been banned in Switzerland since 1992. The birds are able to move freely about in an aviary and lay their eggs in darkened nesting boxes. They peck around in a shed with a straw-strewn floor and have access to an outdoor area covered with wood chips. In good weather, they can flap around in a pasture and seek out shade under the spreading fruit

Among other demands, the initiative is calling for farm animals to be given sufficient living space and guaranteed animal-friendly husbandry. Here we see chickens on the Bio-Hof Saucy organic farm.

Photo: Stéphane Herzog

trees. The hens are productive for 11 months before they are slaughtered and replaced by 18-week-old pullets. On this farm, the free-range area for these hens must provide a minimum of five square metres of land per bird. Conventional poultry farming only requires half that space. At the Saucy farm, the feed they use is cultivated organically, and chicken manure is applied as fertiliser on site. "For the past 20 years, we've used absolutely no commercial fertiliser on our fields," says the Jura native, whose farming operation also has 45 dairy cows. All of the fodder is produced right on the farm.

On the subject of animal feed, Alexandra Gavilano, a food specialist at Greenpeace, points out the considerable environmental burden that results from importing soya and cereal grains to feed animals. She regrets





that “import taxes on animal feed have been lowered since the war in Ukraine began”. The activist is calling on the Swiss population to reduce their consumption of meat, milk and eggs. The idea is that plants should be the primary source of nutrition for humans. The initiative also has a strong ethical component. “The concept of an animal’s dignity includes the right not to be intensively farmed,” argue supporters of the initiative. They point out that only 12 percent of farm animals have access to an outdoor pasture during their lifetime, and that up to 4 percent of farm animals die prematurely before they are taken to the abattoir.

When confronted with these figures, Noël puts them into perspective. “The farms with 18,000 chickens also provide winter runs and pastures,” he says. But isn’t the whole point of the

A stamp that certifies animal wellbeing. The code 0-CH-BIO designates eggs from farms that meet the Bio-Suisse criteria.

Photo: Stéphane Herzog

Conventional farms are allowed to keep up to 18,000 chickens per shed. Animal rights activists are campaigning against this high density and its consequences for animal welfare. Here we see a poultry farm in Dailiens (VD).

Photo: Keystone



initiative to enable the federal government to protect Swiss agriculture? Paradoxically, Noël fears for his business. “If production declines because the number of hens per farm is shrinking, we’ll be competing with foreign poultry, which are raised under much worse conditions than in Switzerland.” In the European Union, for example, chicken farms can house up to 100,000 birds. Noël foresees problems in trying to expand the construction of small organic farms, despite owning one himself. On the other hand, however, the initiative backers believe that such farms would be favourable to animal welfare.

A sense of loyalty at play among farmers

If the initiative is approved, around 5 percent of Swiss farms would be forced to change their farming methods. Greenpeace reports that 237 farms have more than 12,000 hens, accounting for 43 percent of the total poultry stock in Switzerland. Why, then, are some organic farmers fighting the initiative? Christine Gerber, a

farmer from the Jura region, is a member of the Uniterre organisation and has her own views on this matter. “Male farmers are caught up in a system of loyalty to their peers and are influenced by their education, whereas we women bear the children. We have a responsibility to the future generations,” she declares. Her farm in the Franche-Montagnes district is a unique neo-agricultural enclave, where meat is eaten only twice a week.

Christine is in favour of reducing the scale of poultry and pig production. She opposes plans to increase milk production. “More cows means even more manure. The land is already overloaded with it,” she says. Faced with a drought situation, the farmer would consider reducing her herd. She emphasises the generous time period outlined by the initiative – 25 years – to organise a transition to organic farming. “There will be more small farms, which is a positive thing,” she adds, hopefully.

Act now before feed shortages occur

According to Greenpeace, the transition will happen sooner rather than later due to grain and fodder shortages in an environment already under pressure. “We need to help farmers who are dependent on this production system and on major distributors,” says Alexandra Gavilano. She believes that the approval of the initiative would “provide a political basis for the creation of a fund to support the transformation of agriculture”. The Federal Council proposed a direct counter-proposal to this initiative that instead would have required all livestock to have regular outdoor exercise. The National Council, however, did not agree to the proposal.

Pro: massentierhaltung.ch

Kontra: massentierhaltungsinitiative-nein.ch

“French is killing my mother tongue”

Ágota Kristóf (1935–2011) wrote in French about such things as war, murder and manslaughter. This is remarkable, given that the French language remained her avowed enemy to the last.



Ágota Kristóf
(1935–2011)
Photo: Yvonne Böhrer

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Kristóf's trilogy of novels, “The Notebook”, “The Proof” and “The Third Lie”, stand alone in Switzerland for the direct, plain, simple yet horrifically brutal way in which they portray war – and for the distinctive style in which they are written. They provide harrowing accounts of what humans are capable of doing to each other once they become estranged from humanity.

Fleeing war and terror

Kristóf, born in the Hungarian village of Csikvánd on 30 October 1935, was nine when German troops captured her country – exactly the same age as the two twins in her trilogy who live through war and then Stalinism. She fell in love with her history teacher at high school, and fled with him and their little daughter to Austria after Soviet troops moved in to crush the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. “I left my secret diary behind in Hungary, including my first poems,” she recalls. “I abruptly left the country without saying goodbye to my brothers or my parents. But above all, it was on this day at the end of November 1956 that I stopped belonging.”

Making watches in Neuchâtel

After arriving in Austria, Kristóf travelled on to Switzerland, where she found work at a watch factory in Neuchâtel. She learned French and resumed her literary endeavours in this new, adopted tongue. However, the language of Molière would remain her avowed enemy to the last. This is because she never mastered it completely and could only write with the help of a well-worn dictionary. “And because French is killing my mother

“The factory is a good place for writing poems. The work is monotonous, you can think of other things, and the machines have a steady rhythm to recite verses. When a poem takes shape, I write it down. I am one of ten Hungarians who work in this factory in Neuchâtel. The food in the canteen is very different to what we are used to, so we eat almost nothing. At lunchtime, I have made do with coffee and bread for at least a year.”

(Excerpt from a column in “du” magazine in 1990; published most recently in “The Illiterate”, 2007)

tongue.” Kristóf's inconspicuous first steps as a writer came in amateur theatre. Her radio plays in Neuchâtel were broadcast on Radio Suisse Romande.

Unexpected global success

Paris publishing house Éditions du Seuil printed her debut novel “The Notebook” in 1986. To her surprise,

not only this work but its sequels “The Proof” (1988) and “The Third Lie” (1991) catapulted her to worldwide prominence – despite the unbearable brutality of human existence ultimately being their overriding theme. Their relatively simple written style reflects how much trouble Kristóf had with French. In a laconic tone conveying nothing but coldness and emptiness, the author evokes the oppressive era in which she lived as a child in Hungary. Everything is grey. Even the colour white is grey. The protagonists, and their names, are interchangeable. Their senses deadened. Love is dead. The weak inflict on others what the strong inflict on them. Unconscionable things like murder, manslaughter, betrayal and incest. For no plausible reason. The trilogy tells the story of twins Claus and Lucas, who share a symbiotic relationship. The books are filled with horrendously traumatic, cruel imagery and imbued with a somewhat archaic, mythical intonation found lacking in such later novels as “Hier” [Yesterday] (1995) based in the Jura. When comparing Kristóf to other authors, no one from Switzerland comes to mind. There are similarities to Kafka, Daniil Charms, and Beckett maybe, whose writings can also elicit the same feelings of utter despair found in the last sentences of the trilogy: “Once mother has died, there will be no more reason for me to live. Jumping in front of a train is a good idea.”

ÁGOTA KRISTÓF'S WORKS ARE PUBLISHED IN GERMAN BY PIPER VERLAG, AND IN FRENCH BY ÉDITIONS DU SEUIL. HER TRILOGY OF NOVELS (“THE NOTEBOOK, THE PROOF, THE THIRD LIE: THREE NOVELS”) IS AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH FROM GROVE PRESS.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH

Starting again



MARTIN R. DEAN:
Ein Stück Himmel.
Novel. Atlantis Verlag,
Zurich, 2022

One moment of inattention. An unfortunate accident. Then life is changed forever. Artist Samuel Butt, a man in the rudest of health, experiences that moment himself. Waking up tied to an operating table, he learns that he is partially paralysed. Standing there is friend Florian Füssli, who was one of the surgeons who operated on him.

Extreme circumstances put a friendship to the test in Martin R. Dean's latest novel "Ein Stück Himmel" (A piece of heaven). Sam and Florian have lost touch in the preceding three years. Their unexpected reunion brings back memories, but also highlights how different the two essentially are. Freedom-loving Sam finds it hard to come to terms with his paralysis. Dependable Florian tries to help in any way he can. Both have been like that since they were at school together.

Using interweaving narrative perspectives, Dean describes Sam's frustration at trying to get used to life in a wheelchair after his accident. Florian tries to be of assistance. In the end, he and Sam travel together to Portugal in the hope of reviving their old companionship. Easier said than done. Failed artist Sam is still as bolshy as ever, whereas Dr Florian sees himself as a subservient cog in the healthcare industry. You need to hurt in order to heal, he likes to say. Sam rebels against this notion, because complete freedom means everything to him.

Both share an inner disquiet. Shy and retiring Florian envies his friend's vitality, while past failures eat away at Sam. His artistic career has never really taken off, and all that he has left is freedom – and love.

"Ein Stück Himmel" subtly explores and puts this difficult interaction deliberately into a somewhat uneasy context. A moment of inattention can turn a life upside down. Dean expands adroitly on this message, forcing us to confront an experience that could happen to any one of us at any time. How would you cope? Would you resist, as Sam does? Or would you follow Florian's advice and humbly reconcile yourself to your new life? We keep revisiting these questions to the bitter end. The story's comforting showdown merely serves as a flashback to a time when things were better.

BEAT MAZENAUER

A window to the barren beauty of Arizona



INEZONA:
"A Self Portrait".
Czar of Crickets,
2022

The name Inezona evokes the bone-dry state of Arizona – a desert of head-high cacti under a bright sun. It also speaks of a melting pot of US and Mexican cultural influences. Arizona is home to country, Americana and roots music on the one hand, and mariachi on the other. Where English and Spanish vocals intertwine, often in the same song.

It is in this part of the world, or the city of Tucson to be precise, that Ines Brodbeck has spent a lot of time in recent years. The singer from Basel has taken considerable inspiration from her adopted home and made recordings with musicians from Tucson. Her style is reminiscent of internationally acclaimed act Calexico. This is no coincidence, given that her musical partner, guitarist and producer Gabriel Sullivan, has played in said band, as have other members of her ensemble.

Brodbeck's love of Arizona also shines through in her latest album "A Self Portrait" – a work of both tender and mystical beauty. Guitars, banjos and ukuleles reverberate, along with percussive elements that include kitchen utensils.

The LP is a harmonious, authentic marriage of Arizona and central Europe, representing the world in which the singer feels most at ease. Brodbeck opens the door to Inezona and lets us in. But she has no stories to tell this time. This a departure from previous efforts. "A Self Portrait" is a purely instrumental record without words, which Brodbeck – also for the first time – recorded single-handedly at home in Switzerland. The 39 minutes of playing time feature only minimal voices. Vocals rather than singing as such, they add an extra dash of colour to ten compositions that speak for themselves – acoustic expressions of longing, remembrance and hope. The music exudes an intuitive, intimate, almost cinematic urgency.

In keeping with the Arizonan spirit, "A Self Portrait" has no need of words.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Will the Alpine pasture season soon have UNESCO status?

Alpine pastures and huts are the epitome of green living, and the summer grazing season is a tradition to be protected – says Switzerland, which has applied to have the Alpine pasture season included on the UNESCO list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

EVA HIRSCHI

Cows crowned with flowers and hung with huge clanging bells walk majestically down the mountain, accompanied by traditionally dressed herdsmen and women. A dog keeps the bovines in check. Every Swiss has this image in their mind when they think of an Alpine cattle descent. And if they have never witnessed such an occasion in person, they will at least have seen it on television.

“Our cows always stir with excitement. They look forward to it,” says farmer Roger Felder from Flühli (canton of Lucerne). From mid-May until late autumn, Felder lives on the mountain with around 150 dairy cows, suckler cows and beef cattle (100 of which belong to other farmers) as well as a number of other animals. He makes the ascent and descent on foot, assisted by family, friends and acquaintances. The village holds its own Alpine fair at the end of the grazing season.

In March, the Federal Office of Culture applied to UNESCO to have the Alpine pasture season and its associated traditions included on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list. Felder: “UNESCO recognition would be a nice acknowledgement of the job we do.” His father and grandfather used to spend summer on the high pasture, although the custom itself dates much further back. Families in the Alps have been herding their cattle, sheep and goats at altitudes of between 600 and 2,900 metres since the late Middle Ages.

“We also want to increase awareness of the role and importance of Alpine farming,” says Isabelle Raboud-Schüle, a member of the Swiss UNESCO commission who was heavily involved in submitting the application. Recognition as intangible cultural heritage means that Switzerland would undertake to preserve the tradition. “Of course, we are not going to start telling farmers to bring their cows up to the pastures on foot instead of on the back of a truck,” she continues. “Traditions will always evolve. We don’t want to ban farmers from using mobile phones, do we?”

National pride

Instead of imposing a straitjacket, UNESCO recognition is therefore about promoting traditions and practices that have been passed down through generations, giving communities a sense of identity and continuity. Basel Carnival and Swiss watchmaking are two items already on the UNESCO list. The Alpine pasture season also encom-

passes related crafts such as cheesemaking, shingle-making and dry stone walling, as well as customs such as the traditional melody sung or played on the Alpine horn to call the cattle from pasture, or the Alpine blessing recited from the mountaintops every evening.

“Over 200 years ago, Jean-Jacques Rousseau portrayed the Alps as symbolising Swiss unity,” says Raboud-Schüle, adding that the high pasture conjures less of a sense of national feeling among Alpine neighbours France, Germany, Austria and Italy. “Olive oil and the ruins in Rome are much more important to the Italian psyche.”

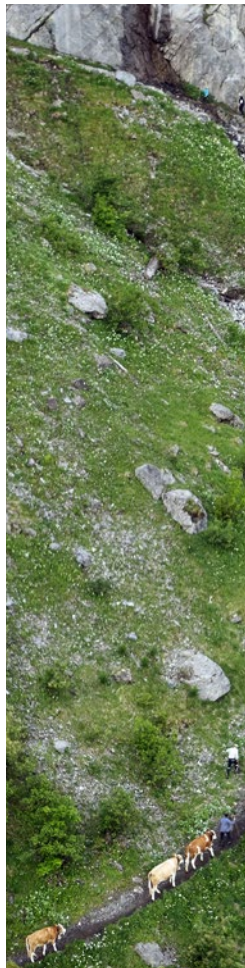
Farmers since the late Middle Ages have been driving their cattle, sheep and goats to meadows between 600 and 2,900 metres above sea level to take advantage of the extra pasture.

The cachet of UNESCO status is not the whole story either, believes Moritz Schwery, a board member of the association of Swiss Alpine farmers, the SAV. “Studies show that the summer grazing season is conducive to animal health,” he says. “Younger animals in particular develop better resilience.” It also preserves the mountain pastures and promotes biodiversity. And it benefits tourism.

Hard reality for mountain farmers

Schwery notes that many traditions are experiencing a revival. Younger farmers and cattle herders are again increasingly descending from the pastures on foot. UNESCO is expected to give its verdict by the end of 2023. Is it necessary for the Alpine pasture season to be included on the list at all? Schwery takes a pragmatic view: “It could give policymakers added impetus to support farmers.” He means financially.

This is because the romanticised image of Alpine herding does not always reflect reality. Climate change is drying out the pastures, hikers are dropping litter, mountain bikers are ignoring the designated cycle paths, and wolves are attacking livestock. “Many think of shepherds looking after their cows in the mountains while the sun shines. But life on the pasture can be really hard.”





Every year, 17,000 Alpine farmers bring their animals up to the high mountain areas. Some 436,000 cows, cattle and calves as well as over 120,000 sheep, goats and pigs spend summer on 6,672 Alpine farms. Photo: Keystone



During the 10th century, farmers ventured higher into the Alps, clearing forests and expanding their pastures up to 2,500 metres above sea level. Their labour continues to shape the image of Switzerland's mountain landscape to this day. Photo: Keystone



The 5,033 square kilometres of summer pasture in the Alps and Jura account for around a third of total land used for farming in Switzerland. Photo: Keystone



Every summer, 5,000 tonnes of Alpine cheese are produced on the mountain farms, representing four per cent of the total cheese production in Switzerland. Perhaps not be a tremendous amount, but certainly one with great symbolic power. Photo: Keystone

Switzerland and Liechtenstein – two neighbours moving even closer together

Switzerland and Liechtenstein already enjoy excellent bilateral relations. An additional treaty allowing Switzerland to represent Liechtenstein's consular interests will now cement these relations further.

Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein have a lot in common. They are separated by a 41.3-kilometre border but have operated in the same economic area, or customs union, since 1924. Over 100 treaties in force currently reflect the many values that unite these congenial neighbours. The 3,758 Swiss living in Liechtenstein and the 1,713 Liechtenstein nationals living in Switzerland (in 2020) are further proof of the close ties shared by the two countries.

Switzerland to represent Liechtenstein's interests

Since 2000, Switzerland has appointed an ambassador for Liechtenstein, with residence in Berne. Apart from the embassy that it opened in Berne in 1919, Liechtenstein also has diplomatic missions in Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, New York, Strasbourg, Washington and Vienna. On the basis of a treaty dating back to 1919, Switzerland represents Liechtenstein in countries where Liechtenstein does not have its own embassy. In 2021, 913 Liechtenstein nationals were registered with Swiss representations.

Under the 1919 treaty, Swiss representations accept Liechtenstein passport applications, authenticate and submit certificates of marital status, and assist Liechtenstein nationals in various emergency situations. As agreed, these consular services are also provided within the parameters of the Swiss Abroad Act.

Switzerland also represents Liechtenstein's interests in relation to visas. Based on a framework agreement that came into force on 19 December 2011, Berne issues visas on behalf of its neighbour for short-term residence (1,352 Schengen visas in 2019) and long-term residence (116 national visas; 1,468 visas in total). An additional treaty, which came into force on 1 May 2022, now also governs consular representation of Liechtenstein by Switzerland in the US,

p.B. 28. Okt. 1919. Rewode 1973

FÜRSTLICH LIECHTENSTEINISCHE
GESANDTSCHAFT IN BERN

ZAHL 15

BERN, AM 21. Okt. 1919
OPTINGENSTRASSE 87
TELEPHON 6596

Herr Bundesrat Calonder,
(Vorsteher des Schweizerischen Politischen Departements,
BERN.

28. OKT. 1919
554.

Herr Bundesrat!

Im Auftrag der fürstlich Liechtensteinischen Regierung habe ich die Ehre, den Schweizerischen Bundesrat zu bitten, die Vertretung der Liechtensteinischen Interessen in den Ländern zu übernehmen, wo das Fürstentum keine Vertretung hat, während die Schweiz eine solche besitzt. Abgesehen von der Schweiz, Deutschland, Österreich und der Tschecho-Slowakei, wo das Fürstentum Gesandtschaften unterhält, ist die Zahl der im Ausland lebenden Liechtensteiner sehr gering. Trotzdem legt die fürstliche Regierung grossen Wert darauf, dass auch in den andern Ländern die Interessen des Fürstentums vertreten sind. Unter solchen Umständen möchte sie dieselben dem Schutze der Schweiz anvertrauen, zu der sie und auch das Liechtensteinische Volk das grösste Zutrauen haben.

Genehmigen Sie, Herr Bundesrat, die Versicherung meiner vorzüglichsten Hochachtung

Der fürstlich Liechtensteinische Geschäftsträger
Jen.

In 1919, the embassy of Liechtenstein in Berne asked the Federal Council to start safeguarding Liechtenstein's interests in countries where the Principality had no representation. Switzerland representing Liechtenstein's consular interests strengthens relations between the two countries.

Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic and, to a limited extent, Austria, i.e. in countries where Liechtenstein has its own representation but no department dedicated to consular matters. Liechtenstein nationals can therefore rely on every Swiss representation abroad to provide them with consular services.

Did you know?

Occupying 160 square kilometres of land, Liechtenstein is Europe's fourth-smallest and the world's six-smallest country. Liechtenstein is a constitutional hereditary monarchy based on democratic and parliamentary principles. Its head of state is HSH Prince Hans-Adam II of Liechtenstein, who also bears the titles Duke of Troppau and Jägerndorf, and Count of Rietberg. In 2004, Hans-Adam II handed over the duties of head of state to his oldest son, HSH Hereditary Prince Alois. Four political parties are represented in the parliament of Liechtenstein, the Landtag. Liechtenstein is a landlocked country with no port, airport or motorway. It disbanded its army in 1868. However, every man fit to bear arms is required, until the completion of his 60th year, to serve in the defence of the country in the event of emergency. Of Liechtenstein's 39,055 inhabitants in 2020, 13,467 were not Liechtenstein nationals. Over half of the country's 40,328 employed people in the same year were cross-border workers (22,511), of whom 58 per cent live in Switzerland. Some 40 per cent of people living in Liechtenstein belong to a sports club. To date, this has translated into ten Olympic medals, all of them in alpine skiing. Liechtenstein has a rich culture. It has five restaurants listed in the influential Gault Millau restaurant guide, it issues its own postage stamps, and it boasts the "Princely Collections" which date back 400 years and have 1,700 paintings. Liechtenstein also has excellent international ties. It

Consular relations between Switzerland and Liechtenstein

On the basis of three treaties, Switzerland has been representing Liechtenstein's consular interests since 1919 and also issues visas on behalf of its neighbour. Consular statistics in 2019: 913 registered Liechtenstein nationals; 57 Liechtenstein passport applications; assistance to Liechtenstein nationals in emergency situations; 1,352 Schengen visas; 116 visas for long-term residence.

- 1919** Exchange of notes between Switzerland and Liechtenstein in countries where Liechtenstein does not have its own embassy.
- 2011** Framework agreement on cooperation related to visa procedures, entry and residence, and on police cooperation in the border area.
- 2022** Exchange of notes between Switzerland and Liechtenstein on consular representation of Liechtenstein in Germany, the US, Belgium, the Czech Republic and, to a limited extent, Austria.

has been a member of the UN since 18 September 1990, it joined the European Economic Area (EEA) on 1 May 1995, and its customs union treaty with Switzerland has been in force for 99 years. Liechtenstein is a Schengen-associated country. It has been implementing the Schengen Agreement since 2011.

The new 2022 treaty will provide even greater impetus and enrichment to what is already a well-established partnership.

RAHEL SCHWEIZER, FDFA,
CONSULAR DIRECTORATE (CD)

Marking the border – on the bridge from Schaan in Liechtenstein to Buchs in the canton of St Gallen.

Photo: dam.liechtenstein.li / provided



Travel Admin – the FDFA travel app

Travel Admin is the travel app from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The app assists you in preparing for a trip abroad and supports you during your journey with useful functions, information and individually adaptable checklists. The always updated travel advice from the FDFA is just a tap away, making it an indispensable part of any travel preparation. After registering, you can enter travel destinations and add other

travellers and emergency addresses. This enables the FDFA to contact you more easily in case of an emergency. Go ahead and create a profile, register your trip and travel safely!



Travel Admin

The Travel Admin app is for free in the iOS and in the Android App Shop.

Stay informed with FDFA travel advice

If you are planning and undertaking a trip abroad, the FDFA can provide you with information on security-related issues concerning politics and crime in whichever country you are visiting. Register your email address with us to receive all the latest FDFA travel advice for free.

FDFA Helpline – your central contact point

The Helpline of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is your central contact point for all matters relating to consular services. The FDFA Helpline is also ready to assist you in emergencies. Worldwide, 365 days a year, around the clock – by phone, email or Skype.

Reisehinweise

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Consular services

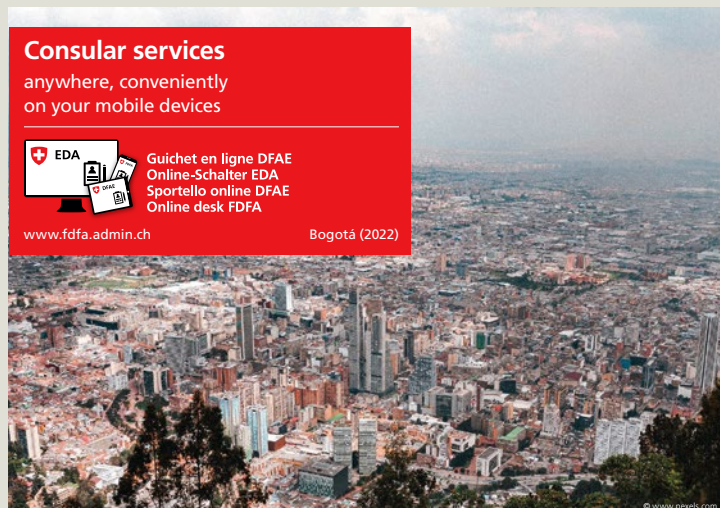
anywhere, conveniently
on your mobile devices



Guichet en ligne DFAE
Online-Schalter EDA
Sportello online DFAE
Online desk FDFA

www.fdfa.admin.ch

Bogotá (2022)



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.

The Federal Council decided that the following federal proposals will be submitted to the people on 25 September 2022:

- Popular initiative of 17 September 2019 "No Factory Farming in Switzerland (Factory Farming Initiative)" (BBI 2022 700);
- Federal Decree of 17 December 2021 on Additional Funding for OASI by increasing Value Added Tax (BBI 2022 2991);
- Amendment of 17 December 2021 to the Federal Act on Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASIA) (OASI 21) (BBI 2021 2995);
- Amendment of 17 December 2021 to the Federal Act on Withholding Tax (Withholding Tax Act, WTA) (Strengthening the Debt Capital Market) (BBI 2021 3002).

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

The following federal popular initiatives have already been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

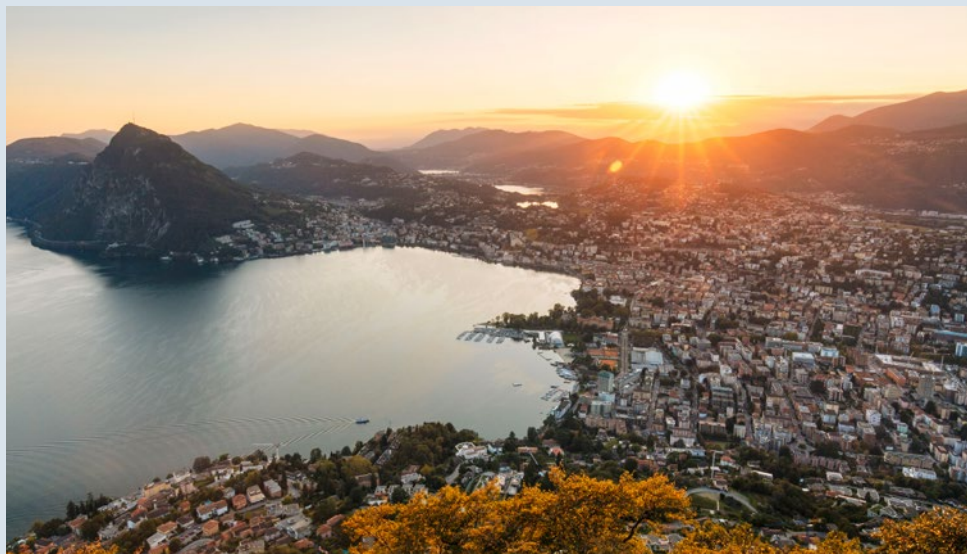
- Federal Popular Initiative "For a new Federal Constitution" (19.10.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "For a civically engaged Switzerland (Civic Duty Initiative)" (26.10.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "For restrictions on fireworks" (03.11.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "Use National Bank profits to support OASI (SNB Initiative)" (24.11.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative "200 francs is enough! (SBC Initiative)" (01.12.2023)

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



Reflecting together on the challenges facing democracy

How does Switzerland's democratic system confront the big challenges of today? This question, the core theme of the upcoming Congress of the Swiss Abroad, has probably never been more relevant than now. Those attending the event in Lugano on 19 and 20 August 2022 will have no shortage of issues to discuss.



Sunset over the lake – Lugano is an attractive venue. Photo: Milo Zanecchia

This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano has already provided unwitting testimony to the fast-moving world in which we live. Its stated theme – "What are the challenges facing our democracy?" – is already three years old. Little did we know back then that both the 2020 and 2021 congress would fall foul of the pandemic. Now that Swiss Abroad from around the world as well as members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad are actually able to meet in Lugano, the congress theme appears in a completely different light.

With Russia having invaded Ukraine, the fundamental challenges facing democracy take on a whole new dimension. This comes after Covid-19, which has already put an unprecedented strain on democracy.

Original topics relevant as ever

Meanwhile, topics on the original congress agenda – globalisation, immigration, data protection, connectivity, increased difficulty in exercising political rights – have lost none

of their resonance in terms of their impact on democracy. In immediate, practical terms for many Swiss Abroad, there is the issue of not being able to vote at all – and the reforms needed to rectify this situation. If anything, the sense of urgency has increased, given that elections to the National Council and the Council of States are scheduled for 2023.

New issues have arisen

"How do we protect Switzerland's unique democratic principles amid the rise of autocracy?" asked the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) back in 2019 in preparation for the congress. For the politicians, experts and delegates gathering in Lugano, this issue is more pressing than ever. And to the list of questions regarding the future from a Swiss perspective have recently been added new conundrums. Are Switzerland's democratic system and neutral status enough of a safeguard against outside threats? How safe is Switzerland at present

and in future for Swiss at home and abroad? Amid the brutal war in Ukraine, what role, if any, should Switzerland play? And finally: given everything happening in the world right now, what are the implications for Swiss neutrality?

These questions need answers. The onus is on dialogue, shared interest and engagement to obtain them. The 98th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano aims to ignite the conversation, as figures from politics, business and science come together to consider some of the most pressing issues concerning Swiss democracy. Representatives of the major Swiss political parties are expected to outline their thoughts and suggest solutions. President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis will also address the assembled Swiss Abroad in Lugano, offering his own view of the future.

Follow on live stream

The Council of the Swiss Abroad, referred to as the "Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland", will convene on Friday, 19 August. The plenary session and workshops will take place on Saturday, 20 August. OSA President Filippo Lombardi will open and close the congress. Anyone who cannot be in Lugano can follow the 2022 Congress of the Swiss Abroad on live stream instead at www.swisscommunity.org. (AB/MUL)

revue.link/lugano2022
revue.link/lugano2022stream



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“I want to give something back”

Fashion designer Lucrezia Biondi, who lives in Germany, used to go on OSA Youth Service summer camps every year when she was younger. She is now taking the plunge as a camp leader and wishes to take elements of her training for this position and put them into practice in her professional life.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Lucrezia Biondi works as a clothes designer and has her own fashion line. She is a dance instructor, she is learning to become a yoga teacher – and she has also completed her training as a Y+S camp leader this year. Y+S stands for Youth and Sport, the federal government scheme to promote sport. Soon Biondi will be doing a dance project in the south of France. A few weeks later, she will be co-leading the OSA Youth Service camp in Fieschertal (canton of Valais). The 26-year-old obviously has a lot on her plate and a great deal of energy to burn. “I just get a kick out of doing a lot of different things,” she laughs.

Living in Germany, Biondi is a Swiss Abroad herself. Her mother grew up in Ge-

neva, while her father holds dual Swiss and German citizenship. She used to go on an OSA camp every year as a child and teenager. “It was the highlight of the year for me,” she says. “To meet people of my age from around the world, all of them Swiss nationals like me, was always exciting.”

The attraction of team play

It is ten years since Biondi last went on such a camp. “Because I enjoyed the camps so much, I decided to become a camp leader myself. I want to experience that special atmosphere again and give something back.”

Biondi did the Y+S camp sports and trekking instructor course in Switzerland. “The course itself is structured like a camp. I

thought that was great. The whole camping environment pulled me in again straight away.” Biondi felt particularly energised by the team-play nature of camp sports. “Until then, I had only ever done sports outside the competitive, teamwork setting. This playful aspect of camp sports is missing in fashion, yoga and dance.” The course changed her perspective. “I found that camp sports can really be quite exciting too. I can imagine incorporating these elements in my professional work.”

Chance to catch up with her relatives

There was another good thing about doing the Y+S training course in Switzerland: “I realised it had been a long time since I had last

Lucrezia Biondi in her day job as a fashion designer.

Photo: provided



In Switzerland for education or training

Young Swiss Abroad receive specific information on the topic of education in Switzerland.

seen my Swiss relatives.” She therefore went to visit them after completing her course. But Biondi not only caught up with her extended Swiss family, but also travelled to the base in Fieschertal where the camp is due to take place. She and the team spent a week-end there preparing for the camp. Anticipa-

“Because I enjoyed the camps so much, I decided to become a camp leader myself.”

tion was starting to build, she reports. Nevertheless, Biondi is happy not to have to take on overall responsibility for the camp yet. She is non-committal on whether she wants to be head of camp one day. “I will just do my job and gain experience.”

Biondi still has a fair amount to do before the camp begins. She is currently putting the finishing touches to her part of the schedule and is looking forward to good vibes and a good group of young people. And she cannot wait to return to Switzerland. “I call it home, without ever having lived there.”

Every year, the staff of *educationsuisse* receive numerous inquiries from Swiss citizens abroad or from their relatives and friends in Switzerland. Most questions concern scholarship opportunities and university studies. However, *educationsuisse* also receives a wide variety of questions about vocational training, finding an apprenticeship, accommodation, insurance, and the language skills required. It often becomes apparent that due to the rather high cost of living in Switzerland, financing an education can be a problem, but in fact a solution can always be found.

The *educationsuisse* service offers free advice and support in the search for suitable education or training solutions:

- Individual counselling onsite in Berne or online on the topic of education in Switzerland
- Vocational and study counselling in cooperation with a professional career counselling provider (fee-based)
- Assistance in applying for cantonal scholarship and administrative support
- Financial help (grants/loans) from *educationsuisse* and private foundations

The *educationsuisse* staff speak English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. They will be glad to help and answer questions about education in Switzerland via email, telephone, Skype or onsite in Berne.

- Information relating to different educational options such as university studies or vocational training
- Information relating to specific questions regarding admission requirements, required language skills, deadlines, accommodation, insurances, etc.



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Information on education and training in Switzerland is available in numerous languages. Photo: Anja Löttscher

I want to change my old Swiss driving licence. What do I do?

Question: I have been living abroad for many years outside the EU/EFTA area and have now learned that Switzerland's old blue paper driving licence will no longer be valid after 31 January 2024. It must be changed into a driving licence in credit card format, apparently. Neither the Swiss consulate nor my road traffic office in Switzerland were able to assist me. Surely there should be a way for Swiss Abroad to avoid losing their old Swiss driving licence. What can I do?



Driving licences in Switzerland are now only available in credit card format. Photo: Keystone

Answer: That's right, the old blue paper driving licence will no longer be valid from February 2024. As it stands, you can no longer swap your old driving licence either. The reason is as follows:

From the date on which you begin residing abroad, the Swiss authorities can no longer issue you with a new driving licence in credit card format, nor can they provide you with an international driving licence. When you are domiciled abroad, it is the authorities of your country of residence that have authority with regard to your driving licence rather than Switzerland. This is based on the principle of territoriality, whereby you are subject to the legal system of the country in which you reside. This also applies to the area of road traffic, which is also governed by the law of your country of residence.

The cantonal road traffic authority that issued your driving licence can only provide

you with an attestation stating that you are the holder of a Swiss driving licence. This attestation certifies that you have obtained a driving licence based on the conditions stipulated by Swiss law. You will then have to inquire with the authorities responsible in your country of residence as to which conditions have to be met for a driving licence to be issued to you (confirmation of the information contained in the attestation, driving test, etc.).

Should you take up residence in Switzerland again later, you must get in touch with your cantonal road traffic authority in order to obtain a driving licence in credit card format. For the contact details of the cantonal road traffic authorities, visit: www.strassenverkehrsamt.ch

Ursula Schindler, OSA Legal Service,
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Fresh new look, but concerns remain

The previous issue of "Swiss Review" came with a revamped layout. This demonstrates our commitment to the hard copy edition. For our publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, it is an acknowledgement of the continued backing that the printed magazine enjoys from our readers. The print edition is popular among many Swiss Abroad, as it provides a tangible, tactile connection to Switzerland. Some 325,000 readers currently subscribe to it.

However, we are experiencing choppy waters at the moment. Paper shortages in Europe drove up our printing costs in 2021. With the war in Ukraine turning the market for raw materials on its head, the price of paper has skyrocketed further this year.

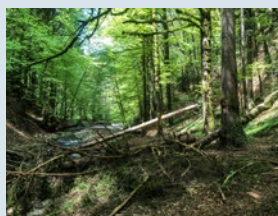
In view of this, please note again that you can pay a voluntary subscription to help fund the print edition of "Swiss Review". Your kind support will allow us to continue publishing on paper for the foreseeable future. For a voluntary subscription, please make your payment to the following account (note that cheques cannot be cashed):

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Discussion

Each edition of “Swiss Review” touches on aspects of everyday life in Switzerland. And each edition turns into a veritable guessing game for the editorial team as we ask ourselves which article will elicit the liveliest reaction from readers. In our 3/2022 magazine, it was a report about Swiss forests. Reading the article, many people realised for the first time that Switzerland has had a ban on deforestation since 1876, and that since then, the surface area of Swiss forests has not decreased at all in size. Radical nature conservation practices – begun almost 150 years ago.



My best friend, the forest

RICHARD JAKOB-HOFF, NEW ZEALAND

Thank you for sharing this article. My love and spiritual connection with forests began in my early childhood in Switzerland. In the forests in and around my birthplace, Wengen, and later Visp. I find them a place of solace wherever I am in the world and am alarmed and dismayed at the disrespect shown by my species to these guardians of global health and human welfare. I was not aware that Switzerland had banned deforestation well over a century ago. This is something that should be more widely known as an example to others.

LOTTI MOHAR, AURORA, CANADA

Reading the report on forests really warmed my heart. Lovely memories come flooding back from 30 years ago. How many times did I accompany my father to the Dählhölzli forest, all the way down to the River Aare, where we also dropped by to see the zoo animals? I will never forget those special moments from my childhood.

MARIA CHAND, PARKSVILLE, CANADA

A law dating back to 1876 that is still protecting forests today. What a gift for the planet and all the species on it.

ELENA LACROIX JAEGGY, FRANCE/SWITZERLAND

Mountain bikes on forest paths and motor-bikes everywhere have become a scourge all over Switzerland. An enormous amount of information and awareness-raising work is required, including bans when necessary, to bring an end to this problem. They pose an ongoing danger for all animals and biodiversity in general, not to mention causing an ecological catastrophe and constant noise. It is absolutely imperative that we stop this devastating trend, which offers no actual benefits at all.

Ban on Nazi symbols in Switzerland

RALF WEYENETH, LOWER SAXONY, GERMANY

It is incomprehensible to me that there are still incorrigible people around today who have learned nothing from the past. The symbols and salutes used during the Nazi era should really be punishable by law. We only need to look at the USA to see where such practices can lead, but unfortunately they are on the way to becoming the norm in Europe as well these days.

SERGIO PAINI, AUSTRALIA

How much longer do we have to "educate" people about what was done to the Jewish population during the Second World War? There is no place anywhere for anti-Semitism.

A warm welcome for Ukrainian refugees

ARYE-ISAAC OPHIR, ISRAEL

There are good reasons to welcome the Ukrainian refugees. On the one hand, because our own humanity demands it of us, and on the other because it also offers us an opportunity to introduce them to the norms of western civilisation, in the hope of positively influencing the future development of Ukraine.

A new look for “Swiss Review”

KATRIN BONNOFSKY, SEATTLE, USA

Your redesigned magazine is terrific. Much better organised. Everything clear and coherent. Thank you. I wish you continued success.

You can view our online edition of “Swiss Review” – www.revue.ch – at any time and comment on articles or read the latest comments.

Moreover, you can participate in the ongoing discussions on the Community platform of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) or start your own dialogues.

At the moment, the platform has three discussions on the go relating to the topic of “the challenges facing democracy”, which is also this year’s theme at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano. One discussion focuses on the question “How can we tackle ‘fake news’?” Below is one of the related comments:

HANS ULRICH LUTZ, SOUTH KOREA

We are proud to be citizens of a country with direct democracy; one that considers us mature enough to decide on important matters. However, when our citizens are not/no longer capable of such decisions because they appear to be easily manipulated, would the next logical step perhaps be to limit their democratic rights and obligations? I tend to believe that we must invest a great deal more in equipping our children to think and act independently. I am confident that my fellow citizens are still able to form their own opinions.

Direct link to the discussion: revue.link/fake

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum:
members.swisscommunity.org/forum



We need days like these.



Switzerland.



Funicular Lugano © Switzerland Tourism / Public Zapręcchia

We need Switzerland.

Discover Switzerland's cities now: [MySwitzerland.com/cities](https://www.myswitzerland.com/cities)
Tell us about your favourite experiences using [#IneedSwitzerland](https://twitter.com/IneedSwitzerland)

