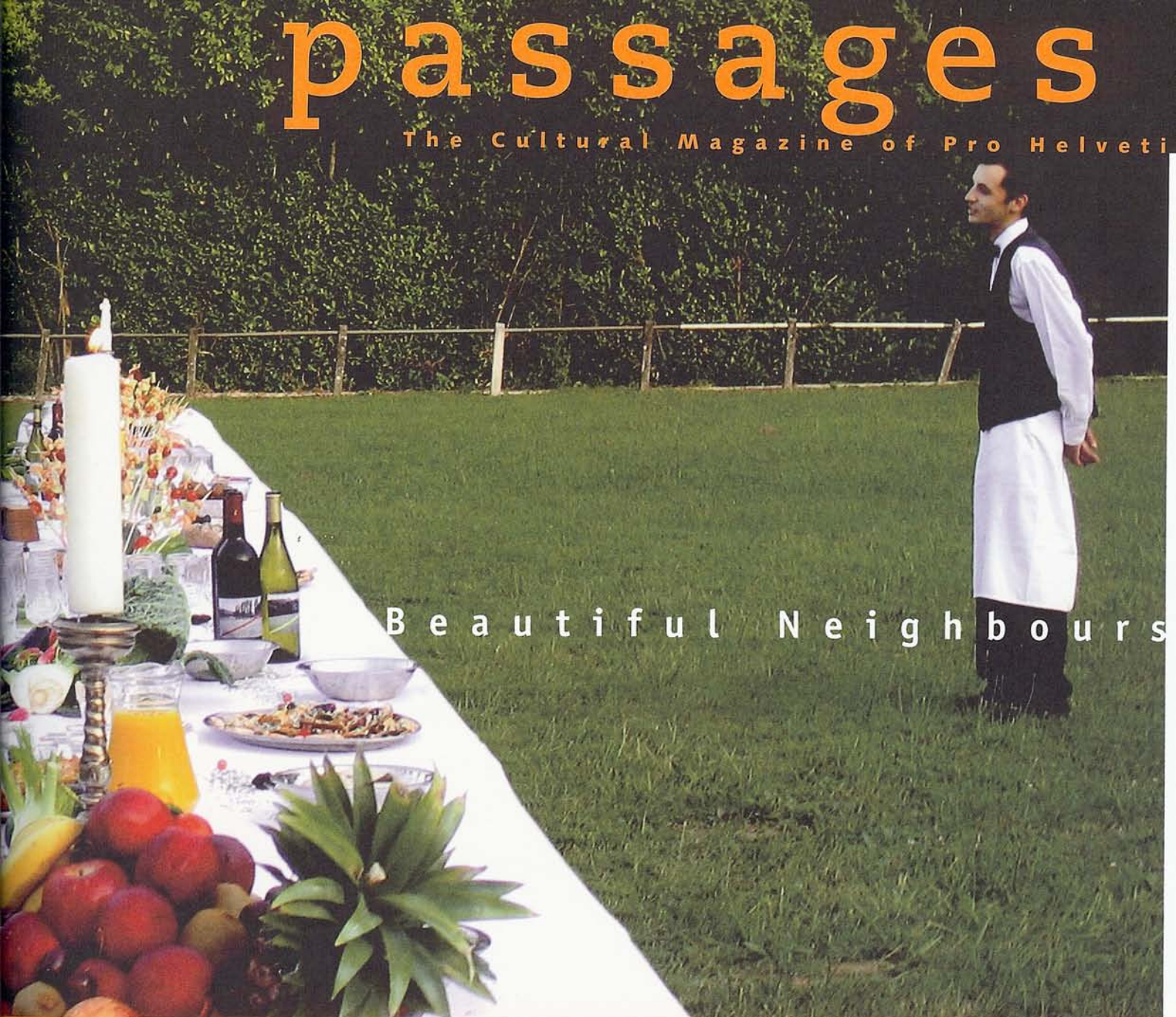


passages

The Cultural Magazine of Pro Helvetia



Beautiful Neighbours

Cultural exchange across Switzerland's borders

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Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, promotes art and culture in Switzerland and fosters Swiss cultural exchange, both interregional and international. Through its activities, it supports a contemporary, diversified, open approach to cultural life in Switzerland.

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The Regio Basiliensis is one of Europe's oldest organizations for the promotion of cross-border networks. As its managing director Eric Jacobs argues, transnational cultural cooperation is one of the Regio's most important, innovative and promising aspects |

Ján Figel, the European Commissioner for Culture, announced after a meeting of the EU Media and Culture Ministers in February 2007 that the culture economy is to become a fixed component of the European Council's work schedule. The fact that the subject of culture will feature more prominently on the EU agenda than has been the case so far is due above all to the circumstance that culture and creativity are making an increasingly important contribution to the EU economy. In a study by the EU commission published in November 2006, the economic importance of the culture and creativity sector is examined, with remarkable results. In 2003 about 2.6% of the EU gross domestic product came from the culture sector, whereas the real estate sector contributed 2.1% and the chemical and plastics industry 2.3%. Between 1999 and 2003, growth in the sector was over 12% higher than the general growth in the other economic sectors. 5.8 million people were working in the culture sector in 2004, which corresponds to 3.1% of the enlarged, 25-country EU workforce.

The study is based on a wide-ranging definition of culture that includes maintenance of the cultural heritage, fine arts and performing arts, film, radio, television, video games, music, books and the press, as well as design, architecture and advertising. Altogether, though, it provides a solid basis for rescuing the culture economy from its shadowy existence and clearing away outdated attitudes. Art and architecture do not play a marginal role in the economy at all. On the contrary, they offer a lot of qualitatively superior jobs, which cannot so easily be outsourced to the Far East. The culture sector is the driving force behind cre-

ativity, and creativity is the basis of social and economic innovation. In the transition process from an industrial and service society to a knowledge society, culture plays a key role. If Europe is unique in one branch of the economy with regard to its great diversity and attractiveness, it is in the field of culture. 55% of world tourism goes to Europe. Or as Ján Figel put it: "Europe is a cultural superpower."

For the Basel region, culture has long been a priority. The Basel region and the trinational Upper Rhine region have not waited for this EU study to realize the value of culture not only in economic, but also in non-material and social terms. With the slogan "Culture unlimited", Basel Tourism advertises a region with a wealth of culture that is crisscrossed by national borders and at the same time triumphs over them. Augusta Raurica, the biggest Roman theatre north of the Alps, testifies to an early enjoyment of culture in the region. In the Middle Ages, the art of book production and book culture were developed to particular mastery in Alsace. The invention of printing with movable type by Johannes Gutenberg made Strasbourg and Basel the first strongholds of the art of book printing. This in turn attracted many scholars and led to the founding of universities, forming the basis for Upper Rhine humanism. Masterworks of architecture like the cathedrals of Strasbourg, Freiburg and Basel are part of the region's cultural heritage. However, present-day architects are also active in the region, adding to Basel's reputation as the architecture capital of Switzerland. Together with architects like Saana, Diener & Die-

ner and Frank O. Gehry, Novartis is building a "Knowledge Campus" close to the French border. Roche is striving upwards, with a double-helix tower by Herzog & de Meuron. In Weil am Rhein, Germany, the architecture park around the Vitra Design Museum is being extended. With its large art collections, Basel is one of the most important museum cities in Europe; its Kunstmuseum has the oldest municipal art collection in the world. Every year the city hosts the world's most important trade fair for modern and contemporary art, known as Art Basel. Among the Upper Rhine museums, those in Mulhouse put the main emphasis on technology (cars, railways, the Electropolis). In Colmar the main attraction is the Musée d'Unterlinden with Mathias Grünewald's Isenheim Altar. In addition, culture is very much alive on numerous stages, large and small, with plays, opera, dance and music. The Burghof Lörrach, for example, enriches the region every year with its international festival STIMMEN (VOICES).

Culture crosses borders. In the Basel region, one soon comes up against national borders. Correspondingly, work, habitation and life in general are conducted on a cross-border basis. 60,000 international commuters from the German state of Baden Württemberg and from Alsace, in France, commute to work in the Basel region every day. At the same time, many Swiss do their shopping in Alsace or South Baden, dine on the region's asparagus, or take up residence there with a first or second home. The canton of Basel-Stadt, with its surface area of 37 square kilometres and population of 180,000, is the core of a trinational urban and suburban region with a population of 700,00. Nevertheless, the rest of Switzerland takes no notice of this fact, and it is not reflected in federal statistics. Cross-border cooperation in all areas of politics, administration, economics and culture is a matter of course here. And the Regio Basiliensis, founded in 1963, is one of the oldest organizations in Europe that is professionally devoted to regional and cross-border networking.

As in many other fields, the Upper Rhine region can also take pride in many cross-border achievements and projects in culture:

- The *Upper Rhine Museum Pass* for 98 Swiss francs or 61 euros was introduced in 1997 and provides entrance to over 170 museums for one year.
- *Regioartline* comprises a bilingual cross-border art portal and an art magazine that appears regularly.
- In the framework of the *Regionale*, regional art galleries from the three countries exhibit contemporary art at the end of each year.
- The monthly 30-minute TV magazine *Vis-à-vis* by France 3 Alsace and SWR Freiburg covers everyday culture in the three countries.

- The *Trischola* framework promotes cross-border school exchanges and multilingualism.
- The *Oberreinschulbuch* (Upper Rhine textbook) includes cultural information about the region, alongside standard school subjects.
- The *Upper Rhine Theatre Exchange* fund has supported guest performances in theatre and dance since 1993.
- The *Upper Rhine Virtual Architecture University* includes cross-border syllabi and planning projects.
- The *ExpoTriRhena* permanent exhibition at the Museum am Burghof in Lörrach focuses on the history and culture of the region.
- The *Biblio 3* network links the region's public libraries across national borders.

There is further cross-border cooperation in connection with multilingualism, the media, dance and music festivals, orchestras and choirs, trinational exhibitions, culture tourism, tourist guides and maps, archaeology and ancient history, institutional networking of cultural and historical societies, etc.

Cultural cooperation pushes the boundaries. If one compares cultural cooperation with other areas of cross-border exchange, a few specific aspects emerge which represent both opportunity and risk. Unlike traffic planning, urban and rural development or the environment, cross-border cooperation in culture is not absolutely crucial. It generally does not spring from necessity and often cannot even appeal to categories like usefulness, gains in synergy or increased efficiency – as cross-border economic cooperation, or cooperation in the job market or health care provision, can. Culture cooperation happens on a voluntary basis, to a great extent, and thus requires its own justification and an intrinsic motivation on the part of those involved.

The cultural life of a region has many facets and very different protagonists. Partnerships, target audience and costs differ to a considerable extent depending on the product. Art Basel is geared to a global market, the city theatre to a regional audience and the local history museum to a local public. That is why, in international cultural cooperation, flexible cooperation in different spatial perimeters is required, even more so than in other fields. In the construction of a bridge over the Rhine or the building of a joint incineration plant, intercultural exchange largely remains a means to an end. That is not the case when jointly putting on a play or organizing a cultural event, where intercultural exchange is itself the essential objective. The demands with regard to knowledge of the language and culture of a neighbouring country, and also to the empathy that has to be stimulated are higher than elsewhere in cross-border cultural cooperation.

In view of this, it is problematic that, as in Europe, we in the Upper Rhine region do not have a joint cross-border media and communication area. The media worlds are still strongly marked by national borders and perceptions: hardly anyone in Alsace or South Baden is interested in the Swiss Axpo Super League, and, conversely, Basel football fans are not primarily focused on French or German championships. Cross-border media reporting mostly has the character of "looking over the fence" and is seldom the expression of a common identity.

Even if the EU states that culture is worth spending money on, it does not follow at all that there is more EU money available for culture. The new EU INTERREG funding programmes for cross-border cooperation starting in 2007 are completely geared to the Lisbon Strategy for strengthening economic competitiveness. The same goes for the Swiss Confederation with its New Regional Policy as of 2008. Applications for financial backing for cross-border culture projects will tend to have a harder time of it in future than they do already.

Intercultural competence as a factor for future success. Europe has been shaped by a common history and culture. Europe is, however, still shaped by national and administrative borders. These borders – scars of history – have frequently cut across historical regions and randomly divided peoples. Over the centuries a complex network of cultural landscapes has developed. Despite the differences mentioned above, cross-border cooperation is playing an essential part in healing these historical scars and making Europe's cultural wealth visible. The European framework in which this cooperation is taking place guarantees that no new borders develop in the process and that no ethnic-secessionist impulses are aroused.

Europe is indeed a superpower in matters of culture and must also use this mark of global uniqueness correspondingly. Yet one should not just measure Europe's cultural wealth on the basis of the number of films produced, computer games exported or tourists steered through Europe's cultural assets. At least as important is what effect this cultural richness has on people: intercultural competence. On no other continent do so many people live in such a small area. Nowhere else is the number of nations and ethnic groups higher. On the multi-ethnic continent of Europe, the spirit of invention is stimulated by the proximity of the Other in one's own country and a mental proximity to the world. Europe's diversity, its many languages and differences in mentality, which are often perceived as weakness and fragmentation, must be interpreted positively, especially in the age of globalization. For international organizations and multinational companies, but also for small or medium-sized Swiss firms operating

abroad, it is one of the biggest challenges to understand, respect and profitably use the various cultures, mentalities and languages of their partners.

Like multinational companies, the cross-border culture regions of Europe must see themselves more than ever before as laboratories of intercultural understanding. There are already multilingual courses of study in various places, exchange programmes at all school levels and in business, specific intercultural training and further education courses and media cooperation, but they could be extended, in the Upper Rhine region and elsewhere. And there is a need for as many opportunities as possible for cross-border encounters. In contrast to a bridge or an incineration plant, which continues to exist as a product of cross-border cooperation for the next generation, too, intercultural exchange must be restaged constantly, as it only materializes in the making and has to be called forth again and again. ─

Translated from the German by Joyce Bachmann-Clarke

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