

9. OVER-ROMANTICISING RURAL LIFE: A DISSERVICE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE?

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Between December 2004 and May 2006, a controversy that pitted job creation against landscape conservation dominated the Swiss press. The story concerned the construction of a biotechnology plant on a 55-hectare greenfield site in the village of Galmiz in Western Switzerland. As the country is made up of 26 autonomous (cantonal) governments which manage their own territory, the possibility of a jobs' bonanza (the biotech firm planned to create close to 1,200 new jobs) in a region where the dominance of agriculture in the local economy was being gradually eroded by the industrial sector generated serious conflicts of interest. All possible arguments were used to defend what was considered good. Opponents, largely from the German-speaking part of Switzerland, especially from the cities of Zurich and Basle, cited non-compliance with town and land planning legislation, the urgent need for soil conservation,

Fribourg a la possibilité d'apporter une contribution très sensible au redéploiement industriel de notre pays.

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and the supremacy of national landscapes over local employment sites. Supporters, mostly the local population, stressed the importance of maximising the synergies between the economy and agriculture.

Astonishingly, the French-language press restricted the debate to the impact on the landscape. Different associations became involved, such as the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation and its President, Erika Forster (who also happened to be married to the President of *economiesuisse*, the Swiss business federation), Pro Natura, WWF, and ASPO (Swiss Association for the Protection of Birds). A sort of coalition between two official camps emerged: business circles

on the one hand and Swiss nature conservation groups on the other. The German-language press, in contrast, widened the debate to other areas, such as

Von daher ist die Vermutung, dass es noch mehr Fälle wie "Galmiz" geben wird, nicht von der Hand zu weisen.

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The proceedings showed the Galmiz dilemma also applied to the country as a whole. It raised further issues too, such as striking a balance between national and local interests, the precise definition of what constitutes national interest, the relationship between the economy and the landscape, and the importance

Le possible renforcement du pôle économique de Suisse occidentale gêne-t-il à ce point les milieux de la finance zurichoise ou de la chimie bâloise? Le lobbying anti-Galmiz est en tous les cas puissant et organisé.

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the role of the Confederation in company localisation, the ability of the Cantons to pre-empt such decisions and to respond quickly to such situations.

Kurz, Galmiz ist der Ausdruck völlig ungenügender eidgenössischer Instrumente sowie grosser Illusionen sowohl über die Zwänge des Weltmarkts wie über die hausgemachten Wirkkräfte der Zersiedelung.

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given to agriculture. How should any profits be shared among the regions? How is it possible to share a collective heritage while not penalising some populations? How can we create a common good for the Swiss space according to the diversity of its conurbations, towns and outlying areas? Would this problem have arisen if Switzerland had developed into a sort of national city — a city comprising diverse socially and functionally mixed neighbourhoods, all concerned by national functional, economic, financial and social coherence, and connected by high-speed transport links, distributed across natural well-conserved landscapes?