



Carnival, an old tradition in some German parts of Switzerland. Picture above, Canton Luzern

Language diversity and 'Swissness'

THE culture of Switzerland is characterized by the diversity of its geography, its languages and its religious affiliation. This is reflected in the variety of its literature, art, architecture, music, and customs. The culture of the mountains of Switzerland is not the same as that in the plateau, there are significant differences between the language areas, and between the mainly Roman Catholic and the mainly Protestant regions.

Switzerland is the home of three of Europe's major languages, but apart from Rumanstsch - spoken by only 0.5% of the population - it has no written language of its own. Whichever language group they belong to, the different Swiss communities have linguistic and cultural ties with one of their larger neighbors. The language communities eat different things and have different traditions and customs.

Language distribution
The diversity is reflected in the linguistic makeup of the country, which encompasses three main languages - German, French, and Italian - that stem from the cultures of Switzerland's neighbors.

German is by far the most widely spoken language in Switzerland: 17 of the 26 cantons are monolingual in German. French is spoken in the western part of the country, the "Suisse Romande." Four cantons are French-speaking: Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud. Three cantons are bilingual: in Bern, Fribourg and Valais both French and German are spoken. Italian is spoken in Ticino and 4 southern valleys of Canton Graubünden. Rumanstsch is spoken only in the trilingual canton of Graubünden. Rumanstsch, like Italian and French, is a language with Latin roots. It is spoken by just 0.5% of the total Swiss population.

The many foreigners resident in Switzerland have brought with them their own languages, which taken as a whole now outnumber both Rumanstsch and Italian. The 2000 census showed that speakers of Serbian/Croatian were the largest foreign language group, with 1.4% of the population. English was the main language for 1%.

Each canton makes its own decision about which language will be taught at school and when. In business meetings or at national conferences, it frequently

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Quadrilingualism—Protected Natural Reserve: sign in four languages. From top to bottom: French, Italian, Rumanstsch, German. The same sign is found all over Switzerland, regardless of language area.

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SME: The backbone of Swiss economy

USUALLY when we talk of Swiss business companies, the names of corporate giants in industry, consumer goods, banking, and pharmaceutical sectors come up. Media headlines are generally dominated by these major corporations. However, it is often overlooked that the Swiss economy is based primarily on small and very small companies. In the 1998 census of companies, 98.2% of all companies had fewer than 50 employees, and therefore counted as small companies. The just under 290,000 firms represent considerable potential in terms of

entrepreneurial initiative even if many became entrepreneurs more or less involuntarily, in the face of impending unemployment. In 1998 companies in this category employed some 1.45 million people. This represented 53% of those employed in the market economy, i.e. not counting state-sector employees. While the major companies were reducing their staff during the last recession, the number of jobs especially in the very small companies, with fewer than 10 employees, was growing. Many Swiss enterprises, especially the ones with less than 10 employees are family-oriented.

The textile and clothing industry

WITH 22,600 employees, the Swiss textile and clothing industry is very small by international standards, but nonetheless country's fourth largest export industry. Production levels are high and it is very innovative and creative sector, famed for its quality, variety and constant flow of new specialties.

The Swiss textile and clothing industry has a long history spanning many centuries. It started around the 12th century mainly as cottage industry. Before industrialization the textile industry was centered around Zurich (silk from 13th to the 15th century), Fribourg (weaving during the same period) and St. Gall (linen and later cotton). The textile industry was already an important factor at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Switzerland. The original cottage industry character was carried over into the largely decentralized textile industry in northeastern Switzerland. The clothing industry is centered in Ticino. In the 19th century, cotton and silk together with watches were the main industries in Switzerland.

Today, the Swiss textile and clothing industry has maintained its competitiveness in the face of tremendous challenges, particularly from low-cost Asian countries. The industry grew at the rate of 3 per cent in 2004. This has been achieved through promoting creativity and high quality, finding

niches in the market and maintaining efficient organizational structures. The industry has retained the market niches of highly specialized products, such as yarns made of seaweed, non-flammable textiles for airplanes, yarns enriched with silk which reduces perspiration, Nanotechnology, special silk yarns (200 meters of which weigh only 1 gram). The Swiss textile industry's top fashion fabrics and embroidery still enjoy a high reputation among international haute couture designers. Elegant dreams made out of Swiss fabrics are in demand all over the world. Presently, the clothing fabrics represent around 50% of production, furnishing fabrics around 30% and technical materials the remaining 20%.

Swiss machinery

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industry. The site <http://www.swissmem.ch> offers information about the association as well as links to all the member companies. The service is continuously expanded and enhanced.

The Swiss engineering and capital goods industry will continue to keep up with or even outperform the global competition due to the significant research and development investments. «On site»-research, keeping well in touch with the production process, together with a well formed and motivated workforce guarantee, that the Swiss Engineering Industry can offer products of high quality in due time. Strong momentum forecast to continue in 2006

Our warmest felicitations to the Government and the friendly people of Switzerland on the auspicious occasion of SWISS NATIONAL DAY

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