

Full rights at eighteen

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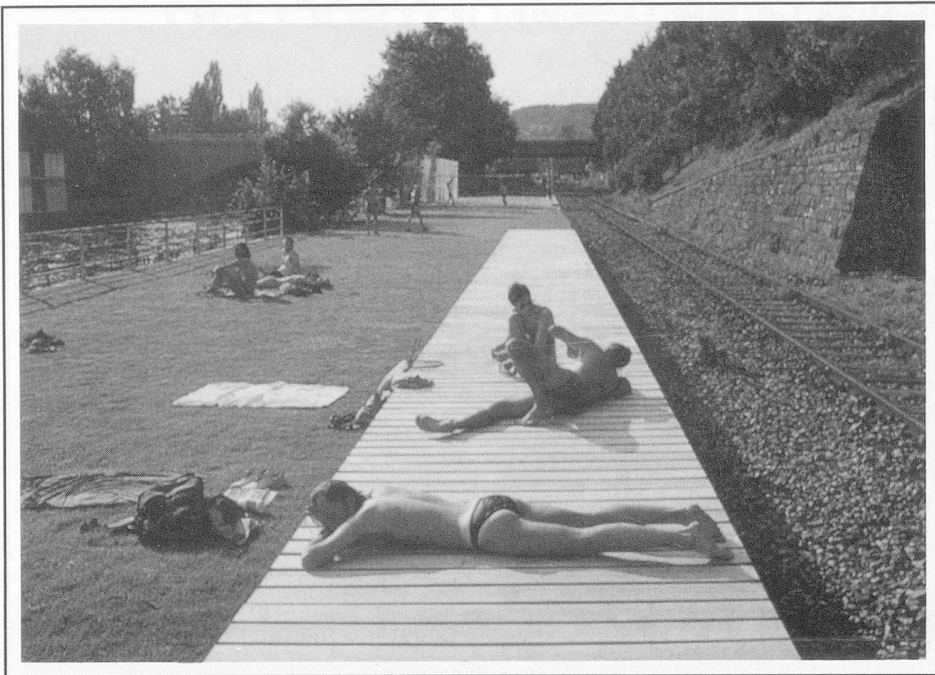
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IDYLLIC SPOT

A peaceful oasis in Zurich by the Limmat where people can sunbathe in all safety, the only visible link to the past being a disused and rusty railway line in the background.

DO YOU RECOGNISE THE PLACE?

It is Letten, Zurich's past and infamous drug hell hole where drug users and drug dealers used to mingle by the thousands, where humanity had once sunken to its lowest level (see our Editorial in the April 1995 issue of the Helvetia).

Looking at this peaceful picture, it is hard to believe that less than a year ago this place had been the centre of one of the worst drug scenes in Europe.

FULL RIGHTS AT EIGHTEEN

In Switzerland, as from January 1, 1996, youngsters of 18 years will now be legally allowed to get married, sign contracts and lease agreements, borrow money and apply for bank overdrafts.

Up to now, the minimum legal age

for such activities had been 20. Eighteen will therefore become the new age when young people become full adults in the eyes of the law.

However, one very disturbing factor for the parents is a peculiar clause in the law which says that parents are still liable and responsible for looking after their children until these children have reached the age of 21. So, on one hand the law considers 18 year olds as full adults but on the other hand, they are still entitled to child support from their parents until they are 21. In other words, 18 year olds can borrow money from the banks without their parents' approval, but if they get into financial trouble, the parents are still liable.

Do you get the feeling too that there is something not quite right in this new arrangement and that someone is getting the wrong end of the stick?

CHEESE EATERS

Last year, the Swiss consumed an average of 15kg of cheese each. The statistics can even tell you that of these 15kg, 10.8kg were local cheese and 4.2kg imported cheese.

Overall Swiss cheese production in 1994 was 140,000 tons of which 80,000 tons were Emmentaler, Gruyère and Sbrinz. The cheese that is currently considered as the "flavour of the year" and enjoying an ever increasing popularity is apparently the Mozzarella.

TWIKE, THE PEDAL CAR

Every child's dream must be to have one of these flash-looking pedal cars. Well, this dream may soon come back to adults too, according to a report from Switzerland.

Designed for two people, this pedal car for adults, called "TWIKE" (a contraction of "twice" and "bike") is more like a car than a tandem. The front of the car looks a bit like the nose of a Concorde supersonic aircraft, although its top speed will not exceed 85 km per hour. Apart from the pedals, the car also has a 5 KW battery powered electric motor to help you along. On the flat you can reach 40 Km per hour just by pedalling without the motor or up to 85 Km with the motor going as well.

The combined effort of motor and pedal power makes hill climbing very easy. The car has an autonomy of 50-100 Km and the batteries can be recharged in 2 hours. Built in aluminium, the car weighs only 230 kgs including the batteries.

The car is the brainchild of a Zurich University student and it is being built in the Val de Travers in the Jura mountains. Two hundred cars have already been sold at a price of some SFR 18,000 each and for 1996 the manufacturers plan a production of 500 cars or more if the demand increases.

Set on three wheels, the car has no steering wheel, but a "joy stick" like a small aircraft. To drive the car you only require a driving licence for small motorbikes. The costs of running this car are absolutely minimal and what is more, at the same time, it will keep you in good physical shape.

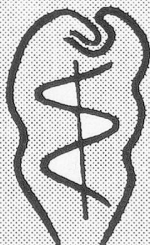
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