

Rescue for Andorra : the Swiss way

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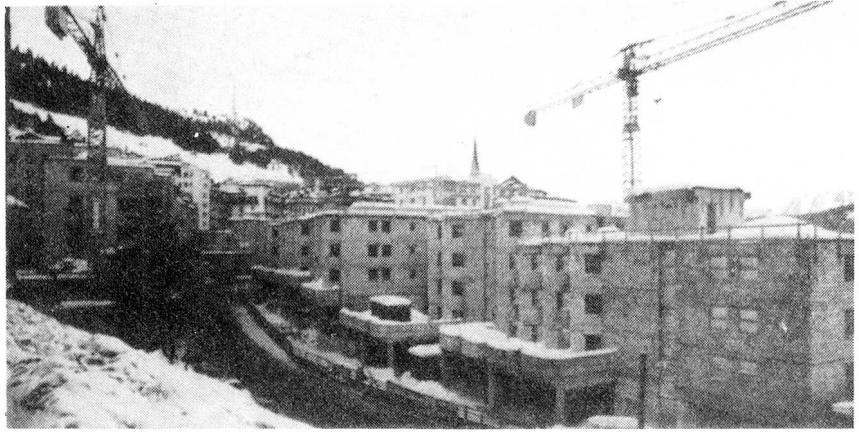
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ANDORRA, the dwarf state between France and Spain, degraded to one of Europe's shopping centres, is to be cleaned up with a comprehensive tourism concept. Taking Switzerland as a model, the pure mountain air and unspoilt scenery are to come into their own again.

The lesson of this tailor-made rehabilitation scheme from Switzerland is that such projects can be successful in the long term only if they are integrated in an overall regional or even national tourism concept.



Switzerland had problems as seen left above – a stark development in

Rescue for Andorra – the Swiss way

FROM Ax-les-Thermes in the French Pyrenees to Seu de Urgel in the Spanish province of Catalonia is just 90 kilometres along the route nationale. Yet the trip often takes all day, for on the way lies Andorra: 464 square kilometres, six parishes, 40,000 souls (though during shopping hours there are far more).

Seven times a week an average of 15,000 motorised tourists – French and Spanish for the most part – fall like locusts upon the countless supermarkets of the mini-state from the neighbouring frontier regions. With her low customs tariffs Andorra ranks as the duty-free paradise par excellence.

Thanks to these shopping sprees, during the last 30 years the peasants and shepherds have changed into a community of bookkeepers – some of them with impressive bank accounts.

Since the late 1970s, however,

easy money is no longer to be made in Andorra. Recession, saturated markets and soaring unemployment have hit this coprincipality harder than most European countries, owing to its almost exclusive occupation with trading. The Andorrans too are now living with a state budget deficit.

But unlike most countries the government cannot simply raise taxes, otherwise her reputation as Europe's discount centre and taxation paradise would be in jeopardy. And so the only new source of income left to Andorra is tourism.

The trouble is that according to opinion polls this once unique spot amidst the Pyrenees now has the image of a shopping centre, to be left as soon as one has made one's purchases, rather than a scenic landscape.

To improve this unfavourable basic situation for the advance-

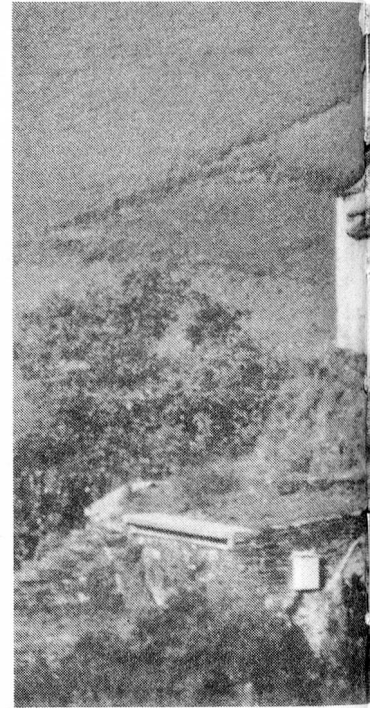
ment of tourism, in September 1982 the government of the coprincipality commissioned a leading Swiss consultant firm in Basle with a study on the development potential for tourism in Andorra.

It was no chance that the choice fell to a Swiss firm, because the Swiss tourism concept offered ideas for a new course.

No industrial country exploits tourism more intensively than Switzerland. A hundred years ago she even held something of a monopoly in the travel market.

Swiss pioneers in this area invented the perfect Grand Hotel style and the mountain railways. Even today this country in the heart of Europe is known for superior service.

Nevertheless a century of tradition has its disadvantages too. For one thing, some of the pre-war hotels are outdated, and the tourist traffic (traditionally con-



Andorra's idyllic scenery could be a

concentrated at a few centres) has burgeoned excessively since World War Two.

At the end of the 1960s therefore, some basic rethinking was overdue for Swiss tourism. Born out of this was the idea of a keynote theme as an orientation aid for authorities and private enterprise.

Recently the fundamentals for a Swiss tourism policy, drawn up to a large extent by the Research Institute for Tourism at the University of Berne under Prof Jost Krippendorf, were declared universally valid by the government.

To ensure that the targets formulated in this concept do not remain empty formulae, various



Bernese mastering tourist development, in contrast to the picturesque tourist development in the Bernese Oberland (above right)



...by attraction for tourists



Swiss planning will help Andorra avoid this kind of unattractive development

cantons have brought their guidelines for encouraging tourism into line with the proposals of the overall concept.

A typical follow-up concept is the Tourist Marketing Handbook for the Canton of Berne, likewise the work of Prof Krippendorf and his assistants. This reference work is intended to ensure that in future "more satisfied guests stay longer in the Canton of Berne and come back more often".

In view of the far more adverse conditions in the case of Andorra, more clear-cut and drastic action will be needed to achieve the same objective.

Accordingly the Basle consultants do not mute their criticism

of the present state of affairs in the tourist trade of this Pyrenean region in their study just concluded: "Andorra 2000".

The analysis culminates in the prediction that if the authorities do nothing to expand tourism, by 1990 the budget deficit will probably swell to 24,000 million pesetas.

However the Prognos study does more than just criticise. The exemplary concept includes a whole program of action for selling the country better to the foreign tourist.

The message is: "Start rethinking, finish with the policy of unbridled laissez-faire".

Nature is Andorra's biggest

capital asset. According to Prognos, unspoilt mountain regions, intact flora, quiet, pure air and a climate influenced by the Mediterranean provide a promising potential for both summer and winter tourism – quite apart from the retail trade.

Starting from comprehensive analyses and forecasts regarding the limitations, possibilities and competition to be met, the study points out the concrete measures that can and must be taken.

In addition to proposals for action on the "national" level, such as overall planning, tax legislation, preservation of local architecture, image and investment policies, specific transport

and infrastructure projects are submitted, aimed at assuring successful tourism in the targeted market segments.

The Prognos proposals even contain suggestions for improvements in the established retail trade, signposting the way to effective marketing.

This study takes the legal, financial, socioeconomic and ecological aspects into account, and therefore offers the assurance that Andorra will be able to develop its tourist trade without detriment to the population and the natural environment as inflicted by the previous strategy.

– Courtesy 'Switzerland Your Partner'