

New Swiss Christianity: Let's build brothels

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By Ingrid Piller | December 7, 2009 | Language & consumerism, Recent Posts

A few years ago I wrote a paper about the sexualization of public space in Switzerland. The paper will be published next year as "Sex in the City: On Making Space and Identity in Travel Spaces" in a book about *Semiotic Landscapes: Language, Image, Space* edited by Adam Jaworski and Crispin Thurlow (Continuum). A preprint is available from our Resources Section (click on "Multilingualism in Tourism"). The paper developed out of the observation that prostitution and the sex industry more generally enjoy high visibility in Swiss cities, and, indeed, throughout Europe. My data included billboards such as the one in the picture but also shop fronts, newspaper ads, graffiti and websites – all of which are an integral part of the semiotic landscape of Switzerland. In the paper I was quoting the 2005 National Security Report for Switzerland as follows:

Everywhere in Switzerland the number of prostitutes and relevant establishments increased in 2005. In Zurich, for example, the number of prostitutes has risen by almost 20% since 2003; in Basel a new brothel opened on average every two weeks in 2005. For the whole of Switzerland, the profits of the sex industry are estimated to be around CHF 3.2 billion per annum. (Bundesamt für Polizei, 2006; my translation)

These numbers are provided by the Federal Police and they just confirm the pervasiveness of the sex industry. Outlets of the sex industry enjoy a higher visibility in Swiss cities than churches, and they are immensely more frequent than mosques with minarets, of which there are only four in the whole of Switzerland.

In the referendum last week 57% of Swiss citizens voted for a ban on building minarets because they apparently don't fit with the traditional Christian character of the country. Seeing that no one is even considering a ban on building brothels, sex shops and other such establishments, I can only conclude that these fit just fine with the traditional cityscapes of European Christianity ... as does intolerance, discrimination and bigotry.

(Tags: Casinos)

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Selim

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