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**off piste: an alpine story**

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An unsuspecting reader opening this “potted local history” (as the original German subtitle has it) might expect a presentation of beautiful mountain scenery, a bit of local lore thrown in plus a fair bit of window dressing. The volume dashes such anticipation within the first few pictures. The left-hand side of each double page does indeed present a “beautiful” motif in black and white, from the recent past. The right-hand side, however, picks up on semiotic elements of the left-hand original and refracts them in a colour photograph of related elements from today. The wooden barrels the cooper works on are juxtaposed with aluminium beer barrels, the water hose with the snow canon, virgin valleys with artificial pistes meandering through deep green meadows. Often the reader is appalled at the change of mentality in the mountains. Fractured images of a pilgrimage chapel are contrasted with posters of a night bar, traditional folk dancers with body builders, cattle at auction with a nightclub dancer.

The book is available in German and English but this is only relevant for the short introductory texts. All photographs are presented side by side without comment and need no translation. Nor do they need any explanation. Viewers can make up their own minds

and are encouraged to mull over each pair of images. The subjectivity of the photographer does of course emerge. In his introduction, Thomas Weski describes it as a “paradoxical fusion of passionate engagement with a distanced perspective”. Indeed, the presentation also allows the acceptance of present-day conditions. Such acceptance is a precondition for a constructive take on these conditions and for learning lessons from loss.

This makes the volume highly relevant for protected areas. It is not aimed at them and the pictures will not have been taken in protected mountain areas. Yet: the loss of values, traditions, culture in its entirety, does not stop outside protected areas. They cannot cut themselves off from the effects of globalization and carry on as “blessed isles”. The series of photographs presented here does not just give you pause for thought, it encourages you to reflect upon history, people, culture and values. In doing so these images may contribute to a more sensitive way of dealing with changes of the cultural landscape in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Handling these changes is a major challenge, not least for protected mountain areas.

Axel Borsdorf



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