



Carrie Paterson, Homesickness Kit, 2013

Is Smell inclusive? Othering Mechanisms of Smell

- + familiar / unfamiliar smells
- + smell connected to early memories
- + smell linked to sense of home

Othering mechanisms

Othering is the process of labeling or portraying individuals or groups as (fundamentally) different and inferior to one's own group, often to reinforce the "us vs. them" mentality.

- + identity formation: "normality" vs the stigmatized "other"
- + formation of prejudices: creating a negative image of the "other"
- + reducing empathy
- + dehumanization and discrimination
- + inequality > social exclusion > marginalisation

Empathy mechanisms of smell

Empathy consists of four qualities: the ability to take the perspective of another person, staying away from judgment, recognizing emotion in others, and communicating it.

- + shared brain regions: brain regions for processing smell and empathy overlap
- + emotional connection: emotional component of empathy is linked to smell identification, unlike cognitively
- + right-nostril smell identification suggests the right hemisphere dominance for emotional reactions

The Smell of Switzerland

Dorothee King
funded by SNF Spark

”It is about cultures, class, and perception, but also about me, about how I navigate the invisible walls of a country that smells so clean it sometimes feels hard to breathe in...

Perhaps the image we have about Switzerland, the clean, pure idyll, as itself is an invention. A scent carefully designed. A brand. Swissness as a perfume, that is what I want to explore.”

Dorothée King, Smell of Switzerland, 2025



Swiss Airlines, Söder Soaps, 2025

Why to write about Othering and Smell and Switzerland

“Despite immigration shaping modern Switzerland, attitudes amongst the Swiss public have hardened, polarising communities who are being radicalised through online and offline social networks.”

Arora, S.D., Singh, G.P., Chakraborty, A. & Maity, M. (2022) 'Polarization and social media: A systematic review and research agenda'. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 183.

9 million people

3 million permanent residency (mostly from EU/EFTA)

1 million Secondos (second generation)

3.5 million with a migration background

60% think racism is a problem in Switzerland

33% think that foreigners are a problem

33% of the “foreigners” experience discrimination

Men, people without a migration background, older individuals, and people living in rural areas more often feel disturbed by people they perceive as “different.” They also tend to have more hostile attitudes toward Black, Muslim, Jewish, and foreign individuals.

Fachstelle für Rassismusbekämpfung, 2024

10% in Switzerland hold 63% of all capital

1% own around 45% of total assets

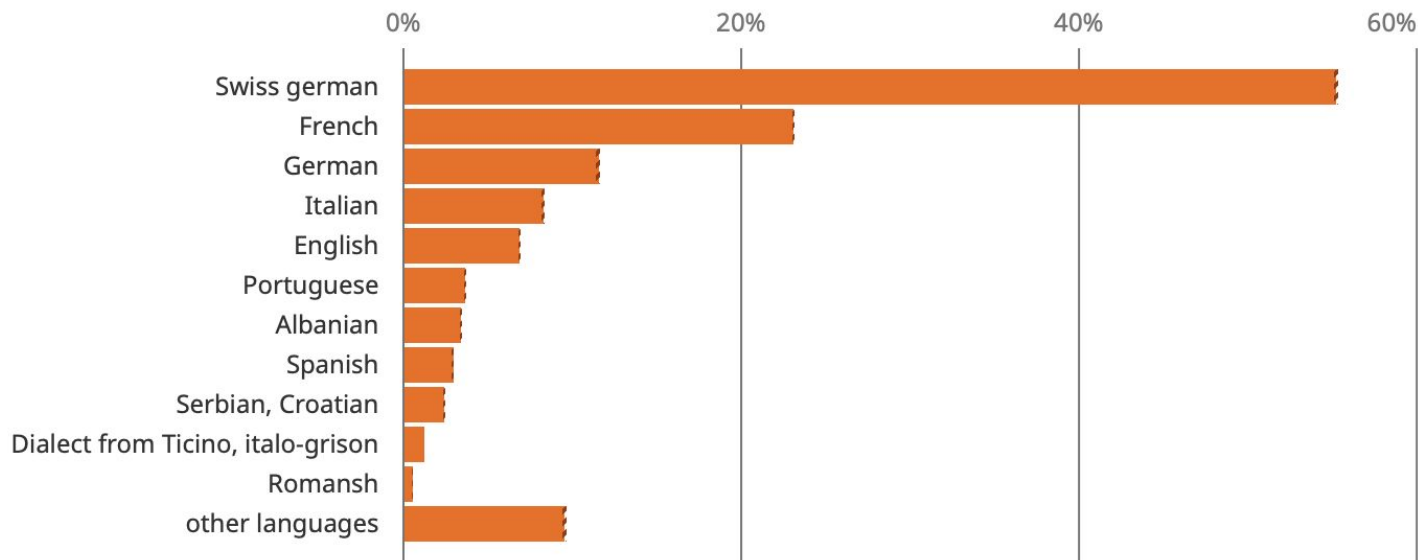
10% live below the poverty line

Bundesamt für Statistik, 2024

Languages usually spoken at home



▨ Confidence interval (95%)



Permanent resident population aged 15 years and over. Persons interviewed could indicate more than one language.

Data as on: 31.12.2023

Source: FSO – Structural survey (RS)

gr-e-01.08.01b

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Why do I need to write about Smell in Switzerland?

“Odorants are always having an influence, even if that influence may not be vocalized, textualized, visualized or felt by those that live with them for extended periods of time.”

*William Tullett, Smell and the Past: Noses, Archives, Narratives
Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, 32.*

- + hired, because no “Swiss” person had the qualifications
 - + discrimination experience on an almost daily basis
 - + multi-migrational family background
 - + chameleon children
-
- + sensitive to smell and its justice implications due to my research
 - + curious about images and realities of Swissness
 - + interested in multisensory art works

How does smell as a marker of “feeling at home” and “feeling welcomed” function in a complex Swiss context?

Especially here, when the locals smell well and the others reek?

cp. Jonathan Reinartz, Historical Perspectives on Smell (University of Illinois Press, 2013).

May I construct my Swiss memories and feelings of belonging via smell? As Switzerland seems to construct them, too?

Underlying Research

- + smell as organiser of communication and community
- + smell in Swiss contexts, culture, communication
- + concepts of othering via smell
- + smell in current art projects questioning of belonging and being Swiss
- + methods of layering of diverse concepts

Underlying Research

+ smell as organiser of communication and community

*Hans Hatt, Constance Claasen, Alain Corbin etc; Sensory Studies Conference
Concordia 2025*

+ smell in Swiss contexts, culture, communication

Current media, online discussions, online questionnaires, social media, music, books...

+ concepts of othering via smell

Allison Mautz, Jonathan Reinartz

+ smell in current art projects questioning of belonging and being Swiss

Noah Wyss, Olivia Wiederkehr, Isabell Burschenen, ...

+ methods of layering of diverse concepts

Mieke Bal (2022)

Smells in Swiss Mainstream Culture

Smells in Swiss TV and Ads



*It has to be a bit stinky,
Coop advertisement,
2023*

Smells in Swiss Public

> Focus on the local



Swiss Perfume Artists

> Focus on the local



Brigitte Witschi, Bern, 2025

Smells in Swiss Art Projects

> Focus on traditions



Claudia Vogel: Basler Lächerli (2010). In her artistic work, the olfactory stimulus plays an important role. Claudia Vogel is interested in the direct effect that scents have on our emotional state and their strong connection to stored memories.

Exhibitions about Smell in Switzerland



*Forum der Geschichte der Schweiz,
Schwyz, Alpendüfte, 2005*



*Belle Haleine, Museum Tinguely, Basel,
2015*

Swiss AI Smell Research

> Focus on wellbeing



“By applying scent technology to olfactory receptor biology, we try to help people combat stress, unplug and find mental well-being,” said Reisinger, a biotechnologist who worked for start-ups in Silicon Valley before coming to Switzerland. Firmenich - hj SWI

Swiss Language Particularities

> No word for smell

Taste = smell

schmöcke = to smell

“du schmöcksch hüt aber guet”

Swiss German Smell Proverbs

«*Wo's stinkt, isch öppis fuul.*»

→ *If it stinks, something is rotten.*

> Othering

«*De Schnuuf lügt nöd.*»

→ *The nose doesn't lie.*

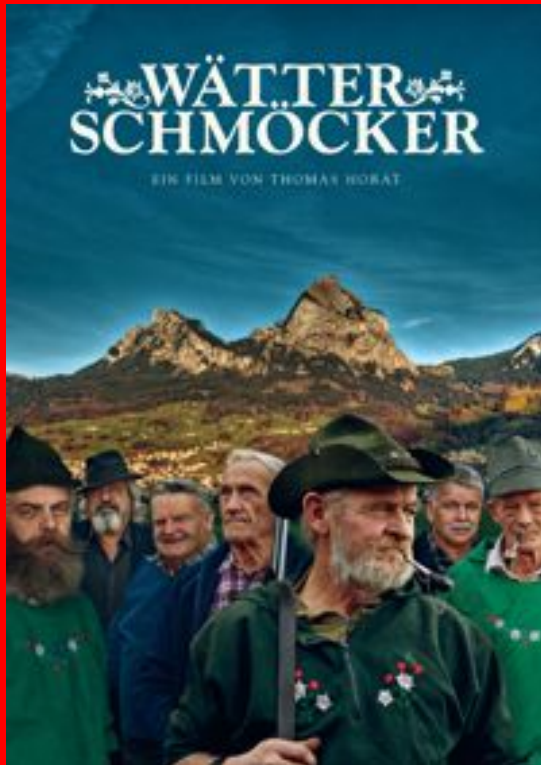
«*Was guet schmöckt, git e guets Gfühl.*»

→ *What smells good gives a good feeling.*

«*Nöd jede Duft isch für jedi Nase.*»

→ *Not every scent is for every nose.*

Swiss Language Particularities



> Holding traditions

2023, Mythenfilm, Thomas Horat

Smells in Swiss Culture

> Socialication by cultural images

Coppin, G., Pool, E., Delplanque, S., Oud, B., Margot, C., Sander, D., & Van Bavel, J. (2016). Swiss identity smells like chocolate: Social identity shapes olfactory judgments. Scientific Reports.



Smells in Swiss Culture

Mainstream media and language:

- + Communicating with smells
to transport traditional, cliché, stereotypical, inclusive ideas of Swissness
- + Applying smells to relax and feel well
- + Learning about “local” smells (like chocolate ...)

A closer sniff on Swiss smell

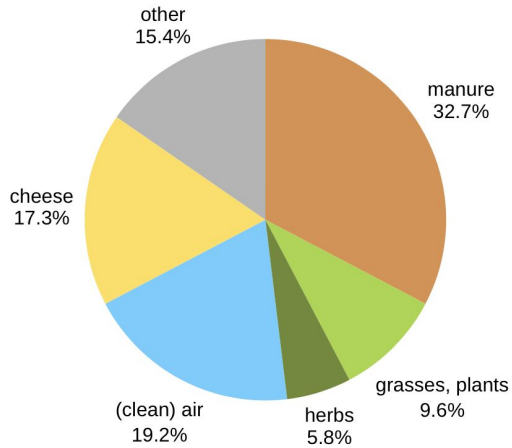
Is there such a thing as a Swiss smell?

alpine herbs, apricot jam, bureaucracy, carnival, cheese, cleanliness, cows, fabric softener, fresh weather smelling of snow, grass, hay, linden flowers, manure, meadows, money, mountains, nature, nothing, old gym mats, snow

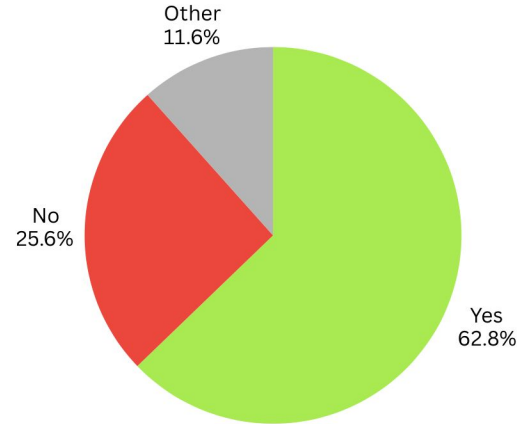
questionnaire, reddit , social media, etc (2025)

Questionnaire Smell of Switzerland

Which scent or smell do you consider typically Swiss?

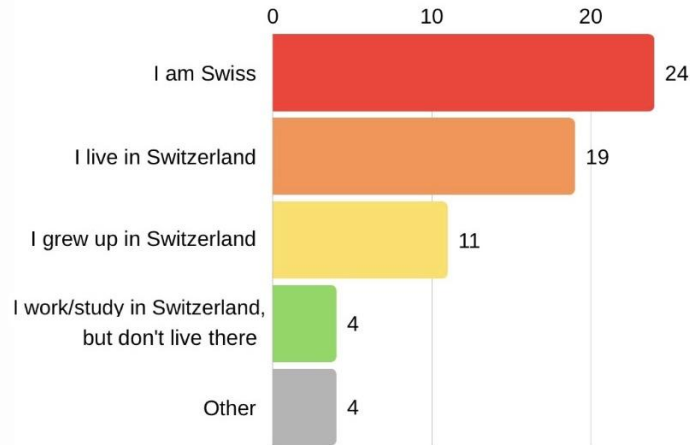


Do you consider yourself part of the Swiss olfactory world?



Questionnaire: Connections and Feelings

What is your connection to Switzerland?



What feelings do you associate with Swiss smells?



Smellbased Othering in Switzerland



*Alfred Rasser - „Läppli am Zoll“, 1954,
Kägi-Film AG / Walter Kägi und Alfred Rasser*



*Fuchs, Daniel: Kleine Gemeinde wehrt sich gegen einen
grossen Halteplatz für Ausländer: Ein Drama des
Scheiterns, Aargauer Zeitung, 14.03.2019,
Foto Anthony Anex (Keytone)*

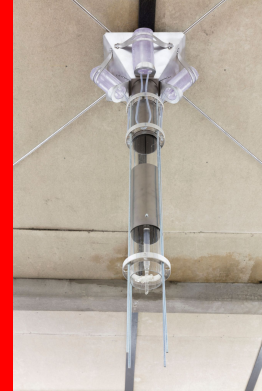
Communicating Swissness Abroad



*Nicole Quint: Die Schweizer
Alpen riechen nach Frittierfett und
Mayonnaise,
Die Welt, Jan 20, 2017*

Complexity in current Swiss olfactory art projects

Noah Wyss: Eau de Glacier (2024)



*Exhibition view at sic!
Elephant House,
Lucerne, 2024
Photos: Andri Stadler*

Scent Installation

*Scent of Ice and Snow
Algae, Glacial Water,
Steel, Plastic, Stones,
Glass*



*with the kind support of
Parfumeur Andreas
Wilhelm*

Olivia Wiederkehr: SchmerZH (2024)



*Public Art Intervention
2024*

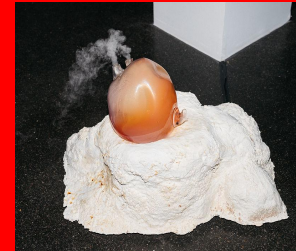
*City of Zurich
commissioned by KiöR
(Department of Public Art,
City of Zurich)*

*with the kind support of
Parfumeur Andreas
Wilhelm*

Olivia Wiederkehr: SchmerZH (2024)



Isabell Bullerschen: Ipseria (2023)



Exhibition view at
Löwenbräukunst, Zurich,
2023

Photos: Philip Frowein

**MIXED REALITY
INSTALLATION**

*vr experience, seating,
vibrating devices, ipseria
scent, fungus mycelium
aroma sculpture, neon*

*with the kind support of
Parfumeur Andreas
Wilhelm*

How to overcome Othering through smell?

Conclusion

- + collect more
 - + smell more
 - + raise awareness
 - + facilitate discussion
 - + collaborate with artists
-
- + creative nonfiction

Education

- + Hans J. Rindisbacher. 2010. **Smells of Switzerland**. In: *From Multiculturalism to Cultural Hybridity: New Approaches to Teaching Modern Switzerland*. Edited by Margrit Zinggeler and Karin Baumgartner. Newcastle : Cambridge Scholar Publishing. 229-252.
- + Nicola Pozzani. **Toolbox: Olfactory Art & Design**, 2025, Academy of Arts and Design Bern
- + Abhay Adhikari, Dorothee King, 2026 (funding tbc): **New Narratives for Integration** will communicate the insights and learnings on the mechanism of sense-based Othering to grassroots and not-for-profit organisations and support them to develop human-centric communication concepts for Swiss citizens to "unlearn" ingrained biases, and preconceptions towards refugees and asylum seekers

Prompts by Olivia Wiederkehr



Impressions, Züriberg, 2025

Thank you!