Switzerland's experiment with free drug zone ends in miserable failure

By Roger Cohen
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After more than four years of steadily rising crime related to drugs, this city has ended its experiment with an open drug market in a public park here.

The smashed windows of a Chanel store and a central branch of Credit Suisse, as well as the shooting of an unidentified man last week, betray the sharp tensions that have stemmed from the closing last week of the Platzspitz, a park where the illicit activities of thousands of drug addicts and dealers were tolerated in recent years in a policy of containment of the drug problem.

Andres Oehler, a municipal spokesman, said the City Council had decided to shut the park, now sealed behind 10-foot iron

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fences, because "it was felt that the situation had gotten out of control in every sense."

But closing the park left several unresolved issues, including the fate of what has become a large international community of addicts in Zurich and the question of what exactly went wrong with an initiative originally aimed at helping drug abusers.

Junkies were drawn from all over Europe in recent years by the Socialist City Council's decision to offer clean syringes, the help of health officials and a large measure of tolerance in the Platzspitz, a once-elegant garden behind the stately National Museum.

The city characterized its approach as an enlightened effort to isolate the drug problem in an area away from residential neighborhoods, curb AIDS and foster rehabilitation. Its policy reflected a strong current of feeling among some European experts that it is the illegal and clandestine nature of the drug

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business, rather than the drugs themselves, that causes many of the associated problems.

But the situation gradually degenerated.

"You give a little finger, and they want the whole hand," said a senior city official who insisted on anonymity. "You turn a blind eye to the small deals, and the big ones come. It was a spiral."

Regular users of the park swelled from a few hundred at the outset in 1987 to about 20,000, with about 25 percent of them coming from other countries. Then, Oehler said, dealers from Turkey, Yugoslavia and Lebanon moved in last year. Thefts and violence increased, with 81 drug-related deaths in 1991, twice as many as in 1990.

"We were having to resuscitate an average of 12 people a day, with peaks of 40 a day on some days," said Dr. Albert Weittstein, the city's chief medical officer. "Our people were running up around the park blowing oxygen into people's lungs. We started with three doctors, but recently had to put in two more. It has become an impossible strain."

Groups of as many as 50 addicts now gather in the streets. adjoining the park, where they are jostled by police officers with orders to disperse them. "This is a crazy decision, we'll be in the whole city now," said one young man, a syringe casually tucked behind his ear, as a policeman pushed him away. He declined to be identified.

On a nearby bench another youth, apparently oblivious to the approaching police officers, calmly tightened a belt around his upper arm before plunging a needle into a bulging vein below his elbow.

Christoph Schmid, a 21-year-old Swiss addict who has been using the park for the last two years, took a measured view of the

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action. He said the closing and the police crackdown would cause him and others "enormous difficulties"—heroin has become harder to get and its price has already doubled to about $230 per gram—but he also said the Platzspitz had recently become too violent. "Too many kids were getting hooked too easily," he added.

The park—beautifully situated at the confluence of the Sihl and Limmat Rivers, which isolated it from neighbors despite its central location—is now a monument to vain utopian hope and sordid devastation. "Anarchy is possible," proclaim graffiti scrawled across the National Museum. A bronze statue of a stag has been adorned with the word "Dope" in fluorescent orange paint.

On the ground lie thousands of discarded syringes and syringe packets, now being collected by garbage crews.

The rhododendrons that once lined the paths are dead; so, too, are many of the trees. Most of the expanses of grass have been reduced to mud.

Peter Stuenzi, the director of the city's parks, said that because the park had become what he called "Zurich's municipal urinal," the soil is such that it will be difficult to plant anything in it in the near future.

Petty selfishness— biggest threat to U.S.

By Michael Thornton
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The 50th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor may produce another unexpected surprise, one that may set the stage for an even greater struggle than WWII. Though born 15 years

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after the attack, my personal animosity toward the Japanese has lingered as if members of my own family had suffered that dreadful Sunday morning. Perhaps viewing the wartime "exploits" of John Wayne, Errol Flynn, and Clark Gable has left me with undue prejudice. However, upon reviewing the many accounts of the battle, studying the maps, and reminiscing vicariously with those who survived, I found my ill-will subsiding; not because I trust the Land of the Rising Sun more, but because I trust the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave less.

No, this will not be a tirade, lambasting 19th century American imperialism as an excuse for the sneak attack. Excuses will not alter the truth. It is a fact that the Japanese were guilty of blatant aggression. But it is also a fact that Americans have far more to fear from each other than they do from a menace overseas.

Ask yourself: Are you safer now than you were 50 years ago? Ten years ago? One year ago? Are you more secure in your person or property? Are you more likely to look over your shoulder (or in your rear view mirror) for potential danger? The

The problem with American families is the abandonment of American morality.

fact is Americans are fearful, and rightfully so. The peace fought for so many years ago is in danger of being lost by our generation. And the blame rests squarely on our shoulders.

Abraham Lincoln said,

> "Shall we expect some transatlantic giant to step the Ocean and crush us at a blow? Never!. . .If destruction be our lot, we must be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through all time, or die by suicide."

And on another occasion Lincoln chided,

> "...we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient...too proud to pray to the God that made us."

We are a nation that has lost its sense of honor, morality, and reliance upon Divine Providence. Perhaps we would be better served by a Bill of Duties than a Bill of Rights. Instead, we leave our children to foot the bill for our wanton neglect of responsibility. With each divorce, each disregard for authority, each drunken stupor we rob our children of their future. It is time for us to grow up. America has become a nation of two-year-olds screaming for a disastrous autonomy.

If our children are ever to rise up and call us blessed, it will be a result of a conscious decision by each of us to act like adults. No longer can we proclaim our "needs" are more valuable than our children's. No longer can we engage in promiscuity and abort the results. No longer can we abuse credit under the ruse that "we're worth it." America doesn't need more free spirits, we need more true spirits; men and women who are willing to face the hardships of life through honor and self-control.

A coalition of people is needed to foster the ideals that nurtured the Founders of our Republic; a broad-based party of

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individuals who cherish the Judeo-Christian principles of hard work, family, integrity, and humility before our Creator. We must teach our children the meaning and value of morality, the morality of men like George Washington. Americans may never come to an agreement on doctrines and creeds. No matter. The Framers of the Constitution did not. But they did agree on the need for virtue. American virtue. We can have that again if we work together to restore a sense of right living.

Our nation can be safe again. We can be free again. To do so we must change the moral direction of the United States. The problem with American schools, American businesses, and American families is the abandonment of American morality. It starts with you. It starts with me. Together we can launch a surprise attack on the real enemy of our Republic: our vile, petty selfishness.

In 1941 we faced a monumental struggle. In 1992, the battle may be even greater. We are in danger of losing everything they

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fought for in WWII. Let us seek virtue. The virtue of the Founders. Together we can preserve America for yet another generation.