

**editoriale**  
— *editorial*

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# **Towards New Summers: On History, Memory, and Ruins**



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Two black and white photographs from the same drawer in my grandmother's house. **Fig. 1 | 2** In the first picture, a boy with a white shirt poses in front of the camera together with other kids. His name is Rodolfo, he is my ten-year-old grandfather. He is photographed in an unknown location on the Adriatic coast. Summer 1932: the Fascist regime was about to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Benito Mussolini's march on Rome. Most likely unaware of Italian politics, Rodolfo is playing on the beach as he engages in the daily activities of a summer camp organized by an unspecified institution of his hometown, a little village on the hills over Modena. I guess that this was one of the few chances for him to spend some time by the sea. In the second picture, Rodolfo is an adult. He is wearing his *carabinieri* uniform, and he holds a boy in his arms: my father, Roberto, seven years old. It is 1960 and they are waiting in line with other children and their families. Roberto

is about to catch a train from Bologna to Miramare di Rimini, where he will spend a few weeks in the *colonia* "Bolognese." My father was a very shy kid, and he has always told me how little he enjoyed the summers in the *colonia*. His skin still remembers the many days spent by the sea with no sunscreen available. 28 years between one photo and the other, a world war, the end of a totalitarian regime, and the economic boom. Yet father and son were guests of a similar institution that survived in continuity between the first and the second half of the century: the *colonia marina*, the holiday camp by the seaside. Rodolfo's *colonia* might have been organized by the local branch of the Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento; Roberto's was at that time coordinated by the local church.<sup>1</sup>

Fast forward to summer 2020, Milano Marittima, ca. 40 km from Miramare di Rimini: a portion of the spectacular ramps in the *colonia marina* "Varese" collapses. This concrete giant,



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built in 1937–39, is now a fragile and abandoned skeleton of rusty iron and crumbled bricks. **Fig. 3** The collapse sparked a debate on the online journal *Il Giornale dell'Architettura*: how should these “giganti senza muscoli” – giants without muscles – be protected, or even restored?<sup>2</sup>

In Italy alone, dozens of abandoned holiday camps for children are scattered throughout the landscape. In the past decades, the size and diffusion of this architectural heritage have prompted many scientific debates on the history and future of these buildings.<sup>3</sup> From Alpine valleys to coastlines, former holiday camps for children tell a long story of educational, architectural, health and social experimentation, which influenced generations of Europeans in the last 150 years. Holiday camps were hosted in traditionalist or modernist structures, built from long-lasting materials such as reinforced concrete or temporary camping tents. Whatever their nature, holiday camps have left both physical and intangible traces on the European landscape and society. With this issue, *in\_bo* engages in the debate on the history of holiday camps in Europe between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular consideration of contemporary reuses and restoration strategies for this architectural heritage. *Towards New Summers* started as

a research project and as a conference held in Ravenna in September 2022, promoted by Micaela Antonucci, Luigi Bartolomei, Mirella Falconi, and me. The conference was organized in collaboration with the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna, the Fondazione Flaminia, and the Centro Studi Cherubino Ghirardacci.

Between the days of the conference in Ravenna and the present moment, when I write these words, many scientific events further investigated the histories and memories related to social tourism and holiday camps in Europe. The seminar “Architectures of Social Tourism: History/ies and Futures” was organized at ENSA Nantes by Nathan Brenu, Laurent Devisme, and Amélie Nicolas in July 2022.<sup>4</sup> In 2023, Tiziana Pironi and Simona Salustri edited an issue of the *E-Review* journal titled “Oltre la scuola. Colonie per l’infanzia e esperienze educative in Italia (1945-1975).”<sup>5</sup> Last year also Luca Comerio published a book on the different pedagogies experimented in some Italian holiday camps between the 1960s and the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> The seminar “Architecture and Coastal Tourism (1960-1980)” was organized in Mantova by the Politecnico di Milano in May 2024.<sup>7</sup> Historian Stefano Pivato recently published the book *Andare per colonie estive*, part of the popular book series “Ritrovare l’Italia” by

Some children, including my grandfather, at a seaside holiday camp on the Adriatic coast, 1932 (author's private archive).

My grandfather and my father, waiting to catch a train towards the *colonia* "Bolognese" in Miramare di Rimini, 1960 (author's private archive).

Italian publisher Il Mulino.<sup>8</sup> The social memory of holiday camps is now also discussed in public arenas, such as the documentary *Di che colonia sei?*, directed by Riccardo Marchesini, in partnership with the cultural association Il Palloncino Rosso.<sup>9</sup> For many years, Spazi Indecisi – an association based in Forlì – has been promoting alternative touristic routes through the third landscape formed by the *colonie* along the Adriatic coast of Emilia-Romagna.<sup>10</sup> The exceptional variety of these publications, seminars, and events attests to the social and historical relevance of holiday camps today. These buildings are a tangible pretext to discuss the social, sanitary, and political histories of many European countries from the nineteenth century until today. They are also a trace of the many material legacies of the twentieth century, and the inner weaknesses of modern architecture. As both physical buildings and collective imaginaries, holiday camps are a lens through which scholars can reflect on the entanglements between social histories and personal memories, as well as on the transformations of touristic landscapes promoted by the emergence of mass society. Above all, holiday camps may be a starting point for thinkers and designers to imagine alternative ways of living within the ruins of modernity.

## PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF HOLIDAY CAMPS IN EUROPE

*Towards New Summers* is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the emergence of the phenomenon of holiday camps in Europe, the roots of which date back to the nineteenth century, as part of the sanitary and therapeutic measures against infectious respiratory diseases, such as tuberculosis. The first holiday camps merged medical research and climatic therapies, usually promoted through charitable activities and donations. The great variety of models produced diversified results, from Giuseppe Barellai's *ospizi marini* in Italy to Hermann Walter Bion's *Ferienkolonien* in Switzerland. At the same time, these experiments were strongly linked to the emergence of new touristic locations in the mountains and along the seaside, which were increasingly connected by new railways under construction. The chapter opens with an introductory paper by Valter Balducci on the *promises* that the institution of holiday camps pledged to industrializing societies. The effects of these *promises* at local and national scales can be detected in the following papers by Dolf Broekhuizen on the Kerdijk holiday camp in the Netherlands, Luca Comerio on late nineteenth-century *colonie* in Milan, Philippe Clairay on

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Inside the ramps of the former *colonia* "Varese",  
Milano Marittima (ph. Sofia Nannini, 2022).

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José's kitchen in the former *colonia* "Varese",  
Milano Marittima (ph. Sofia Nannini, 2022).

holiday camps and sanatoria in Bretagne, and Pedro Silvani on seaside holiday camps in early twentieth-century Lisbon. The second chapter engages with the history of the many totalitarian regimes that defined Western Europe during the twentieth century. In Fascist Italy, in the German Third Reich and in the Portuguese Estado Novo, the education of youth was a key goal for totalitarian dictatorships. Through the study of holiday camps for children we may read and understand the totalitarian policies of control on free time, as well as the military and political education of youth. A well-documented case is that of holiday camps for children in Fascist Italy. During the *ventennio*, the role of these camps went beyond original welfare scopes and acquired military and racial meanings, transforming holiday camps into a tool for nationalistic and ideological education.<sup>11</sup> Holiday camps were characterized by new pedagogical models and a new architectural language, supported by a generation of architects who worked in collaboration with the regime.<sup>12</sup> This chapter opens with Arne Winkelmann's analysis of the political purposes behind the Italian *colonia* promoted by the Fascist regime. Fascist politics over childhood and motherhood are also discussed by Massimiliano Savorra who investigates the (often forgotten) architecture of the Operazione Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia (ONMI). The sanitary positions of the

fascist regime and their propagandistic use are presented in the research by Simonetta Ciranna and Patrizia Montuori on the exhibitions held in Rome between the late 1920s and the 1930s. Elisa Pegorin investigates the connections between Italian fascist *colonia* and the holiday camps promoted under the Portuguese regime of the Estado Novo. Gianluca Drigo focuses instead on Nazi Germany and reflects on the different architectural and spatial strategies promoted by the *Kraft durch Freude* and the *Hitlerjugend*. Finally, Fabio Montella analyzes the peculiar case of the *colonia antifascista* in Saint-Cergues, Haute-Savoie, built by Italian political refugees in the 1930s, as an architectural counterpart of the monumental constructions of the regime. However, the experience of holiday camps in Europe was not limited to totalitarian regimes. Since the first experiments in the construction of welfare states and until the Postwar years, the organization of the children's free time was a key interest for democracies – from the *colonie de vacances* in France to the Swedish *barnkoloni*. The decades after the Second World War are particularly interesting in this regard. In these years, holiday camps for children became very popular, moving away from the original sanitary or educational scopes, and merging with the phenomenon of mass tourism. The third chapter focuses on the architectural, political, and pedagogical peculiarities that



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characterized holiday camps for children in relation to the construction of welfare states in twentieth-century Europe. Especially in the Postwar years, Western Europe experienced different kinds of holiday camps, such as those financed by religious institutions, governments and public bodies, by political parties or business companies. These manifold educational directions resulted in a large quantity of new buildings with different architectural languages – some experimental, some traditional, at odds or in continuity with the experiences before the Second World War. The chapter opens with Stamatina Kousidi's research on two villages for children built in Greece, that combined pedagogical and environmental concerns. Eléonore Marantz focuses on the holiday camps designed by French architect Roland Schweitzer, who specialized in architectural typologies for social tourism and, particularly, for the youth. Stefano Mais offers an original overview of Postwar holiday camps in Sardinia, analyzing the microhistories of buildings that have been overlooked so far. Silvia Cattiodoro instead engages with Edoardo Gellner's Albergo Meridiana in Cortina d'Ampezzo – an experimental test for and a fascinating forerunner of Gellner's most famous Colonia Eni at Borca di Cadore. The long shadow of the Italian Fascist regime in the Postwar years is at the core of Elena Pirazzoli's piece on Sciesopoli, a former holiday camp built during the

regime in the mountains above Bergamo. The multifaceted reuses of the former *colonia*, from a sanctuary of young Jewish refugees to a tuberculosis sanatorium, attest to the intricacies of its history and may suggest new directions for future uses.

Indeed, for any given holiday camp we can study its past, assess its value in the present, and even inquire or orientate its futures. Since the second half of the 1970s, operative holiday camps for children have been diminishing in number throughout Europe. The increasing individualization of free time and vacations has threatened the very notion of holiday camps, which have almost completely disappeared in the last decades. However, the traces of this phenomenon are still present along the coastlines, in mountain valleys, and in rural areas. Hundreds of former holiday camps are scattered throughout the continent and are still awaiting restoration and reuse. Apart from a few positive cases, there is a general indifference towards this architectural heritage in scholarly works.<sup>13</sup> In the last decade, abandoned holiday camps have become the object of a nostalgic fascination among the general public, with an important role played by photographers – such as Dan Dubowitz and Lorenzo Mini – who contributed with photographic projects specifically on the Italian heritage.<sup>14</sup> The development of reuse strategies is often hindered by fragmented ownership, the size of



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the buildings, and the transformation of the surrounding landscape. Most of the time, private investors opt for the easiest solution, which is to transform former holiday camps into luxury hotels, ignoring the needs of local communities and often erasing the historical memory of these settlements. This last chapter includes contributions on restoration and reuse projects of former holiday camps for children, in Italy and France. Giorgio Danesi and Sara Di Resta investigate the archival documents related to the former *colonia* "Principi di Piemonte," in Venice Lido – a precious example of a fragile, modernist heritage. Saverio Sturm, Marco Fasolo and Fabio Colonnese focus on the *colonia marina* in another Lido – that of Ostia, near Rome –, which survived a complex history of official and bottom-up uses, but also of abandonment and decay. Francesco Gastaldi and Federico Camerin critically discuss the controversial restoration of the *colonia* Gustavo Fara in Chiavari, on the Ligurian coast, recently transformed into a luxury hotel. A former holiday camp that still needs a conservation strategy is the one designed by Luigi Carlo Daneri for the Piaggio company in Santo Stefano d'Aveto, Liguria. Davide Del Curto and Francesca Santoro analyze the *colonia's* recent, turbulent history, as well as the role of the institutional bodies active in the preservation of its

unique architectural features. Finally, the chapter ends with a reflection by Amélie Nicolas on the "Palais des enfants" in Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez, France – a former holiday camp abandoned since the early 2000s. Ethnography, microhistory, research by art, even archaeology – Nicolas states that all these perspectives are needed to imagine or reject the futures that will come anyway, "regardless of our research outcomes."

#### **CODA: ON THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE IN A MODERNIST RUIN**

While preparing for the conference in Ravenna I visited several abandoned *colonie* on the Adriatic coast of Emilia-Romagna. Some of them are fenced off, while others allow curious visitors to get through – despite the evident risks of entering an abandoned building with unstable floors and crumbling ceilings. When I visited the *colonia* Varese in the spring of 2022, I wanted to see its famous ramps and understand the scale of the damage caused by the collapse that occurred in the summer of 2020. As I entered the building, I noticed that it was not really abandoned, after all. For many years now, the huge *colonia* has been the home of José, who settled in the building and transformed some of its parts into a home – with kitchenware, a toilet, and other

appliances he built out of personal ingenuity.<sup>15</sup> **Fig. 4** As I was editing this issue, my mind came back several times to the idea that the former *colonia* Varese had lived many lives throughout the decades: it was a holiday camp; a machine for the propaganda of the Fascist regime; a place full of memories of children and educators; a military hospital during the war; again a holiday camp coordinated by the propagandistic attitudes of the Gioventù Italiana and of the Democrazia Cristiana; then a movie set for Pupi Avati's horror film *Zeder*; then a decaying monster in front of the Adriatic sea; a nest for migratory birds and other species living by the coast; a realm of possibilities for investors, institutions and designers; and, for someone like me, an *urbex* Disneyland offering Instagram snapshots and the thrills of walking over unstable concrete beams. The *colonia* had indeed been many things over almost a century, plus one: for more than twenty years, the *colonia* has been José's home. He might have cared for it more than any political or administrative institution ever had, or will. As architectural historians, we seek answers in the documents collected in libraries and archives. As designers and planners, we seek solutions in institutional strategies, guidelines, and restoration projects. Somehow, the continuously negotiated and delicate coexistence between José and the crumbling walls of the former *colonia* seems to be the most intriguing lesson on how to adapt, take refuge, and even imagine living within the ruins of modernity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mirella D'Ascenzo, "La colonia Bolognese a Miramare di Rimini nel secondo dopoguerra, tra continuità pedagogica e (scarsa) discontinuità," *E-Review 10* (2023), [https://e-review.it/colonia\\_bolognese\\_miramare](https://e-review.it/colonia_bolognese_miramare), accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Bartolomei, ed., "Ex colonie: giganti senza muscoli," *Il Giornale dell'Architettura* (2021), <https://inchieste.ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com/category/ex-colonie-giganti-senza-muscoli/>, accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The most notable studies are those edited by Valter Balducci: *Architetture per le colonie di vacanza. Esperienze europee* (Florence: Alinea, 2005); *Architecture and Society of the Holiday Camps: History and Perspectives*, eds. Valter Balducci and Smaranda Bica (Timisoara: Editura Orizonturi Universitare, 2007). See also less recent investigations: Istituto per i beni culturali della Regione Emilia-Romagna, *Colonie a mare. Il patrimonio delle colonie sulla costa romagnola quale risorsa urbana e ambientale* (Casalecchio di Reno: Grafis, 1986); Gian Carlo Jocteau, *Ai monti e al mare: cento anni di colonie per l'infanzia* (Milan: Fabbri, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See the program at the link: [https://aau.archi.fr/uploads/2022/06/Public\\_Prog\\_EN\\_Architectures-of-social-tourism.pdf](https://aau.archi.fr/uploads/2022/06/Public_Prog_EN_Architectures-of-social-tourism.pdf), accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Tiziana Pironi, and Simona Salustri, eds., "Oltre la scuola. Colonie per l'infanzia e esperienze educative in Italia (1945–1975)," *E-Review 10* (2023), <https://e-review.it/sommario/>, accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Luca Comerio, *Le colonie di vacanza italiane (1968-1990). Una pedagogia fra tradizione e innovazione* (Milan: Unicopli, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> See the call for papers at the link: <https://www.dabc.polimi.it/event/architecture-and-coastal-tourism/>, accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Stefano Pivato, *Andare per colonie estive* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> See the summary at: <https://www.giostrafilm.it/di-che-colonia-sei/>, accessed June 3, 2024. See also: Storia di colonia. Racconti d'estate dalla Bolognese, 1932–1977, eds. Ilaria Ruggeri, Paola Russo, and Luca Villa (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> "Spazi indecisi," <https://www.spaziindecisi.it/>, accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: Roberta Mira, and Simona Salustri, eds., *Colonie per l'infanzia nel ventennio fascista. Un progetto di pedagogia del regime* (Ravenna: Longo, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Elena Mucelli, *Colonie di vacanza italiane degli anni '30: architetture per l'educazione del corpo e dello spirito* (Florence: Alinea, 2009); Francesca Franchini, ed., *Colonie per l'infanzia tra le due guerre: storia e tecnica* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> A recent exception is the study by Gabriele Neri, *La colonia Olivetti a Brusson: ambiente, pedagogia e costruzione nell'architettura italiana (1954–1962)* (Rome: Officina Libreria, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Dan Dubowitz, *Fascismo abbandonato: The Children's Colonie of Mussolini's Italy* (Stockport: Lewis, 2010); Lorenzo Mini, *Colonie* (Ravenna: Danilo Montanari, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> See an interview with José in this short documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01-ZDpAlvVs>, last accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> I take this idea from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and her revelatory book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).



# Verso nuove estati: tra storia, memoria e rovine

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## KEYWORDS

colonie per l'infanzia; architettura; storia; memoria; riuso

## ABSTRACT

*Lo stato di abbandono di numerose ex-colonie per l'infanzia sparse nel territorio italiano sottolinea l'urgenza di un dibattito scientifico-critico sulla storia e il futuro di questi edifici. Dalle valli alpine alle zone costiere, le ex-colonie per l'infanzia raccontano una lunga storia di sperimentazione sanitaria, pedagogica, architettonica e sociale che ha influenzato generazioni di cittadini e cittadine in Italia e in Europa negli ultimi centocinquanta anni. Ospitate in architetture tradizionali o dalla grande modernità, realizzate in materiali da costruzione duraturi come il cemento armato o effimere come tende, le ex-colonie hanno lasciato significative tracce, fisiche e non, nel paesaggio e nella società. Questo numero di in\_bo ospita le più recenti ricerche relative alla storia delle colonie per l'infanzia in Europa tra Ottocento e Novecento – con diverse chiavi di lettura, dall'architettura alla pedagogia, dalla politica alla sanità – e mette in luce esperienze virtuose di riuso e restauro di tale patrimonio architettonico.*

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