The buildings for the holiday in the 20 years. The “Vittorino da Feltre” colony in Matera

Antonella Guida, Antonello Pagliuca*, Giuseppe Damone

Highlights

In Italy, the holiday colonies are an important research field for researchers in recent years. This study - a part of a wide research that involves the whole Basilicata area - has highlighted the spread of marine and heliotherapeutic colonies in the territory [1]. An important part of the study is also represented by the built-landscape relationship that has characterized the area [2]. With the advent of mass tourism, these testimonies have been progressively abandoned, favouring their philological disappearance; in fact, there have been converted to education facilities as the “Vittorino da Feltre” colony in Matera [3].

Abstract

The study aims to present the first results of a wide research carried out on the holiday constructions made in Basilicata during the Fascism, in particular on the “Vittorino da Feltre” helioterapical colony in Matera; it was built in 1937 by a design of the engineer Vincenzo Corazza. It is the only helioterapical building present on Basilicata area until today, which has not been destroyed in the decades, after the collapse of the fascist regime because it was transformed and readapted in a public school. The analysis of the archival material, the study of the state of the art and the technological characterization of the building made it possible to highlight all the typicalities of this architecture.

Keywords

Holiday colony, Recovery, Building characterization, Architectural knowledge, Typological analysis

1. GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN HOLIDAYS BUILDINGS IN ITALY

Over the last few decades, throughout Italy, it had witnessed the progressive dismantling of the specialized architecture of children summer holiday. From the late 19th century, it assist at the birth and development of marine hospitals for the stay and care of children suffering from particular diseases. This phenomenon is related to the figure of Tuscan doctor Giuseppe Barellai who demonstrated how healthy air, proper hygienic conditions, exposure to the sun and sea baths allowed the care of children affected by scrofula [4].

Already in 1841 it is documented the stay of some children in some private residences of the Duchy of Lucca and, ten years later, thanks to the action of some philanthropic societies, it starts a systematic organization for the sending of children affected by various pathologies, in seaside resorts for

* Corresponding author
Tel.: +39-0835-1971472;
e-mail: antonello.pagliuca@unibas.it
summer stays. Between 1861 and 1869, then, the first building was built at Viareggio - designed by architect Giuseppe Poggi - with the aim of welcoming the children for the holiday. This building, however, was a normal residential building with no special features that could be distinguish its function. The location of the colonies is also dictated by practical needs: places favoured by roads or railways are preferred, and therefore already interested in seaside tourism; but soon there is a capillary development throughout the national territory of summer colonies. The slow phenomenon of birth and diffusion of this specialized architecture receives an exponential acceleration with the advent of Fascism.

In the Twenties of ‘900, through the construction of the colonies for the holiday of the young, it was started the struggle against tuberculosis - the first and fundamental reason for the creation of marine hospitals; this politics soon became a propaganda instrument of Fascist ideology and an instrument to inculcate the sense of discipline in Italian youth, too.

In addition, these architectures are soon elevated to buildings with particular stylistic and formal features and becoming the experimentation field for young architects who can confront themselves with the construction of structures where they incorporate their ethical and aesthetic theories. The summer colonies are thus loaded with formal values derived from functional considerations and with the idea to celebrate the dictatorship and its leader, guaranteeing an image of modernity.

Without reference to tradition, these architectures give designers an unusual expressive freedom [5]; the colonies thus become a fundamental moment for the diffusion of Rationalist Architecture. The same ones, then, represent a typology that encapsulates the character of the hotel, the school, the nursing home and the barracks [6].

«At the architectural physiognomy of the colony, the chronicles of the time, as appropriate, assigned adjectives as “authoritarian”, “sliding”, “standardized” or “arbitrary”, too. In fact, those buildings were essentially “night refuges”, as the day the young male and female guests had to spend the time mainly on the open air, the areniles or on the grass ... » [6].

Depending on the site chosen for the construction, the colony could be marine, fluvial or mountain. In addition, those colonies could operate just few months a year (temporary) or year-round (permanent). In relation to economic availability of users, some colonies - especially heliotherapeutical ones - were organized in temporary structures (tents, wooden shacks) or provided activities that took place only in daytime hours (hence the name of day colony); this condition permitted to avoid to provide dormitories and an
economic savings, as well; according to this organization, the young guests reached their homes every night.

2. THE COLONY ABANDONED PROCESS: RECOVERY AND PRESERVATION PROBLEMS

After the Second World War, it continues the construction of holiday colonies - managed by Catholic charitable institutions -, but with buildings of modest architectural value; the years in which colonies have been built by strong aesthetic and formal values are now far removed.

In the following decades, due to the achievement of an economic well-being that allows at Italian families to be able to enjoy summer vacations without the need to send their children to the colony for sun care, these buildings are gradually being abandoned.

The phenomenon of progressive abandonment reaches its peak in the 1970s when, many of these structures are demolished or left to an inexorable decline. Only few of them, just in these years, have been reuse to other functions. Now that these buildings have ceased the function for which they were built, it is questioning what the policy to adopt for their recovery and, therefore, to give it a new identity and value.

![An historical photo of heliotherapic colony “Vittorino da Feltre” in Matera.](image)

It should also be said that in order to bring these artefacts to a contemporary standard feature, large financial capital is needed to invest.

Structural adjustments (in accordance with current seismic requirements),
improved energy behaviour, functional adaptation, represent the challenge for contemporary technicians, who have to face the recovery of a strongly characterized heritage of great historical importance.

3. THE TYPOLOGICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHARACTERIZATION

Basilicata responds to the regime’s policy of establishing holiday colonies in mountain locations, on the coast or in sunny areas during the summer months for the treatment of the most common diseases curated by ‘sunbathing’.

This is what happens in Matera in 1932 when a first colony was established in the Cappuccini district, on the suburb of the historic city. In fact, in 1937 (designed by the engineer Vincenzo Corazza (Matera 1899-Taranto 1964), it begins the construction of the heliotherapeutic colony “Vittorino da Feltre”.

The building, along with those built in the same period in the city, was realized using new materials and technological systems, not close to the local construction tradition (for formal aspects and constructive techniques): it passes from the masonry (and vault) to the reinforced concrete frame structure.
A first project, presented by the engineer Corazza (not approved), is modified to realize a building that can respond optimally to functional needs. The structure starts its activity in the summer of 1941.

In the designed architecture, it finds the desire to strive for the construction of an architectural landscape with a formally far away from the architecture of the place and made of “plastic volumes”.

In addition, the engineer suggests in his project all those elements that Gino Levi Montalcini, speaking about the architecture of the Italian colonies, summarizes: «The architect’s inspiration can devote itself to a wide and uncluttered composition of the atmosphere of a just built mediocre context; different levels propose the movement of masses, esplanades, stairs; insulation and natural ventilation offer many suggestions of defects and backgrounds, sheltering against the sun... ». [7]

The building, realized according to the style of Rationalist Architecture, is articulated on three levels with a rational division of spaces, conceived according to what has been the scanning of daily activities in colony of hosted children.

On the ground floor (as it can be deduced from the archive drawings), there are the halls with some of the classrooms, the caretaker’s accommodation, a refectory, the ambulatory and the infirmary. The first floor is occupied by a dormitory room divided into two sections (male and female), while on the...
attic floor there is a solarium; outside there are sports areas and swimming pool.

Figure 5. The colony refectory in an historical view.

Figure 6. Axonometric projection of colony (original drawing).
Large windows reflecting the sides, ensuring ventilation and enlightenment. From a constructive point of view, the heliotherapical colony is built using a mixed bearing structure: reinforced concrete elements - stringcourse and beams - and masonry bearing in local stone; the foundation system is a continuous type on the rocky.

At the end of the 1970s, the colony ceased its original function and, a decade later, became reused as a public school; following this new use, the structure was expanded in 1989 and a new volume is attached close from the original ones.

Analysing this building, that is one of the few (still existing) testimonies in Basilicata of specialized architecture for holidaying made during the Fascist Twenty Years – as said before - has enabled to capture the local identity sedimented in matter.

Buildings, such as the subject of study, besides being aesthetic and formal values, have represented a true field of architectural experimentation in Basilicata, sometimes far from the echo of great constructive revolutions; it represent passages from the architecture of tradition to that of contemporaneity and where the designer’s creative esteem has created a harmonious relationship with the past or a strident break with it. These considerations lead to conceiving these architectural testimonies as a unicum to be guarded for future generations as a testimony of the past.

4. REFERENCES


