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HOLIDAY COLONIES AND THEIR HERITAGE, A NEW SUBJECT

JEAN-MARIE BATAILLE

The buildings which have been used to accommodate holiday colonies are fast disappearing today, being converted to new uses or simply being destroyed. In a few cases, they are also being refurbished. Information on this type of heritage is sketchy. It is almost impossible to know the precise number of buildings used. A building might have been used as a holiday colony for one or for several years and then acquire another and altogether different function. Other buildings had different functions before being used as holiday colonies and some were never officially declared as holiday colonies.

Rather than trying to compile statistics at a national level, another way of approaching this subject is to look more closely at local situations. This approach shows the history of holiday colonies to have been a varied and contrasted one. Key periods emerge for different regions showing how important the local context was. This article presents the results of a study carried out in the Haute-Savoie department from May to July 2007. It draws attention to the careers of a handful of architects who were particularly interested in holiday colonies. But looking at the heritage means looking not only at the buildings but also at their planning contexts, their overall layout and the different categories of buildings used. It also means examining the pedagogical ideas behind the places and the objets that these ideas produced.

The first official text concerning the renovation of the holiday colony heritage dates from 8 June 2007 (VI^e Plan, priority action programme n° 14).¹ 'The essential objective of this renovation is to adapt and modernise the installations' over a three-year period. An important point is the improvement of accommodation standards. 'The dormitories will be partitioned off and replaced by bedrooms with a limited number of beds, well isolated and sound-proofed and with good ventilation.' At this date, many holiday colonies still had dormitories and we know, from information in the departmental archives of Haute-Savoie, that all these buildings had dormitories in 1939.²

The Regional History of Holiday Colonies

A national history based on the compilation of data gleaned at the local level gives an incomplete and unrealistic picture of the evolution of holiday colonies at this local scale. A few examples will illustrate the specificity of such local contexts. In the regions of the North of France, devastated by the First World War, several camps were developed to accommodate children and young people.³ At Camiers, in the Pas-de-Calais department, one of the largest holiday colonies ever seen was organised in an abandoned British military camp, at the instigation of the Ministry of the Interior (refugee service), the Ministry of Hygiene and the Ministry of Public Instruction.⁴ This camp functioned from 1920 to 1925 and took in from 10,000 to 12,000 children coming from the liberated regions.

Between the two wars, the town of Suresnes, in the suburbs of Paris, pursued a policy of placing children in families.⁵ For Laura Lee Downs, this practice was based on a local tradition, specific to the Paris region, of sending children to stay in families. After the Second World War and up to the 1960s, the region of Alsace witnessed a considerable development of holiday colonies.⁶ In the aftermath of the war years, it was a question of 'de-nazifying the population of Alsace, re-frenchifying it even (that is to say re-awakening it to French civilisation) after the five years this population had been oppressed and the region annexed to the German Reich.' The Finistère department, in Brittany, reached a peak in the

¹ See also *Le Moniteur, Equipements sportifs et socio-éducatifs*, special issue, June 1980, p. 461-62.

² A law of 1937 stipulated that a plan should be presented in order for a holiday colony to be opened.

³ Nicolas Palluau (2007).

⁴ Rey-Herme (1961), p. 308-309; A. Vulbeau (1993), p. 128-131; see also Dequidt, 'Colonies de vacances et œuvres de plein air', *Journal Officiel*, 19 September 1923.

⁵ Laura Lee Downs (2002).

⁶ Julien Fuchs (2007).

⁷ Houssaye (1991).
⁸ ADHR 659 D 56 Sports et Avant-garde du Rhin, letter of Maurice Herzog, Under-Secretary of State for youth and sports, addressed to the head engineers of the 'Ponts et Chaussées' administration, departmental directors of construction and technical advisors, 16 April 1964.
⁹ AFDWM, Commission, 'équipement et animation', report by the Prime Minister and to the High Committee for Youth, presented by M. Ricardeau, Inspector for youth and sports, head of the working group, June 1963.
¹⁰ 'This means the development of facilities which will be more or less evenly spread throughout the national territory according to types of activity they are destined to accommodate, entirely linked with the geographical, climate and tourist conditions.'
¹¹ See Houssaye (1991) for further details.
¹² For the most part, these new holiday camps were constructed along the road going through the village.
¹³ Maurice Novarina also built a holiday colony at Saint-Jean-d'Alp, from 1986 (source: CAUE Haute-Savoie).
¹⁴ Bertrand Stämpfli, 'Vallée verte : vers la « décolonisation »?', *Le Faucigny*, 3 August 1996.

H.-J. Le Mème (photo by Bataille, 2007)



M. Novarina (photo by Bataille, 2007)



Fuchs tells us that 'in April 1964, Maurice Herzog wrote letter [...] in which he announced that the development of outdoor centres and holiday camps has become an imperative necessity. This letter was undoubtedly a consequence of the work of the 'facilities' and 'animation' commission which had delivered its report in June 1963,⁹ a commission which had been working on 'facilities by zone'.¹⁰ During the 1961-1965 five-year plan, a total of 255,000 new beds were to be provided and credits were to be increased fivefold. From 1960 to 1966, there was indeed an increase in credits.¹¹ The role of the state was an important one, then, increasing the number of holiday colonies from 1964 and up to 1966. The local story of how holiday camps developed during these years must therefore take into account the impact of state policies. The increase in the number of holiday camps in the Haute-Savoie department is concentrated in four man periods: 1963-1966, 1968-1972, 1975-1979 and 1988 to 1992. The resort of Super-Châtel was opened in 1955, Avoriaz in 1966. For the villages and towns that were directly linked to these ski resorts, the opening of Avoriaz seems to have had an impact, particularly on the resorts of the Val d'Abondance (Châtel, Abondance, La-Chapelle-d'Abondance). Six new holiday colonies were opened in the same year of 1966 at La-Chapelle-d'Abondance, and a process of emulation perhaps emerged amongst the people responsible for running these sites.¹² Several factors came together, then, and the years 1964-1966 benefited from significant public grant aid and a 'valley-effect', both contributing to the increase in the number of holiday colonies in this territory, particularly in the Val d'Abondance. From the end of the Second World War up to the 1970s, the French state played a central part in the way society developed and, consequently, in this domain of holiday camps. Nonetheless, and tempering this observation a little, it is possible to say that the Haute-Savoie department and its inhabitants gave local colour to the national history of these colonies.

Architects of Holiday Colonies in Haute-Savoie

In the evolution of the design of holiday colonies, three architects, Maurice Novarina, Henri-Jacques Le Mème and Roland Schweitzer, may be identified as having played an important part. We will now take a look at the work of these three architects in the department.

Burdignin.

Maurice Novarina, a former student of the Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts, began his career as a town planner. He is well known in the region for his church on the Assy plateau, which bore witness to a certain renewal in religious architecture.¹³ The project was to create a fifteen-hectare village comprising thirteen chalets, each with thirty beds, destined for the accommodation of children who had been victims of deportation.¹⁴ The first chalet was inaugurated in 1953 but apparently too late for the original project. Consequently, the Espérance village was transformed into an aërium, an open-air sanatorium, up to 1966. The sisters of the hospitals of Berck-Plage (Pas-de-Calais) then took the village over for 'young girls suffering from scoliosis and cyphosis'. This use ended in 1977, the village then becoming a centre for holiday colonies and school classes in the mountains. Today, it is a 'second chance' school run by the army, still receiving holiday colonies during the summer.

Henri-Jacques Le Mème and Megeve

Either as architect or interior designer, Henri-Jacques Le Mème was responsible for fourteen holiday colonies in the Haute-Savoie department,¹⁵ and seven other buildings he designed (sanatoriums,

children's homes, aériums) are today used as holiday colonies. If only in terms of quantity, then, Le Mème occupies a special place in the history of holiday colonies in the department. He is best known for the sanatoriums of the Assy plateau, which he built in collaboration with Pol Abraham.¹⁶ But he is also well known for his design of a specific form of mountain dwelling which was to witness considerable development with the growth of ski resorts, the 'chalet'.¹⁷ He also lived at Megève, a town where he was the architect of numerous buildings.

From 1942, Le Mème occupied the post of technical advisor for school buildings in his region, at the Ministry of National Education, and, from 1946, he was head architect for reconstruction.

The village of Megève, known as 'the children's ski resort', occupies a central position in Le Mème's work. 'The last war and the Occupation are ample justification for the need for these „homes“ for children; many hotels have been requisitioned in order to welcome young refugees and the under-nourished children of the cities.'

Several of his sanatorium buildings were to become holiday colonies. This is the case, for example, of 'La Ravoire' (1928-1931), 'Le Saint-André' (1938-1931) and 'Le Guébriant' (1930-1971). This last is now a holiday village used by the Val-de-Marne department in the Paris suburbs, the two buildings to the right of the main building occupied by a holiday colony.

Roland Schweitzer and the colony of the FFC

Roland Schweitzer was the architect responsible for a maternal holiday centre at Ballan-Miré near Tours (1977), built for the Ministry of Economy and Finance, a children's holiday centre, Les Torchets, at Arache (1966), Le Pré-Long at Murot (1973) and at Arèches (Savoie), and another centre for pre-adolescents at Four-Cieux (Haute-Vienne).

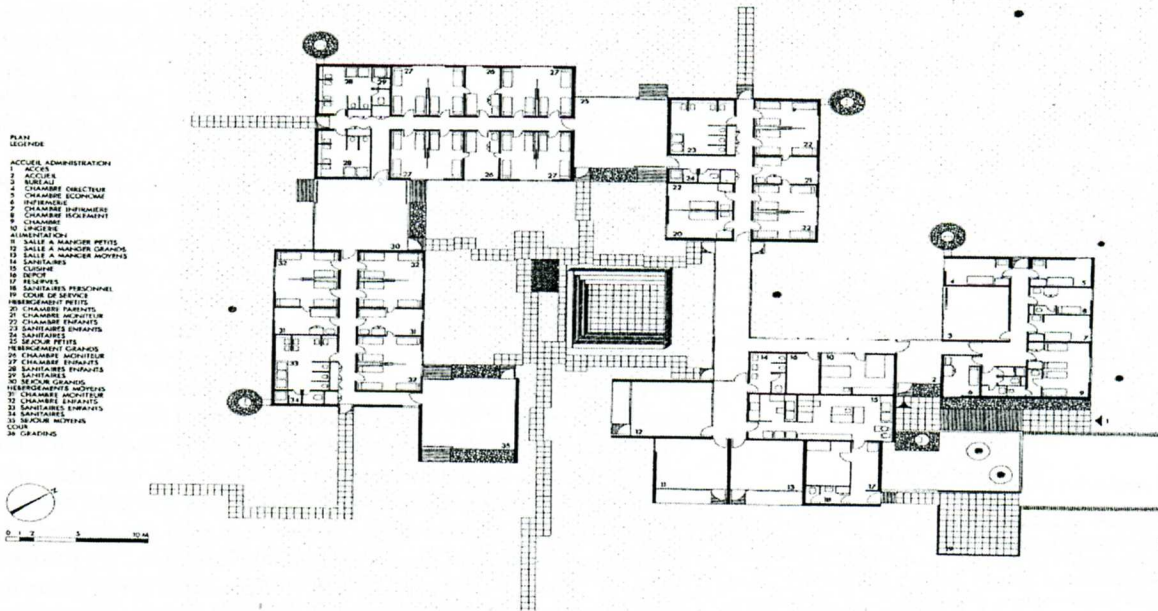
Les Torchets is a national centre of the 'Francs et Franches Camarades' (FFC) Its layout, elaborated in collaboration with the Cemea, is at the origins of a design in which the plan of the holiday colony is conceived of as the duplication of a basic unit called a 'small group'.¹⁸

¹⁵ Eleven colonies were opened after 1955.

¹⁶ J.-B. Cremnitzer (2005).

¹⁷ F. Delorme (2005).

¹⁸ Cemea: Construction, installation, aménagement, équipement des centres de vacances d'enfants et d'adolescents. Scarabé éditions, 1965.



Maternal holiday centre belonging to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, at Ballan-Miré, near Tours; architect R. Schweitzer, published in *Le Moniteur*, June 1980.

The emergence of an architectural doctrine concerning holiday colonies dates from after the Second World War. The overall layout offers two conceptions for these facilities, as pavilions or as a single building. The second model is more frequently to be found, since it is more economic in spatial terms: space is at a premium in the mountains, often difficult to find on account of the sloping terrain or the high investment costs for mountain resorts. In the Haute-Savoie, the number of holiday colony buildings has diminished considerably, from about 600 in the 1990s to about 350 today. The overall evolution of planning within the department is one explanation for this phenomenon, along with the economic reality of resorts on the lower slopes, now getting less snow.

The Arve valley, which goes from Chamonix up to Annemasse, has witnessed a profound evolution, characterised by rapid urbanisation largely due to industrial estates associated with metal-cutting activities. Some 40 colonies have disappeared along this valley. The towns in the valley are also affected: at Saint-Gervais, 14 colonies have disappeared, at Annecy, 15 and at Thonon, 8. The distance from the major ski resorts is also a factor accounting for the disappearance of the colonies: Vallée verte (13 disappeared), Montiond, Essart-Romand, Saint-Jean-d'Aulps (9).

Monnetier-Mornex

Monnetier-Mornex is above all a mountain resort for tourists. The so-called Salève electric rack-engine railway was opened there in December 1892. The Bellevue Hotel had opened six months earlier, and there were already two other hotels at Monnetier, La Terrasse, of 1890, and another hotel dating from 1840.

From 1917 to 1919, a building was used for the installation of one of the first open-air schools in France.¹⁹ After the First World War, the material deprivations which these families were faced gave new significance to these open-air schools. Doctors and educational experts agreed as to the urgent need to welcome this 'war generation' of children who were 'fragile, excitable and weakened' (A. Jouenne, 1927, p. 19). Two boarding schools were opened during the summer of 1918. One of these, at Fontaine-Bouillant, near Chantres, was destined for 'young, anaemic Parisian girls' (Foucteau, 1924, H. Cahen, 1937). The other, at Monnetier-Mornex in the Alps, was opened up for children coming from the regions invaded by the Germans and whose tubercular mothers were being taken care of in the nearby sanatorium (F.-F. Armand-Delille, 1921).²⁰

The school was opened with the help of two doctors, Paul Armand-Delille and Philippe Wapler. It was equipped with portable desks designed by Koller. Armand-Delille was responsible for the medical service of 'displaced' people in 1917. In this new job, Armand-Delille is responsible for the medical care of soldiers' wives who are suffering from tuberculosis. He is particularly concerned with the children of these women. For these children, he wrote, who are going to stay with us for perhaps four to six months, two main issues are raised. It is necessary to restore them to good health, but it is also necessary to occupy them. Since they have been without any schooling since the invasion, it is necessary to give them all the elements of primary education. But since they are also debilitated children, possibly tuberculosis carriers, it is also necessary to keep them closed inside darkened and ill-ventilated rooms.' (F.-F. Armand-Delille, P. Wapler, 1921, p. 18-19).²¹ This experiment came to an end when Armand-Delille left for the United States in 1939.

In August 1934, the Salève cable car was opened, the railway closing in the same year. In 1938, the Rayon de Soleil was functioning as a holiday colony. The building, reconstructed in 1934, was converted into a preventorium in 1942 and is used today as a retirement home.

¹⁹ term 'open-air school' dates from 1906 and about ten schools existed in France prior to the First World War. F. Châtelet (2003).
²⁰ Félix Armand-Delille, 1874-1964, 'Vertu thérapeutique et action sociale en faveur de l'enfance', in Châtelet, Luc, *L'école de plein air. Une expérience pédagogique structurelle dans l'Europe du XX^e siècle*, Recherches, 2003.

During the Second World War, the hotels at Monnetier were requisitioned in order to shelter refugee children from Lyons, Saint-Etienne, Paris, the north France and Marseilles. The architect Henri-Jacques Le Même was entrusted with adapting these buildings for their new occupants during and after the war.

After the war, several hotels were used as holiday colonies: Les Pléiades, L'Hôtel des Alpes (from 1965 to 1990) and La Terrasse, used by the Lyons Jeumont-Schneider works committee, from 1955 to 1987. The Bellevue Hotel was almost certainly used as a holiday colony as well, although there are no documents at the Haute-Savoie DDJS to confirm this, and a fire has seriously damaged the building.

This brief look at one village gives us a fairly typical account of the evolution of accommodation in such a village in the Haute-Savoie. To begin with, the hotels were erected as a resort for holidays in the mountains (1840-1900). Then, the period from about 1920 to 1945 was dominated by hygienist theories (preventoriums, aériums, open-air schools). The Second World War was a period of requisitioned hotels, with the appearance of accommodation centres and children's centres. From the 1950s, holiday colonies arrived, then the centres destined for the treatment of tuberculosis were progressively transformed into retirement homes and other such medical facilities.

*The Cité des Jeunes at La Frasse*²²

The Cité des Jeunes was a holiday colony based on a pedagogy of decision.²³ It presents two interesting aspects: an approach to heritage through practical work and an original pedagogical component, which was of considerable importance in the history of holiday colonies.²⁴ The history of this place begins, prior to its acquisition, with Father Fillère, chaplain of the student scouts at 104 rue de Vaugirard in Paris, subsequently a school for scout chiefs.

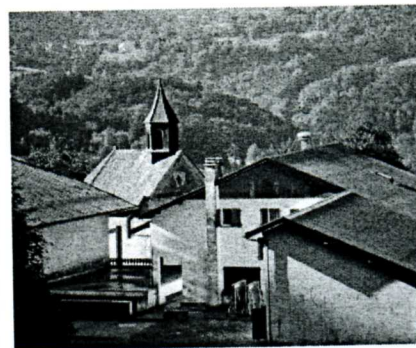
In July 1926, Fillère accepted responsibility for running the Ozanam colony at Saint-Christophe-en-Boucherie, in the Indre department. In 1928 he took over the Ozanam colony at Jouy-sur-Morin, in Seine-et-Marne. The Cité Notre-Dame was founded. The colonies succeeded one another at Jouy. The pedagogical ideas gradually took form and the Cité des Jeunes concept was born.

The colony, still at Jouy, moved to the Chauffour chateau, which possessed an estate of 25 hectares. It was to provide accommodation for up to 800 children and youngsters. This centre was closed down from 1939 to 1946 and then started up again with a new team. Father Fillère died on 10 August 1949.

Father Collet, who had known the Cité des Jeunes at Jouy and participated in the running of the summer camps, launched a new holiday colony at Marjevols in the Massif Central in 1943. This experiment ended in 1945. Then it began again in different places: at Point-du-Fossé (Hautes-Alpes), the Col Bayard in the chalet of the Gap ski-club at Sallanches. Then Father Collet, who was sick, passed the mission on to Abel Arnaud who had been running the colony for two years. He was at the origins of the creation of the colony at Frasse and, thanks to gifts and interest-free loans collected from amongst members of the families of the colonists, he was able, in 1949, to buy an abandoned farm with three hectares of land.

The buildings were adapted progressively, using the building talents of the colonists themselves, and many of them were to participate in the different restoration operations. Different pedagogical practices, based on the ideas of the Cité des Jeunes developed by Father Fillère, appear in the colony's objectives.

The children and youngsters gather once a week around a pole. A young person explains how each group had its own pole and decorated its base. „We shall never forget, assembled on the large lawn, the immense group of five hundred boys aged from ten to twenty. Each group, in turn, was invited to sing its ideal chant,



Cité des Jeunes, La Frasse, Haute-Savoie (by Bataille, July 2007)

²² See Rey-Herme (1961-62), p. 339-342 and Vulbeau p. 87-89.

²³ This pedagogy of decision is inspired by the principle of 'allowing individuals to decide about what concerns them'. This category may be included the holiday colonies based on free games (colony of Jean Houssaye, Courcelles) or colonies calling on the decision principle (Houssaye, the colonies—one of these was to develop as the Don Bosco at Biot in Haute-Savoie—the République des Jeunes, des Jeunes and the colonies of the Isogoria association).

²⁴ These remarks are based on a visit to the Cité des Jeunes and on documentation made available by the managers of the colony and a document held by the 'La Cité des Jeunes, son idéal, son organisation, édition anniversaire'.

The corpus of buildings used to shelter holiday colonies is diminishing rapidly. The social project which carried this particular form of informal education no longer survives. Nonetheless, there is still a certain interest for the effects produced by, and in the holiday colonies. Bion, using this term, observed how this form of education for children could provide a fruitful basis for possibilities of self-renewal and the renewal of relations with others. The colony, for this precursor, is the place where one starts from zero again, starting life anew. Others have insisted on the articulation between the individual and the collective, a theme which is of course recurrent in architecture. Finally, the change of environment offered by a spell of life in a different milieu gives the child a chance to discover his or her own culture as much as the culture of others. These three points are the strict equivalent of the three processes at the basis of any process of socialisation, that is to say, in order, individualisation, personalisation and acculturation. In the recognition of its potential for socialisation, the holiday colony will perhaps find new meaning enter a new future.

The Colony is Dead, Long Live the Colony!

The association between architecture and education for holiday colonies is an invention of the inter-war years, but only becomes a fixed doctrine after the Second World War. Probably inspired by the current of open-air schools, this doctrine uses the architectural environment itself as an educational tool. This approach has subsequently disappeared, but reappears today around the question of executives and their environments which encourage processes of socialisation.²⁶

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Several objects bear witness to this pedagogical organisation: the 'Appel de Notre-Dame', a document of a few pages drawn up each week by the 'minister of information', or notes used as money during the colony's fêtes.

One of the essential principles of the Cité des Jeunes was that of 'self-administration'. The aim was for joint management of issues of general interest and services. This organisation was enacted then through ministries and all the children, except the youngest, participated in these tasks. Each ministry was entrusted with a special task.

The children changed ministry every week. For Father Fillère: "Auto-organisation is not a means like any other, a game or a short-lived experiment, only coming back afterwards to usual authoritarian practices. It expresses a tendency and marks a spirit which the director must always bear in mind. It requires much subtlety. It is a result to be reached progressively. It is an experiment to be entered into loyally, a game where something important is at stake. It is a means of attaining a more general objective, not the objective itself."²⁵ This pedagogy played an important part in the different Christian communities which organised holiday colonies during the 1930s, according to Rey-Herme.