

Salubre e bello. Le colonie italiane durante il periodo fascista: due architetture tra i monti e il mare degli Abruzzi

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Le colonie marine, montane ed elioterapiche sono un tipo di edifici, a metà strada tra le strutture sanitarie e quelle educative, volute dal Partito Nazionale Fascista per la cura e la formazione dei giovani italiani.

La committenza variegata e le differenti condizioni insediative impediscono d'individuare un modello edilizio con tratti unitari per questa nuova tipologia, che supera quella cupa dei centri ospedalieri per la cura della tubercolosi. Esse si caratterizzano formalmente per l'aspetto allegorico e ludico, che evoca l'immagine di aeroplani, navi, lettere dell'alfabeto ecc.. Le strutture, però, sono anche complesse "macchine sanitarie" in cui sono messe a punto soluzioni distributive per la salubrità degli edifici, anche attraverso l'ausilio di tecniche edilizie innovative.

Il contributo ripercorre l'evoluzione architettonica e tipologica degli edifici per la cura dalla tubercolosi da cui originano le colonie, focalizzando l'attenzione su due delle colonie marine e montane realizzate in Abruzzo nel Ventennio, al fine di studiarne l'architettura, le vicende costruttive e le scelte progettuali per renderli "salubri e belli".



Healthy and Beautiful. Italian Colonies during the Fascist Period: two Architectures between Abruzzi's Mountain and Sea

Simonetta Ciranna, Patrizia Montuori

Climatic colonies and more generally sanatoriums, are a type of building developed since the 19th century in order to prevent or cure respiratory diseases while staying in mountainous or marine resorts where the climate was considered therapeutic¹. This phenomenon was developed throughout Europe with national variations linked to the socio-political context of the 19th and 20th centuries².

In particular sanatoriums and Italian colonies can be considered a first type of “bioclimatic” buildings, designed to prevent or cure respiratory diseases thanks to the stay in marine or mountainous locations, and a rational architectural organization aimed at promoting the natural ventilation, sunshine and heating of indoor environments.

Between the two World Wars, in Italy, the Fascist regime collected and developed studies and expertise in the fight against tuberculosis, creating real “health machines”, specially designed not only for the care of the sick (sanatoriums and tuberculosis dispensaries), but also to build resistance to

Result of a joint research work, the text is elaborated separately in the paragraphs: *Between healthiness and symbolism. Origins and development of an architectural typology...*; *The colonies of Abruzzo Region: from the typology of village to monoblock...* (P. Montuori). *Two colonies and two construction sites compared...*; *Ettore Rossi and Francesco Leoni: two architects and two projects compared*; *The contract and the realization of the two Abruzzi colonies* (S. Ciranna).

1. See SABBATANI 2005; BONESIO 2008.

2. See BALDUCCI 2005.

and counteract the spread of the disease (temporary climate colonies) especially in young people, by exploiting the beneficial effects of mountain and marine air, and thanks to particular architectural, typological and constructive approaches.

Sanatoriums and climatic colonies have played an important role in the development of the Modern Movement in architecture³, and in the definition of innovative technical and design solutions that have profoundly influenced the history of 20th century architecture. After the Second World War, the control of tuberculosis through widespread use of antibiotics lead to the gradual abandonment of sanatoriums in favor of the creation of infectious wards in municipal hospitals. Consequently the end of the Fascist regime in Italy and, in general, the development of a new mass tourism further hastened the disappearance and the abandonment of the climatic colonies.

It is currently estimated that in Europe there are hundreds of these disused structures, waiting to be upgraded and destined for a new function. This building heritage, already largely under public ownership, apart from representing precious historical-architectural heritage, has an enormous potential and, also thanks to its typological and constructive characteristics, it could easily be rethought.

The paper intends to frame the architectural, typological and constructive characteristics of the colonies of the fascist period and their origin, focusing the attention on the colonies built in Abruzzo Region and their typological features, also that related to the health aspects and, in particular, on two buildings, the Stella Maris marine colony in Montesilvano, Pescara (1939) and the mountain colony IX Maggio in Monteluco di Roio, L'Aquila (1934).

Between healthiness and symbolism. Origins and development of an architectural typology, from the 19th century hospices to the colonies of the Fascist Period in Italy and in Abruzzo

The iconography of the colonies built in Italy during the Fascist period presents a picture of “healthy and beautiful” buildings, children intent in their games, at the seaside and in the mountains. These modern buildings, however, are the end product of a long battle with «a scourge of mankind (...) that takes away children from their mothers, minds from studies, arms from work»⁴, linked to an industrial civilisation and very widespread in cities, especially among the very young: tuberculosis.

3. See CAMPBELL 2005.

4. CABRINI 1918.

«Monstrous urban buildings dreamt up by man before he was able to foresee or be precisely aware of their absurd aesthetics and their inevitable damage to health»⁵ were, indeed, one of the causes of the massive spread of the disease. For this reason, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the 19th centuries, starting in England and rapidly spreading across Europe, a cultural and scientific movement was launched, based on the discovery of nature and the therapeutic role of open air and, especially, the seaside and mountain climate in the struggle against diseases linked to industrial cities and against tuberculosis. In the absence of an effective antibiotic drug therapy, developed thanks to Robert Koch's findings in the mid-twentieth century, in fact, the only contrast to the spread of tuberculosis is to divide the healthy individuals from the sick and from those susceptible to disease, especially among the younger ones. The result is the shelter of the first in the sanatoriums, structures physically separated from the city of "the healthy" thanks to the location of the buildings, mainly in less accessible mountain areas; of the second in structures built in seaside resorts, which host for 4-6 weeks children from 5 to 16 years old, debilitated or with mild symptoms: the Ospizi Marini in Italy, the Hospices Maritimes in France, the Seehospize in Germany, etc⁶. The marine structures for the prophylaxis of children, in fact, are characterized, generally, by a bland physical separation from the locations destined to the first seaside tourism: the first hospice built along the English coast to treat the poor children of the eastern suburbs of London with baths and the sea air, the Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary in Margate (1791-1796) (fig. 1), for example, rises in a traditional holiday destination for Londoners since the 19th century⁷.

In Italy, the institution of the first seaside hospices and mountain sanatorium was encouraged by the scientific research and practical experimentation resulting from contemporary European debate: the studies of the biologist Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799) on the bactericidal properties of sunlight; the experiments of the Florentine physician and epidemiologist Giuseppe Barellai (1813-1884) on the health-enhancing effects of seaside holidays on children; those of the scientist Biagio Castaldi (1821-1864), who verified on himself the effectiveness of altitude in curing tuberculosis.

The internal spaces of the buildings, however, were still not arranged according to the therapeutic aims of the structure, recalling rather those of other types of collective homes for children, such as convents and seminaries.

The Ospizio Marino of Viareggio, also called Palazzo delle Muse (1861-1869), designed by Giuseppe Poggi, for example, is still, architecturally and typologically, a replica of an "urban palace", overlooking

5. SANARELLI 1913.

6. See BALDUCCI 2005.

7. About more detailed aspects of typology and localization of marine hospices see CIRANNA, MONTUORI 2018.



Figure 1. The Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary in Margate (1791-1796), the first hospice built along the English coast to treat the poor children of the eastern suburbs of London with baths and the sea air (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4f/Royal_Sea-bathing_Infirmary%2C_Margate%2C_Kent._Wood_engraving._Wellcome_V0013930.jpg).



Figure 2. The Ospizio Marino of Viareggio, also called "Palazzo delle Muse" (1861-69), designed by Giuseppe Poggi: the building is still, architecturally and typologically, a replica of an "urban palace" (from REALE SOCIETÀ ITALIANA D'IGIENE 1885, p. 431).

the sea (fig. 2). Still in 1880 the results of the *Grand Prix De Rome* of the *École de Beaux Arts* in Paris on the theme *Hospice pour le Enfants Infirmes ou Malades*, to be realized on the shores of the Mediterranean to accommodate 600 children aged 5 to 14 years, had raised criticism for the solutions proposed, austere and contradictory to the therapeutic objectives, being set on closed courts that prevented air circulation, promoting contagion⁸ (fig. 3). On the other hand, even the Ospizio Marino Veneto at the Lido of Venice, inaugurated on June 9th 1870 thanks to the work of Giuseppe Barellai, not far from the fabulous Hotel Excelsior (1908), is appreciated by Henry Cazin, for the choice to equip the building of a single floor facing the sea, but not for court disposal, unable to maximize the beneficial effects of the climate⁹ (figg. 4-5).

The architecture of buildings for prophylaxis and treatment of tubercular diseases was transformed when therapeutic techniques began to associate the isolation of children from their families and cities with building shapes capable of maximising climatic conditions, by opening courtyards to increase air circulation and allowing the sun to penetrate. This approach was adopted in the contemporary hospital construction research on the risk of contagion in closed buildings and the greater health benefits in building separate pavilions¹⁰. Therefore, the buildings start to be designed to exploit and enhance natural elements with healing purposes: draughts of air followed set courses to facilitate the natural ventilation of the premises; the sun became a source of light and heat, thanks to large glazed areas; greenery was also incorporated in the buildings in conservatories and greenhouses. A rational sanitary organisation that, from the beginning of the 20th century, produced a “healthy and beautiful” architecture, aesthetically in line with the canons of the Modern Movement¹¹ as, for example, the Purkersdorf sanatorium by Josef Hoffmann (1904-1905)¹². An approach that integrates the health aspect with the symbolic and representative one and that, in Italy, became widespread thanks to the colonies built during the Fascist period, associating with the traditional fight against tuberculosis also the propaganda aims of the Regime’s ideological requirements and the need to train the young.

With the advent of Fascism, the colonies were stripped of their purely therapeutic garb belonging to the 19th century hospice and sanatorium, and became also a privileged gymnasium for the physical and spiritual training of the new “Fascist man”. Besides “permanent colonies”, for the cure of pathological cases, there arose “temporary climatic colonies”, holiday camps where children stayed for a few weeks

8. *Les Grands Prix* [1904].

9. CAZIN 1885, pp. 380-393.

10. BALDUCCI 2005; SABBATANI 2005.

11. CAMPBELL 2005.

12. DI LORETO, GORGO 2017.

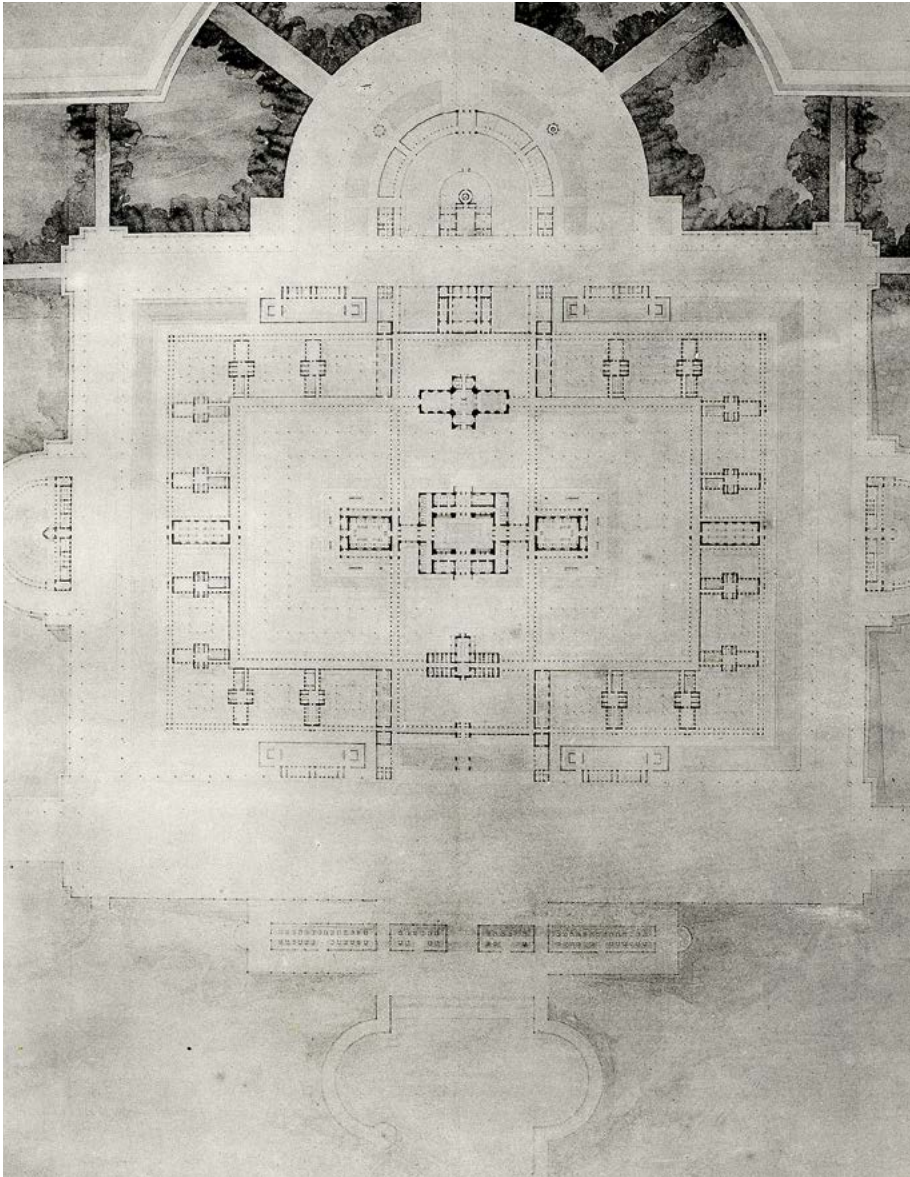


Figure 3. One of the project of the *Grand Prix De Rome* of the *École de Beaux Arts* in Paris of 1880 on the theme *Hospice pour le Enfants Infirmes ou Malades*, to be realized on the shores of the Mediterranean to accommodate 600 children aged 5 to 14 years (from *Les Grands Prix* [1904], p. 433).

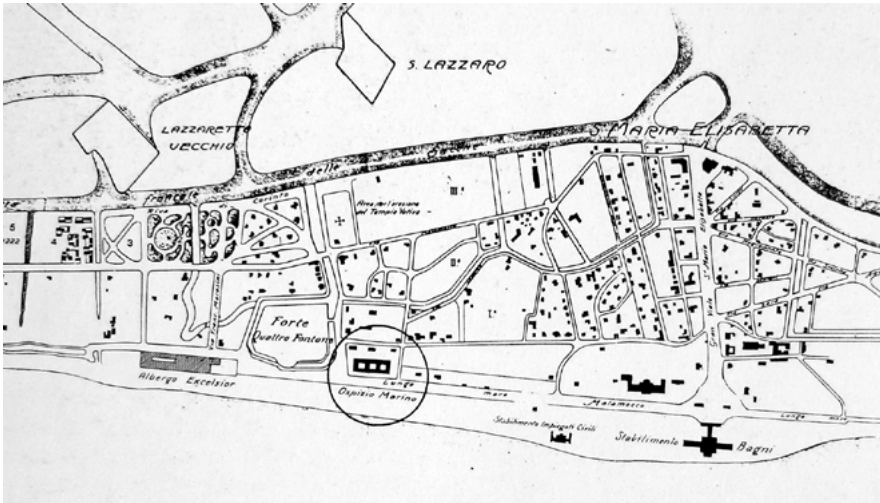


Figure 4. Planimetry of the Lido of Venice, 1907-1908. Ospizio Marino Veneto at the Lido of Venice (1870): the building was not far from the fabulous Hotel Excelsior (from GALLERANI, MAUGERI 1986, p. 24).

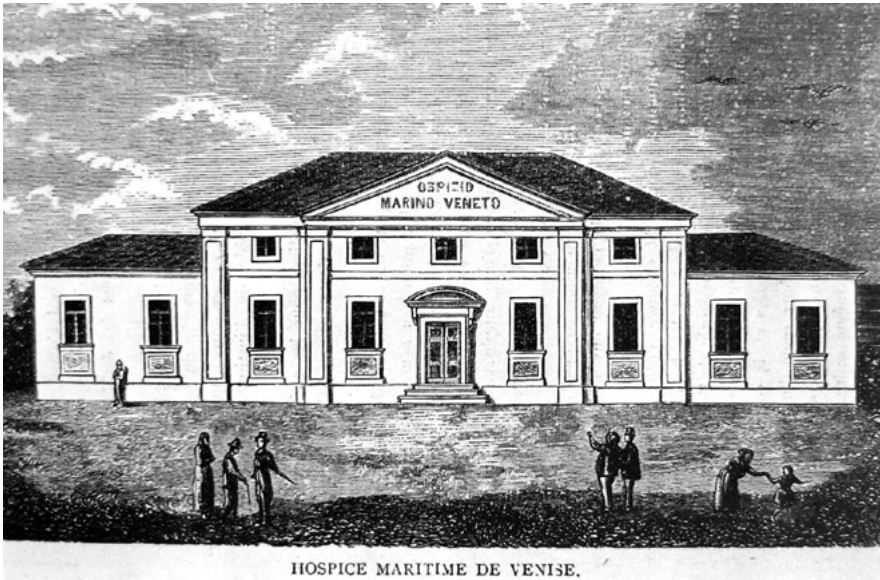


Figure 5. Ospizio Marino Veneto at the Lido of Venice (1870), drawing of the main façade of the building (from REALE SOCIETÀ ITALIANA D'IGIENE 1885, p. 454).

at the seaside, in the mountains or by the lakes, as well as “daytime colonies”, where they could spend the day in structures in urban centres or close to them. Since 1925, the Opera Nazionale Maternità ed Infanzia (O.M.N.I.) dealt with permanent colonies as part of its prophylaxis activity against childhood tuberculosis; the Opera Nazionale Balilla (O.N.B.), established in 1926, instead, coordinated the temporary ones until 1931, when the management and control duties were delegated to the provincial Enti Opere Assistenziali (E.O.A.) and, finally, from 1937, to Gioventù Italiana of Littorio (G.I.L.), directly dependent on the National Fascist Party. The Regime fully understood the propaganda potential and value of aggregation, in particular in the temporary climatic colonies, and built a great number of them, especially from the late 1920s to the outbreak of the Second World War: to prove this, the National Exhibition of Summer Colonies and Child Care, were set up in Rome at Circo Massimo in 1937 by Adalberto Libera, Mario De Renzi and Giovanni Guerrini¹³, where 492 buildings can be counted destined to the colonies¹⁴.

In actual fact, these structures constituted a new typology, integrating the hospice, the sanatorium and the school, thus allowing the Regime to achieve a double aim, therapeutic and educational, through a programme of «intensive vacation, achieving a maximum result in a brief stay»¹⁵. With this objective, therefore, the buildings were often designed to evoke recreational and symbolic forms (aeroplanes, submarines, M for Mussolini, or the fasces) to impress the young guests, and with wide, luminous premises for sleeping, games, canteen, connected by porticoes, balconies, terraces and external loggias designed to exploit the natural elements, according to the different climatic conditions and the occasional and mostly summery use of many structures, also utilising solutions already adopted in the sanatoriums. In some cases the devices used are modest; in others, like in the case of colony “Rinaldo Piaggio” at Santo Stefano d’Aveto, Genova (1938-39), by the architect Luigi Carlo Daneri, buildings are conceived so that light, air, coolness and heat penetrate according to their orientation and the routes designed to supplement them and transform them into an architectural form, with the adoption of criteria of “passive environmental control” according to different climates and usage, using the orientation and shape of buildings, the size of windows, shade elements, and insulation

13. LAVAGNINO 1937; PAGANO 1937; DE MARTINO, WALL 1988, pp. 62-65.

14. Today is not yet available a total census of buildings made in Italy during the fascist regime but only partial studies. Along the Romagna coast, from Marina di Ravenna to Cattolica, which, along with the Tuscan one, was among the areas most interested by the phenomenon, for example, 246 marine colonies were located, of which 1.2% were built before the 1915 (the Ospizi Marini), 14.6% between the two wars and 84.2% in the second post-war period. Along the beaches of Tuscany, instead, it is estimated that between the wars have been made about 1,100,000 cubic meters for marine colonies. See: ISTITUTO PER I BENI CULTURALI 1986; CUTINI, PIERINI 1993.

15. LABÒ, PODESTÀ 1941; LABÒ, PODESTÀ 1942.

and ventilation systems¹⁶. Even the materials and the construction techniques used, in particular, in the marine colonies, show the adhesion to the contemporary rationalist canons of which they are one of the most effective vehicles of diffusion in Italy. In fact, they are made in large part with punctiform bearing structures in reinforced concrete, closed by masonry walls, mostly plastered, or left exposed in porches and loggias, they have large glass surfaces and interior finishes also made with modern plastic materials (such as linoleum floors).

After an initial experimental period, the designs of colonies, which were in the hands of architects of greater or lesser experience with results that were deemed more or less interesting, were conceived according to three patterns: the village, the tower and the mono-block. Three different settlement and functional types, generally used by designers in buildings with a modern architectural language, in some cases, strongly symbolic, such as the marine colony XXVIII October in Cattolica, Rimini (Clemente Busiri Vici, 1934), a village structure that evokes the futuristic image of ships, also called "Le Navi"; in others more abstract, such as the tower structure of the marine colony Edoardo Agnelli in Marina di Massa (Vittorio Bonadè Bottino, 1933) or refinedly rationalist, like the monoblock designed by Giuseppe Vaccaro for the marine colony AGIP Sandro Mussolini (1938) (figg. 6-9).

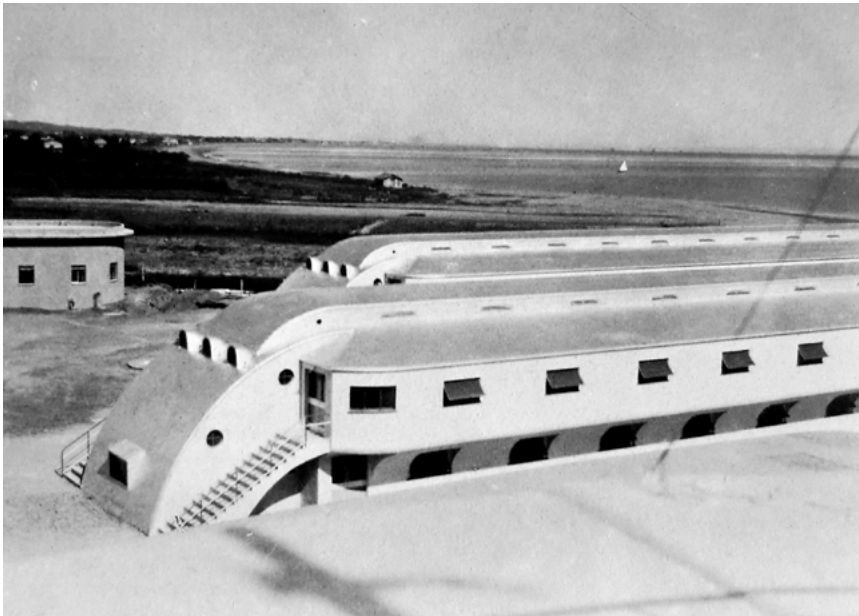
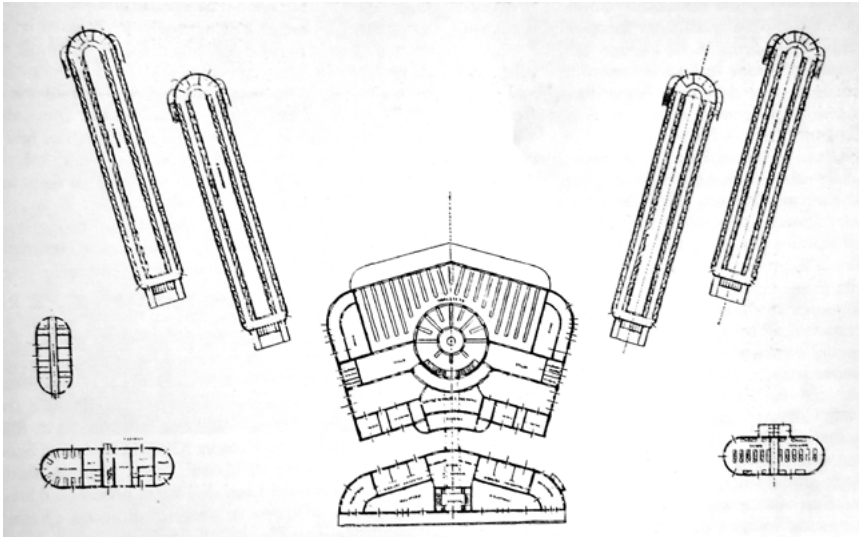
The colonies of Abruzzo Region: from the typology of village to monoblock, between tradition and innovation, between symbolism and environmental control

After completing the Ospizio Marino at Giulianova, in the province of Teramo (1885-1897), a traditional structure built according to studies on the therapeutic effect of a seaside climate, Abruzzo remained on the margins of what other Italian regions achieved¹⁷. It was only in the 'thirties that the Region was included in the massive youth invigoration programme launched by the Fascist regime, with the building of three temporary climatic colonies: two at the seaside, located on the Adriatic coast in Giulianova and Montesilvano, near Pescara, and one in the mountains, in Monteluco di Roio, just opposite L'Aquila.

Built by the Istituto Nazionale di Assistenza Magistrale (I.N.A.M.) to provide heliotherapeutic treatment for the teachers' children, the Rosa Maltoni Mussolini Colony at Giulianova was a kind of "children's city" for 770 children, inaugurated in 1936. The engineer Alberto Ricci, a technician from the Molise region and employee of the Ministry of Education in charge of the project, adopted the village

16. CAPOMOLLA, VITTORINI 2016.

17. About the Ospizio Marino at Giulianova see CIRANNA, MONTUORI 2018.



Figures 6-7. Example of type of temporary climatic colonies: the village. Cattolica, Marine colony XXVIII October, by Clemente Busiri Vici, 1934 (from CUTINI, PIERINI 1993, p. 19; GALLERANI, MAUGERI 1986, p. 34).

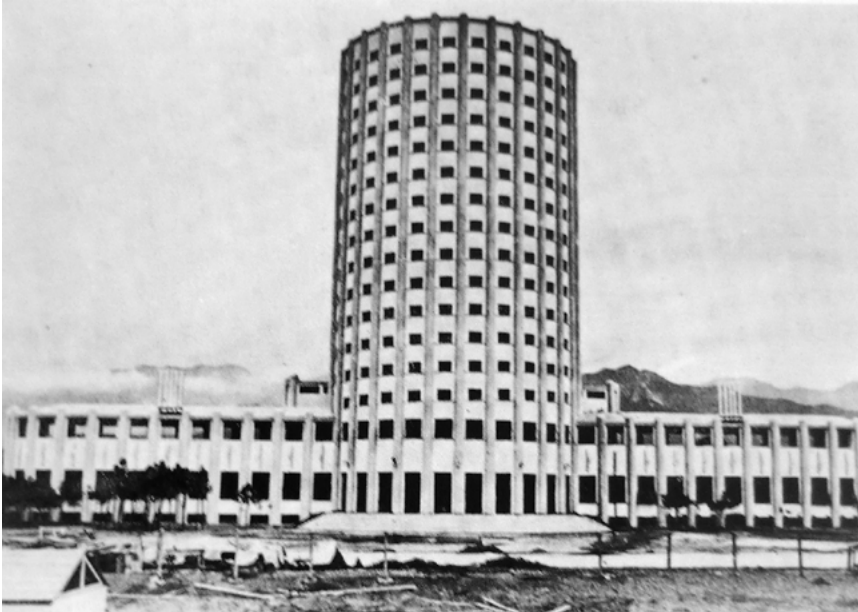


Figure 8. Example of type of temporary climatic colonies: the tower. Marina di Massa, Marine colony Edoardo Agnelli, by Vittorio Bonadè Bottino, 1933 (from CUTINI, PIERINI 1993, p. 21).

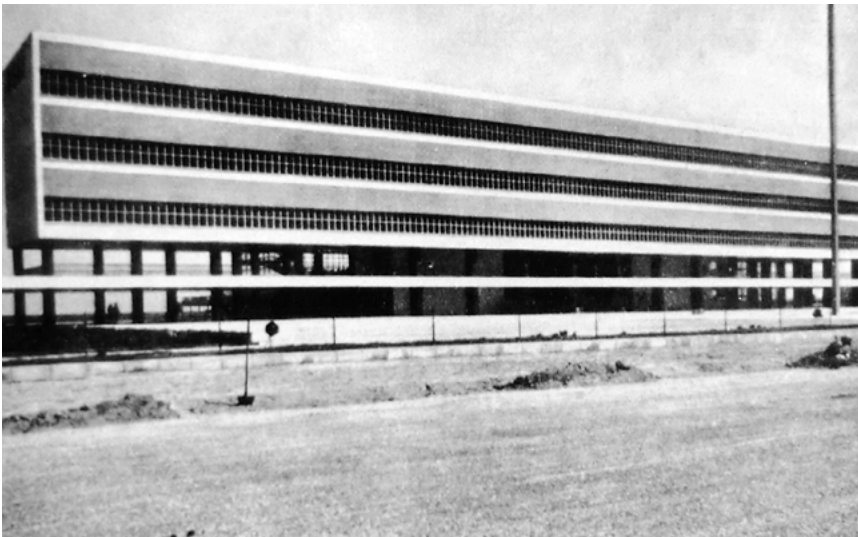


Figure 9. Example of type of temporary climatic colonies: the monobloc. Cesenatico, Marine colony AGIP "Sandro Mussolini" by Giuseppe Vaccaro, 1938 (from CUTINI, PIERINI 1993, p. 22).



Figure 10. Giulianova (Teramo), Colony Rosa Maltoni Mussolini, engineer Alberto Ricci 1936. Historical photo of the main front (courtesy by M. Di Massimo, T. Iachini).

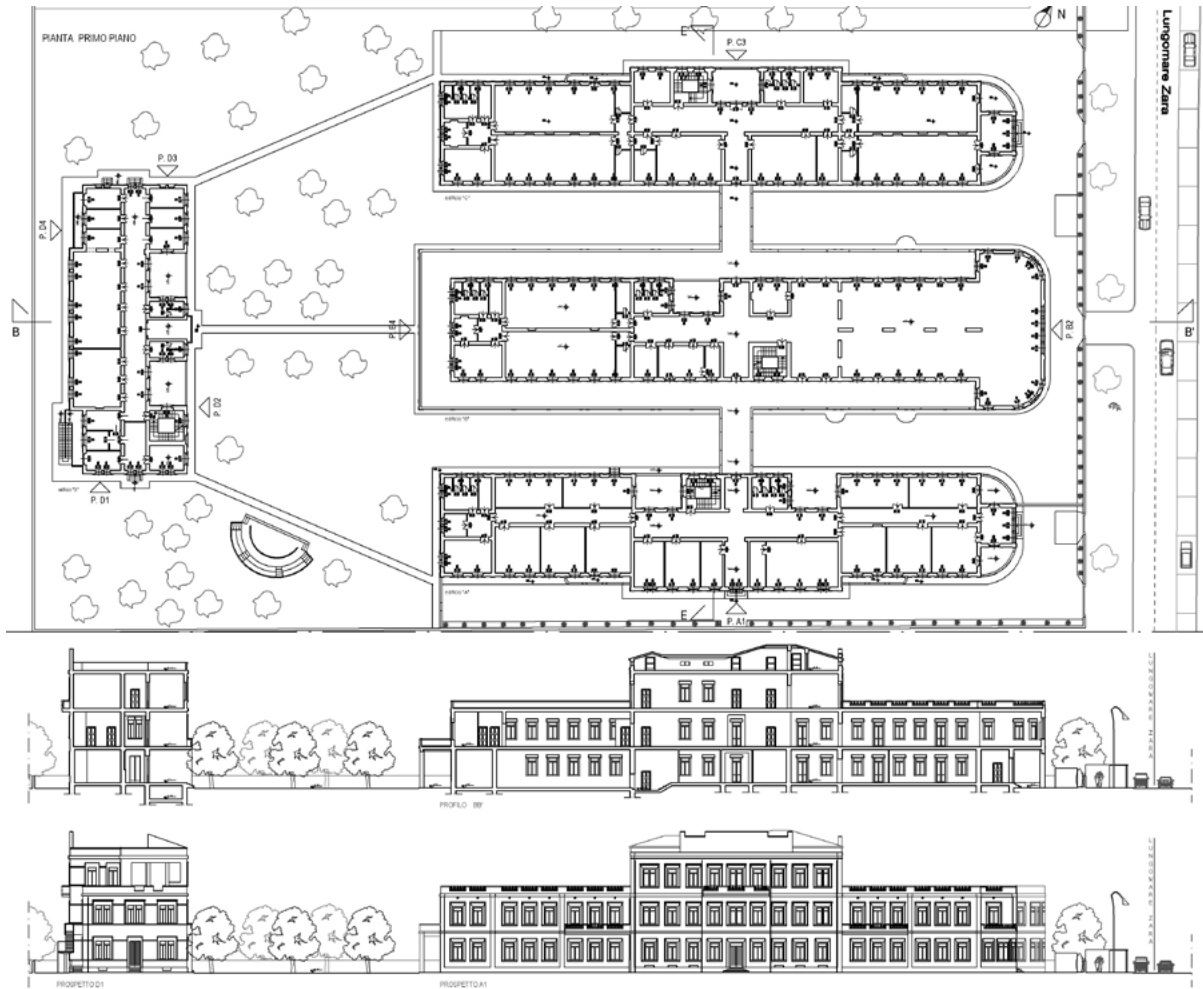


Figure 11. Giulianova (Teramo), Colony Rosa Maltoni Mussolini, engineer Alberto Ricci 1936. Planimetry of the building (thesis by M. Di Massimo, T. Iachini).

typology, closest to the nineteenth-century hospital pavilion arrangement, which the Giulianova camp still reflects in its functional organisation and architecture. Three parallel buildings, two on each side with twelve dormitories and toilets and a central one with recreation rooms, refectory, kitchens and terrace, connected to each other and to the fourth orthogonal one for the sickbay and services by external corridors: the layout reproduced the letter M of Mussolini, simultaneously evoking the image of anchored ships facing out to sea with a celebrative intent rather than of typological experimentation aimed at internal environmental control (figg. 10-11).

The Montesilvano colony, then called Stella Maris, built since 1937 by the Federazione dei Fasci di combattimento di Rieti on a design by the roman architect Francesco Leoni, instead, is only formally classifiable as a “mono-block”, but designed with the articulate shape of a biplane. A perfect expression in the futuristic language favoured by Fascism and of the “mechanical pun” that would evoke «the visual image, with which it will be forever identified in the mind of these children, the memory of their stay at the colony»¹⁸, which Leoni, however, exploited also for the rational arrangement and environmental control of the premises (figg. 12-13).

The central block, the aircraft’s “engine”, with the refectory and the helical stairs leading to the upper turret, in fact, is conceived as a kind of ventilation tower for the building, with a central space for the whole height, wide external windows oriented toward the east with sash openings and rolling shutters to control the air flow and penetration of sunlight in the rooms, arranged in the “wings” of the aircraft, canonically oriented east-west, with windows on either side to facilitate cross-ventilation, fundamental in a building originally used only in the summer months.

The mountain colony IX Maggio, built since 1934 at Monteluco di Roio, L’Aquila, is the only one of the three Abruzzi colonies conceived according to the canonical “mono-block” pattern by the architect Ettore Rossi, the first in Italy to design single-block hospitals, which had already been adopted for some time in the United States in order to reduce distances between wards and construction costs as compared to the “pavilion” type. The influence of Rossi’s experience in hospital building on the design of the colony at L’Aquila is evident from his very choice of a single block type «despite the fact that the level ground was not lacking to him: on the contrary this colony was enviable for the great meadows surrounding it for the benefit of its guests»¹⁹.

With an elegant doubly-inflected layout, it may evoke a stylised M in honour of the Duce, Benito Mussolini; maybe the proposal in the competition for the “Palazzo del Littorio” in Rome, prepared by

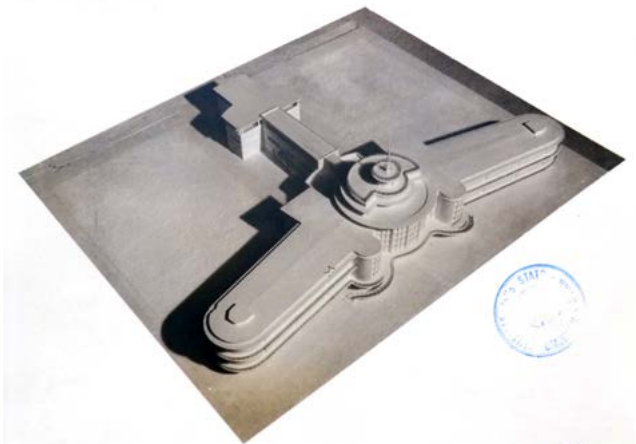
18. LABÒ, PODESTÀ, 1941.

19. *Ibidem*.



P.N.F. FEDERAZIONE DI RIETI. COLONIA MARINA - PEIGARA

*Francesco Leoni
1937 - 1939*



P.N.F. FEDERAZIONE DI RIETI. COLONIA MARINA - PEIGARA

*Francesco Leoni
1937 - 1939*

Figures 12-13. Montesilvano (PE), Colony Stella Maris, architect Francesco Leoni, 1937-1939). Historical photos of the relief model (Rome, ACS, PNF, Servizi Vari, serie II, b. 1368).

Rossi with Mario Ridolfi, Vittorio Cafiero and Bruno Ernesto La Padula between 1933 and 1934; almost certainly, however, is the result of a rational orientation of the internal environments according to the heliothermic axis and according to their use (fig. 14-15). In the colony, in fact, open from November to June, as well as during the summer, although it wasn't destined for hospitalisation and the cure of the sick, were applied the same serial design criteria over several floors and the arrangement of the premises according to their destination, as well as optimal orientation for ventilation and sunlight, desired in modern mono-block hospital facilities.

If, therefore, the "village" structure of the Giulianova colony is even more similar, in terms of image and functioning, to the hospices and traditional hospital facilities with pavilions of the nineteenth-century, in Roio and Montesilvano the "mono-block" type is applied in two modern educational and sanitary "machines", also conceived according to the internal environmental control of the buildings²⁰.

Two colonies and two construction sites compared: IX Maggio at Monteluco di Roio (L'Aquila) and Stella Maris at Montesilvano (Pescara)

The two Abruzzian colonies of Monteluco di Roio, L'Aquila and Montesilvano, Pescara constitute two relevant examples of Italian education-health resort architecture of the nineteen-thirties, and a pattern for the formal choices, technological innovations and political-economic processes that take place during the Fascist period, that would define and impact the design of the structures themselves: installations, building systems, and even the figurative language used.

Designed and built just a few years apart, their architecture constitutes two different responses to the colonies theme. This difference is linked to many factors: starting from the bodies that commissioned them, respectively the Ente Assistenza Federazione Nazionale Fascista Gente del Mare and the Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento di Rieti; the location close to two towns whose expansion was supported by the Regime, one in the mountains in a wooded area at almost 1000 m a.s.l. about 11 km from L'Aquila, and the other by the sea, along the shores of the Adriatic at about 6 km from Pescara; the designers, in the first one the noted architect Ettore Rossi, in the second the equally well known Francesco Leoni, assisted by the engineer Carlo Liguori; the years in which their jobsites opened, the first in 1934 and the other in 1937, and the construction companies, the large and well-equipped Bonomi & Federici at Roio, and the other, also active, of Ugo Silvi at Montesilvano.

20. MONTUORI 2019.

IL DUCE HA DETTO:

“Il nostro destino è stato e sarà sempre sul mare,,,”



La Colonia montana per i figli dei marittimi è stata inaugurata nel nome del Duce il 27 luglio 1937-XV. Essa prende nome dalla data gloriosa che ha visto la rinascita del terzo Impero di Roma, dell'Impero Fascista del Lavoro: e vuole onorare, con l'alto fine sociale delle sue opere, la memoria dei Caduti del mare:

di quelli che non sono più tornati dalle imprese eroiche della Grande Guerra;

di quelli che hanno offerto il loro sacrificio per la conquista dell'Impero;

di quelli che hanno dato la loro giovinezza e il loro ardimento alla vittoria della civiltà mediterranea contro la barbarie bolscevica nelle acque di Spagna, un'altra volta arrise di epopea;

di quelli che hanno chiuso la loro vita terrena al servizio della bandiera italiana, sulle vie pacifiche dei traffici del lavoro.

Nella serena vita della Colonia si esaltano, dopo Dio, gli ideali della Patria, i valori della famiglia, i fasti dell'eroismo della nostra razza.

Ogni camerata dei bambini ha un nome: il nome di un eroe del mare.



Figure 14. Montelucio di Roio (AQ), Colony IX Maggio, architect Ettore Rossi, 1934-1937. A view of the building in an advertising brochure of Ente Nazionale Assistenza Gente di Mare (ENAGM) with the image of Benito Mussolini (Rome, AIGMF, ENAGM, *Colonia Montana di Rojo*, 1937-1961).

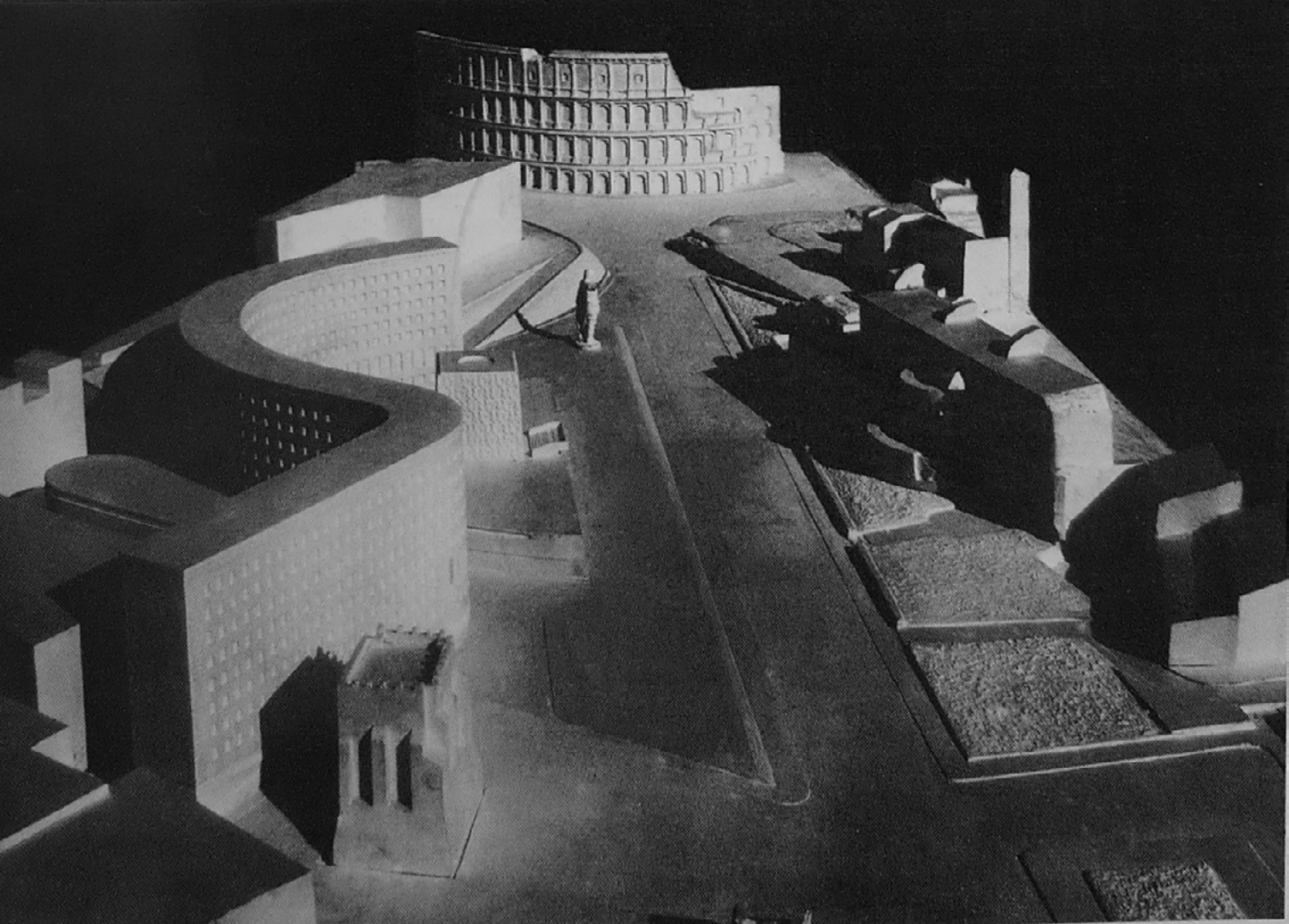


Figure 15. Proposal in the competition for the “Palazzo del Littorio” in Rome, prepared by Rossi with Mario Ridolfi, Vittorio Cafiero and Bruno Ernesto La Padula between 1933 and 1934 (from PANDOLFI 2013, p. 99).

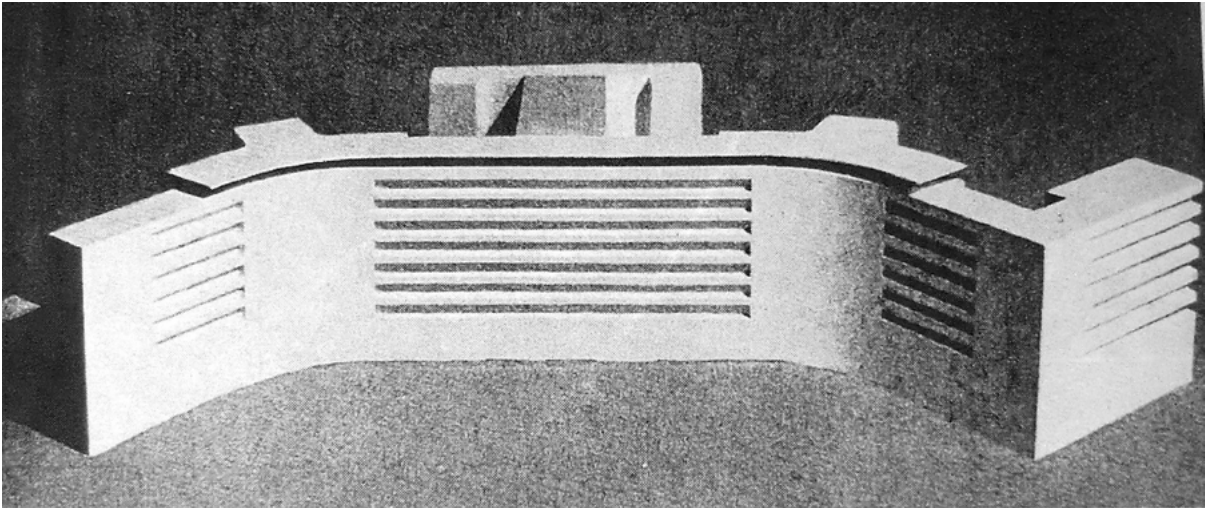


Figure 16. Model of the project for the Bolzano Hospital (1934) by Ettore Rossi (from PANDOLFI 2013, p. 100).

Finally, the architectural structure of the two buildings, both with mono-block type but, that of Roio conceived more like a modern functioning hospital structure, practically, for the whole year; that of Montesilvano as a canonical temporary marine colony, active only in the summer months, which brilliantly integrates the symbolic aspect with the health one.

Ettore Rossi and Francesco Leoni: two architects and two projects compared

The designers of the two Abruzzi colonies, almost contemporaries and both registered with the Architects' Association in Rome since 1928, had rather different professional fortunes. Rossi (1894-1968) born in Fano, proud of his youthful activity as National Resident in the Royal Italian School of Archaeology at Athens, in 1934 had already carried out major assignments in Rome, starting with the design of Piazzale Belle Arti and the building of the North American College on the Janiculum²¹.

21. About the biography and professional activity of Rossi see Archive of the Ordine degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori di Roma (AOPPC-RM); PANDOLFI 2013.

A decisive factor in his future career, not only during the fruitful years of his links with the Fascist regime, was however the design of hospitals: in the early 'thirties, the principal hospital at Viterbo and the one at Modena. The latter, in particular, proved a kind of watershed between hospitals with separate pavillons and the monoblock type that Rossi successfully proposed at Bolzano (1934), in which the layout is based on a double "T", with unequal curving wings. This design, and particularly its arrangement in zones and the south-facing body devoted to hospitalisation, has clear similarities with the Roio project designed that same year (fig. 16).

When, in 1937, Leoni was called to Montesilvano, he was already a successful designer, although still little known by recent historiography. The juvenile project activity of the twenties sees him author in Rome of the small but significant Museum of the Grenadiers in the square of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (1922) (fig. 17) and several residential buildings, two of which, the villa of engineer Giuseppe Latmiral (1928) and the building for the Cooperative Castrense (1929), made with the construction company "Ugo Silvi" that, in the thirties, will be engaged in Montesilvano, after he tries to take part in the massive season of design contests initiated by the Fascist regime. He participates, without success, also to the contest for the four postal buildings to be built in Rome in the Appio, Aventino, Nomentano and Milvio quarters (1933), then won by Giuseppe Samonà, Adalberto Libera with Mario De Renzi, Mario Ridolfi and Armando Titta; success that, however, comes just in 1937, when he is the winner of the project of the Palazzo di Giustizia in Forlì, the "Città del Duce"²².

Of course, to the different commissioning bodies of these buildings and position are also linked the size and importance attributed by Rossi and Leoni to the two climatic colonies, both temporary and of "mono-block" type.

In Roio a building large enough to accommodate 500 seamen's children from all over Italy, that through three staircases, one central and two lateral, it is divided into two distinct wings, one for the males and the other for the females, «in order to avoid more promiscuity» (figg. 18-20). These wings slope exactly fifteen degrees eastward to enjoy optimal sunlight throughout the day, even in winter, since the colony was open from November to June, as well as during the summer season. Rossi then arranged the corridors and toilets on the opposite front of the dormitories to provide them with direct ventilation and sunlight. Here, too, he applied to the Roio colony all the indications of magazines and conventions for the realisation of mono-block hospitals in Italy where, unlike the United States, it was preferred not to have wards on both side of a corridor, making the latter dark and poorly ventilated, and not to have windowless toilets, since it was not always possible to utilise expensive ventilation systems already widely used in America.

22. About the biography and professional activity of Leoni see: AOPPC-RM, envelope Francesco Leoni; CANALI 2003.

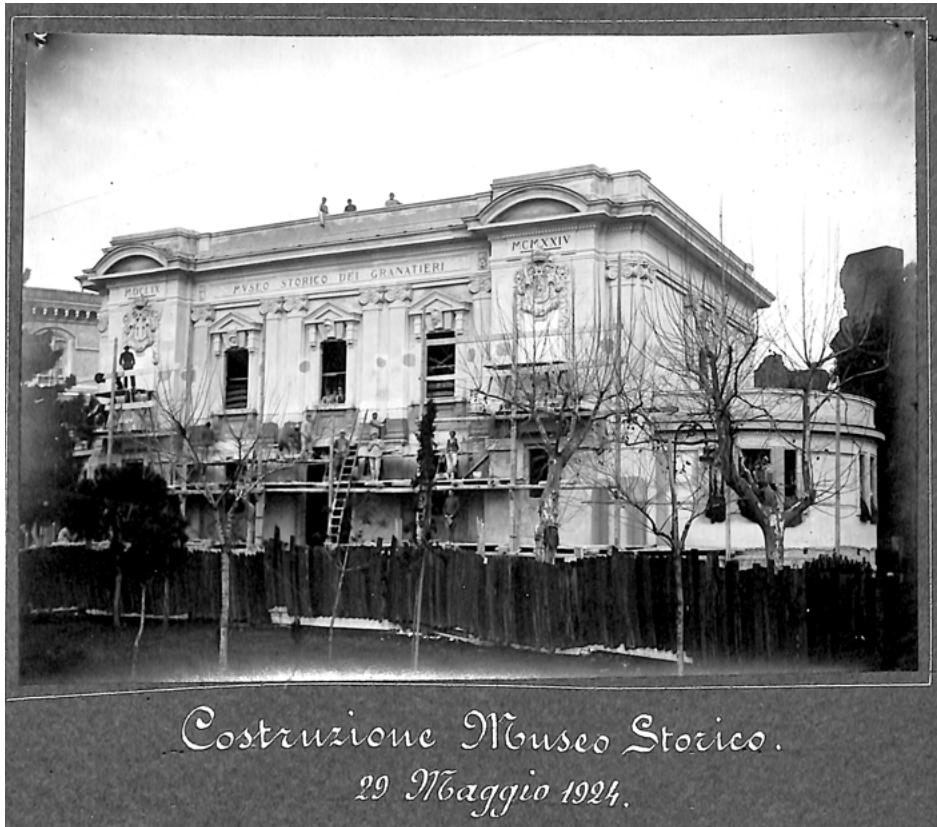
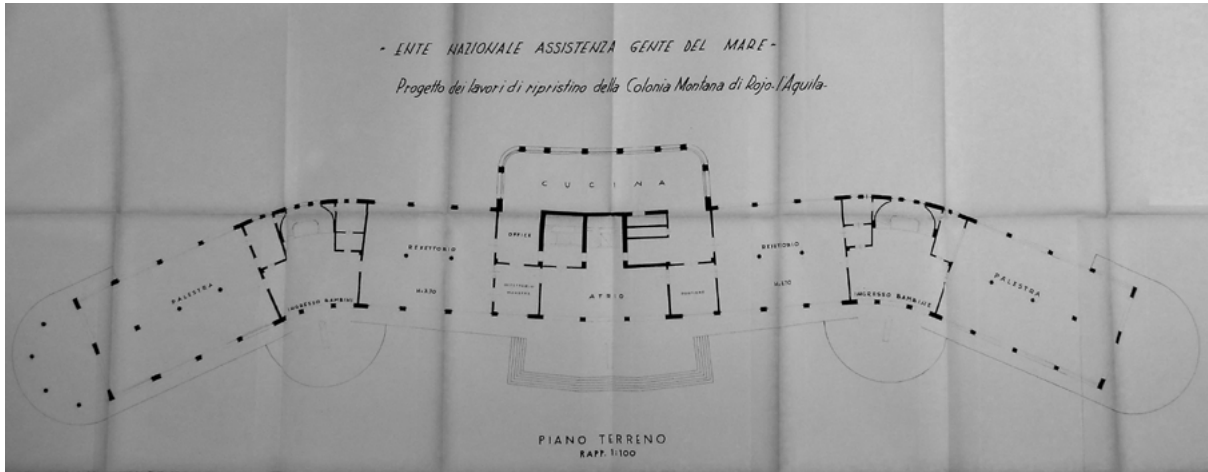


Figure 17. Rome, Museum of the Grenadiers in the square of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, by Francesco Leoni, 1922. Historic photo of the construction site (courtesy of the Museo Storico dei Granatieri di Sardegna of Rome).

The building vertically consisted of a basement floor for machinery, storerooms, laundry and toilets; a raised floor with gymnasiums, kitchens and toilets; a first floor, with four dormitories, surveillance and management areas and bursary; two other floors with four dormitories and surveillance areas; a fourth floor with the sickbay.

In Montesilvano a structure for 200 children from the Lazio and Abruzzo regions, is also divided into separate parts. In this case, however, it is the “biplane” aeroplane whose sections identify the Colony’s different functions. This is clarified by Liguori in 1936:



Figures 18-19.
 Montelucio di Roio
 (AQ), Colony IX
 Maggio. Planimetry of
 the ground floor of the
 building and historical
 photos of one of the
 three staircases and
 one of dormitories
 (Rome, AIGMF,
 ENAGM, *Colonia
 Montana di Rojo*,
 1937-61).



Figure 20. Montelucio di Roio (AQ), Colony IX Maggio. Historical photos of one of the staircases (Rome, AIGMF, ENAGM, *Colonia Montana di Rojo*, 1937-1961).

«The building has the typical shape of a plane taking off, with the standards of the Littorio, to reach new destinations and conquests. There is a close analogy between the parts of the building, representing the aeroplane, and their function; the canvas wings include the dormitories; the central part, the engine, has been assigned for the refectory, the fuselage for changing rooms and corridors, and the back part, the rudder, for the sickbay and toilets»²³.

The central part of the ground floor houses management offices and the helical staircase that gives access to the director's lodging and the watch tower; on the sides are the gymnasium and the chapel. At an elevation of 5.30 m in the central part is the great refectory or assembly room, «served by a wide terrace, a gallery, vestibules and storerooms for the kitchen and the refectory itself»²⁴. In the fuselage section, on the ground floor, are the showers, cloakrooms, storerooms; on the upper floors the changing rooms, made independent by outside stairs. The “rudder” area includes: on the ground floor the laundry, the sickbay storeroom, servants' lodgings; on the upper floor the sickbay, isolation ward, surgery and the doctor's lodging; on the second floor, a covered drying area. Above the refectory is the Director's lodging. The volumes of which the building is composed, as well as to evoke

23. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), Servizi Vari, Serie II, b. 1368.

24. ACS, PNF, Servizi Vari, Serie II, b. 1368.

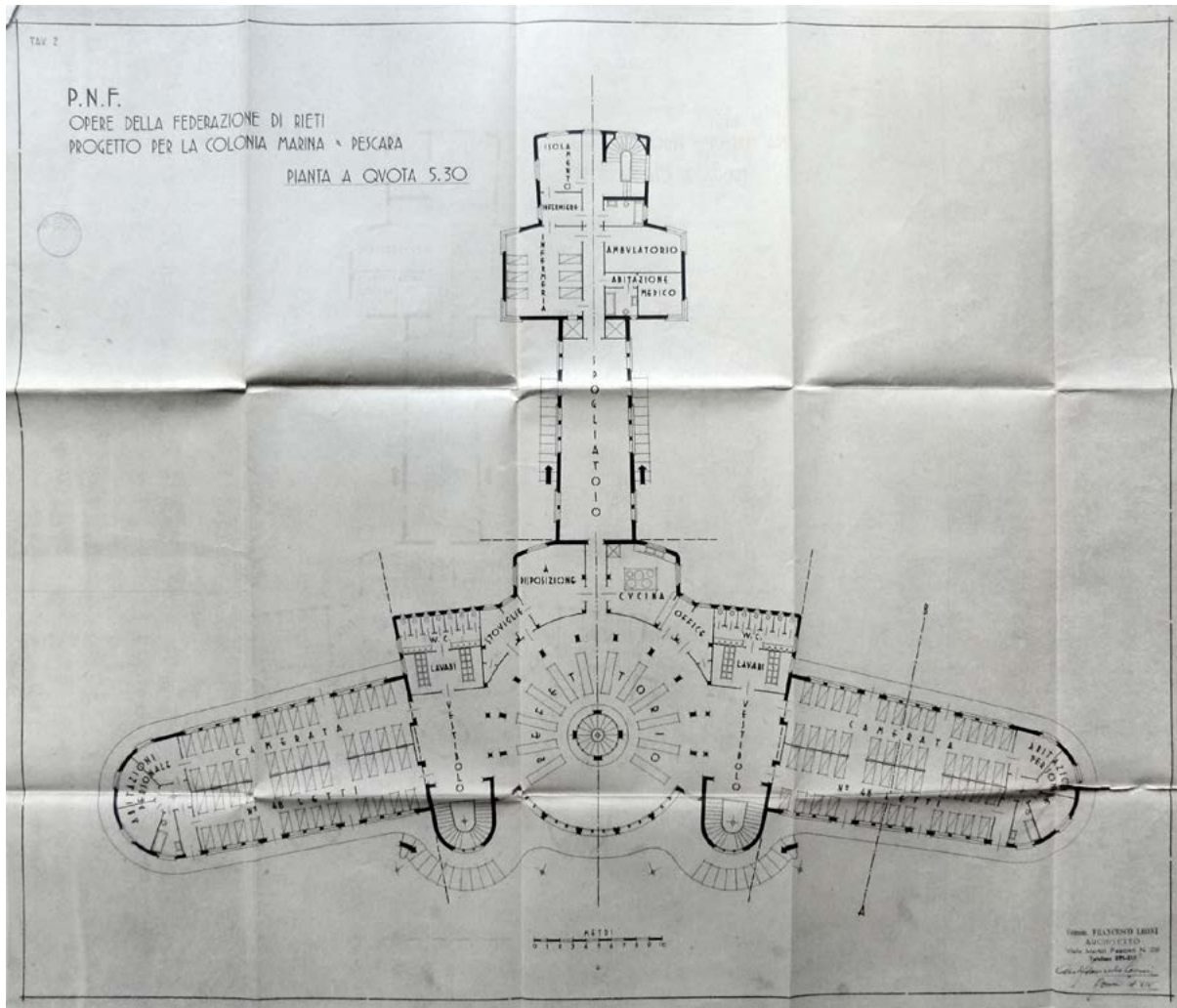


Figure 21. Montesilvano (PE), Colony Stella Maris. Planimetry of the first floor of the building (Rome, ACS,PNF, Servizi Vari, serie II, b. 1368).



Figure 22. Montesilvano (PE), Colony Stella Maris. main façade (Rome, ACS, PNF, Servizi Vari, serie II, b. 1368).

the mechanical parts of the biplane, however, seem conceived to reach an optimal internal comfort by exploiting the natural elements: the cylindrical central block, with the refectory and the helical staircase, to example, seems to have the characteristics of a “ventilation tower” that captures and spreads the sea breeze²⁵ (figg. 21-22).

The contract and the realization of the two Abruzzi colonies

The “notable benefits” that colony building would have on the local economy convinced the podestà (mayor) of L’Aquila, Centi-Colella, who, on 19 July 1934, resolved not only to donate the area of Monteluco di Roio where the building would rise and part of the pine grove to be used for the children’s recreation, but also to provide drinking water at normal rates for the charitable institutions of L’Aquila; to build at municipal expense the access road between the Colony and the existing road to the pine grove (about 150 m); to extend the electric lighting system up to the buildings and to allow local stone to be used.

25. MONTUORI 2019.

At Roio, the private bid, proclaimed and closed in August 1934, for the realization of L'Aquila colony, was won by the company Bonomi & Federici, in competition with the companies Carlo Cottini of Milan and Ercole Federici of Rome; Castiglione of Milan, although invited, was not present. In that year, the company was one of the most active and well-known in Rome: in 1932 it took part in the grandiose and prestigious project of Via dell'Impero, in which – as it advertises made – it employed 1,500,000 man-hours of labourers and navvies and 150,000 man-hours of bricklayers.

Testifying the company's solidity is a brief report sent by Rossi, the Works Manager, in June 1935 to Davide Lembo, Commissioner of the Federazione Gente del Mare. Works began with a delay (from the hand-over on 7 September 1934) owing to the decision of increasing the height of the building by one floor: being a seismic area, this «meant, that after the granting of the contract, a study for specially robust structures had to be undertaken in agreement with the new provisions and requirements of the Higher Technical Authorities». The working plan thus needed more time; furthermore, works were halted during the winter and restarted in March.

The company hired numerous workers to ensure two daily shifts, and provided the jobsite with all necessary equipment. The laying of re-bars was started on 11 April and the casting of concrete on the 26; on 10 June «the foundations, pillars and beams of the semi-basement were completed, so too the slab of the semi-basement, the pillars and part of the beams of the ground floor». The jobsite,

«with over one hundred workmen, was provided with a crusher, sifter and mill for stone, taken from a quarry opened for the purpose, as well as gravel and sand; two concrete mixers, three lifts, various trucks and rails for transporting material, iron-workers' shop, cement store and whatever else was necessary, whether tools or constructions, to complete the jobsite»²⁶.

The site had already a fair supply of iron, cement, gravel, sand and timber, safeguarding it from the quota restrictions on materials, as a result of the 1935 Act, which would jeopardise the Montesilvano jobsite, completed only in September 1939.

In Roio's colony it was thus possible to experiment and adopt modern finishing and installation solutions: from door and window frames, to the windows themselves, flooring materials, water purification plant, and even an electric stove for large communities, sponsored by the Unione Esercizi Elettrici on the pattern of the one already in use in Ancona's Psychiatric Hospital, during the consolidation and reconstruction works after the 1930 earthquake (fig. 23).

The Roio colony functions perfectly in the care of physical health and intellectual and moral control of the small guests desired by the Regime up to 1940, when the activity was suspended due to the

26. Rome, AIGMF, ENAGM, *Colonia Montana di Rojo*, 1934-1943.



Figure 23. Montelucio di Roio (AQ), Colony IX Maggio. The electric stove for large communities, sponsored by the Unione Esercizi Elettrici on the pattern of the one already in use in Ancona's Psychiatric Hospital after the 1930 earthquake (Rome, AIGMF, ENAGM, *Colonia Montana di Rojo*, 1937-1961).



Figure 24. Monteluco di Roio (AQ), Colony IX Maggio. Photos of the main façade of building after the earthquake of 2009 (photo by S. Ciranna).



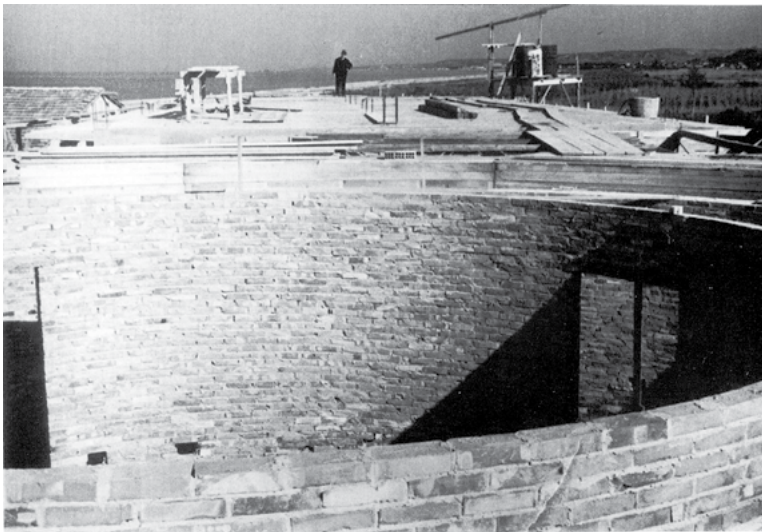
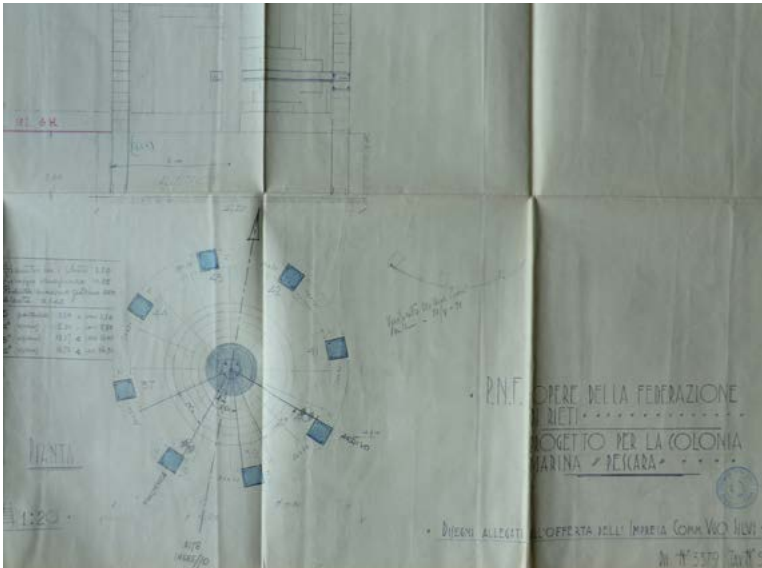
Figures 25-26. Montelucio di Roio, Colony IX Maggio. Exterior and interior details of the walls (photos by S. Ciranna).

outbreak of war. Transformed between the Forties and the Fifties in a reception center for displaced persons, since the late sixties the former colony had been converted into the new headquarters of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of L'Aquila and today (2019) is waiting for consolidation and restoration, having been severely damaged by the 2009 earthquake in L'Aquila²⁷ (figg. 24-26).

At Montesilvano, too, the Municipality donated the building site in 1936: a level plot of about 12,000 sq m, lying between the sea, the National Road and two minor ditches, about which, however, the builders several times complained for «the unsuitable location and elevation, subject to frequent flooding at all seasons, with the sole exception of the summer».

For the construction of the colony a tender-competition was called, to which, the Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento di Rieti will invite various companies specialized in construction works and reinforced concrete, then won in 1937 by the company Ugo Silvi of Rome. The «unhappy location of

27. Detailed information on the transformations and the state of conservation of the colony IX Maggio are displayed in P. MONTUORI, *Dalla salute all'istruzione della "meglio gioventù", dalla colonia montana IX maggio a Montelucio di Roio alla nuova facoltà d'Ingegneria dell'Università dell'Aquila*, presented for the publication of the Proceedings of the International Conference *Le Città universitarie del XX secolo e la Sapienza di Roma* (Roma 23-25 novembre 2017).



5. Montesilvano - "Stato dei lavori" al 7 giugno 1939 XVII IMPRESA U. SILVI

Figures 27-28. Montesilvano (PE), Colony Stella Maris. Construction details of the walls and the central staircase and historical photo of the construction site (Rome, ACS, PNF, Servizi Vari, serie II, b. 1368; courtesy of M. Volpe).

the land», however, will continue to condition the construction site of Montesilvano, with delays in the completion of the work generated, both by frequent flooding and by the failure to deliver iron for the reinforced concrete load-bearing structures (figg. 27-28). The building, tested only in 1941 will never become operative, due to the Second World War, during which it is used, first as German headquarters, then as a civil hospital. Returning to its original function in the fifties, from the late seventies the former colony is used as a retirement home and from 1984 abandoned and for years left in a state of functional and material degradation; today (2019) it is the subject of renovation work to transform it into the dormitory of the Hotel Management School of Pescara²⁸ (figg. 29-32).

Conclusions

The historical analysis of the typology of the climatic colonies and, in particular, of two of the three buildings realized in Abruzzo, the Stella Maris in Montesilvano (Pescara) and IX Maggio in Monteluco di Roio (L'Aquila), show how these structures have been designed and built to meet the requirements of comfort in the interior spaces, as well as symbolic and celebrative purposes of the Regime. Already extensively investigated in numerous studies²⁹ this type of buildings, such as sanatoriums for the treatment of tuberculosis and similar pathologies, from which they originate, have been designed to create healthy and comfortable spaces, and can be considered “bioclimatic” buildings, realized by applying the technological knowledge and materials available at the time. These “architectural and sanitary machines”, of considerable value and historical-architectural interest, but, in large part, altered and in disuse, can be recovered in harmony with their original shape, adapting them with a low environmental impact to modern needs of comfort, understood as quality of life and health for users.

In fact the reuse of buildings of historical and architectural value with adequate functions is a fundamental tool for the conservation and safeguard of this heritage, as also indicated in the “European Charter of the Architectural Heritage” of Amsterdam (1975). The develop of “virtuous” and integrated strategies not only for safeguarding but also for a sustainable, environmental, social and economic reuse of this type of buildings could mean regain a precious resource, which is still scarcely exploited.

28. For further details on the interventions and the current status of the colony Stella Maris see VOLPE 2019.

29. See FALASCA ZAMPONI 1997; BALDUCCI 2005; CAMPBELL 2005; BALDUCCI 2007.



Figures 29-30. Montesilvano (PE), Colony Stella Maris. Outdoor photos of the building in its current state (courtesy of M. Volpe).



Figures 31-32. Montesilvano (PE), Colony Stella Maris. Indoor photos of the building in its current state (photos by S. Ciranna).

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