

Eclectic architecture in the Lanzo valleys: resort and building holiday

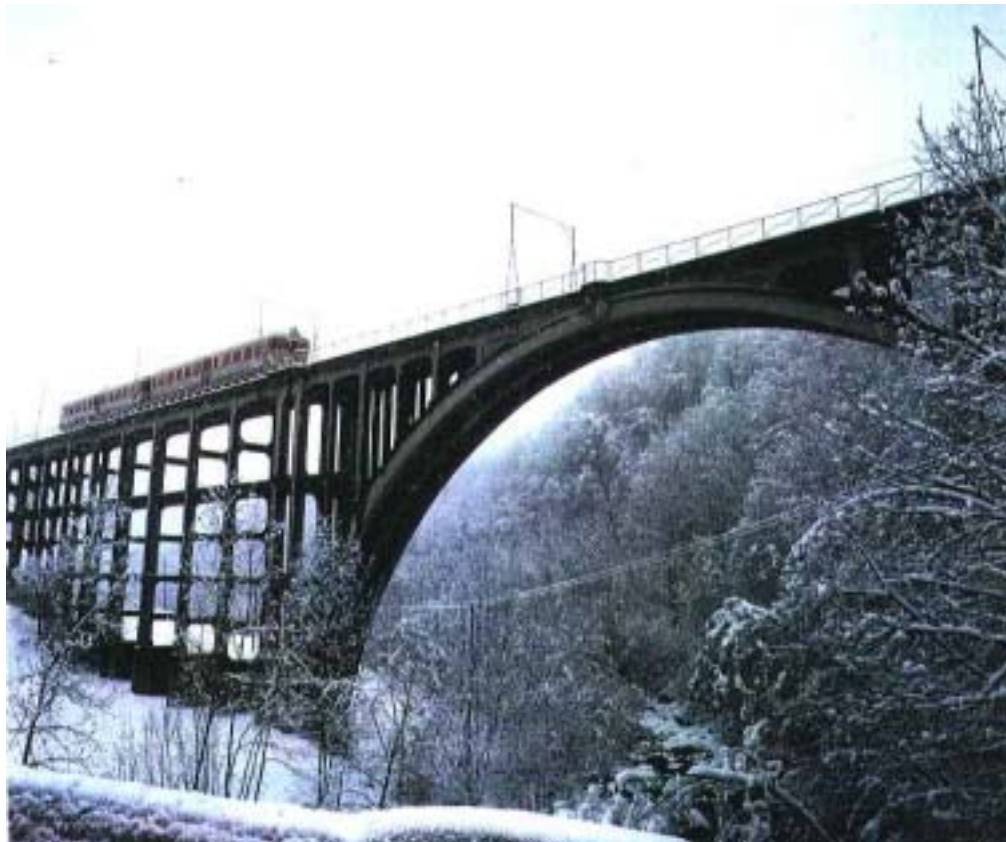
by Gallo Monica

Tutor: Costanza Roggero

Co-Tutor: Vittorio Defabiani

The Lanzo Valleys are situated North-West of Turin on the eastern slope of Western Alps; they are subdivided into Viù Valley, Ala Valley and Grande Valley. The district we are going to consider has been always regarded as an outlying place isolated by an orographic structure that has just allowed links and passages only with the plain between Lanzo and Turin.

From the 2nd half of the nineteenth century the Lanzo Valleys have gone through an outstanding touristic development. Several factors promoted the touristic increase in the areas: the diffusion of a wide literature regarding the place; the birth of the mountaneering and the foundation of the Italian Alpine Club; the built of carriage roads and of railways that improved the road communication.



Railway bridge in Ceres

Following the mountaineers example, the first ones who enjoyed the Valley, many city-dwellers began to spend their summer holiday in the mountain resorts. They went there not only to practice alpine sports, but also to relax, to have walks and to give themselves up to social life. A weekly magazine founded in Turin in 1888, entitled "Il Venerdì della Contessa", reported, among its articles, some letters coming from the holiday places situated in the Lanzo Valleys. They described the beauty of the environment, the life of the holiday goers, their meeting- place, their habits, the parties organized in the villas or in the halls of the hotels and cafes, the tennis and bowl matches and also some gossips. The presence of middle-class Turin tourists caused a general renovation in these villages, so that they could come out of their isolation and they increased their welfare. The effect of such a change was the diffusion of a new housing which turned into a seasonal and temporary use. Hotels, alpine shelters, villas, mansions and chalets were built to fulfil the tourists' requirements needs and they were characterised by their architectonic peculiarities.



Ala Grand Hotel opening advertisement
(in G. Garimoldi, *Alle origini dell'alpinismo torinese*, 1988, p. 116)

With reference to villas and mansions, some of them present typologic characteristics derived from the eclectic city mansions, most of the time they had to be fitted to the mountain environment; other ones had typologic characteristics which were similar to the mountain tradition or to the swiss chalets.



Front detail of Bottino mansion in Bonzo (Groscavallo)

A deep study of the bibliographic sources concerning the Lanzo Valleys, and with particularly careful consideration of the touristic guide-books issued from nineteenth to twentieth century (Luigi Francesetti, *Lettres sur les Vallées de Lanzo*, Torino 1823; Luigi Clavarino, *Saggio di corografia statistica e storica delle Valli di Lanzo*, Torino 1867; Luigi Clavarino, *Le Valli di Lanzo*, Torino 1874; Carlo Ratti, *Da Torino a Lanzo e per le valli della Stura*, Torino 1883; Carlo Ratti, *Guida per il villeggiante e l'alpinista nelle Valli di Lanzo*, Torino 1904; Club Alpino Italiano (a cura di), *Le Valli di Lanzo*, Torino 1904; Giovanni e Pasquale Milone, *Notizie delle Valli di Lanzo*, Torino 1911; Don Secondo Carpano, *Le Valli di Lanzo*, Torino 1931), we have found out a list of buildings built up in the Lanzo Valleys in the period of time elapsing from 1820 to 1930.

On the data gathered we have found out that the greatest diffusion of villas and mansions took place between the end of nineteenth century and the first thirty years of the twentieth century; if we consider hotels and alpine shelter, they spread mainly between nineteenth and twentieth century

Referring to cadastral documents, and particularly to the land register Rabbini maps (1859-1865) and to the current ones, an analysis of the seasonal building complexes has been carried out; the whole research aims to an identification of the architectonic and environmental ambient properties still recognizable in the district nowadays. It hasn't been easy to trace on the buildings pointed out in the guides. Actually many buildings has been demolished or completely restructured and their use has been converted, so that they lost their original characteristics. A peculiar characteristic of the buildings of that period (both villas and hotels) were their gardens which had been partly neglected or dismantled, so that now there is a very little evidence of the original mountain park settlement. However many buildings show their own architectonic features, keeping their original plants and structures and they can be regarded as interesting examples of the late-eclectic or Art Nouveau trend.

The results of this research regarding the cultural and environmental properties in the Lanzo Valleys are reported in a file of all the buildings. In this document we have outline for each building bibliographic sources, iconographic sources, estate properties, construction phases, and where possible, the photographic evidences.