THE (ABANDONED) HOTEL IN THE ALPS

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Plan des Grossen Waldhauses Tenigergad, um 1907 (Kantonsbibliothek Graubünden Bc 1057[2]).
DAWN OF ALPINE TOURISM

Scientific exploration of the Alps and glorification of the natural environment by the Geneva writer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau were the factors in the 18th century that ultimately led to the following century's surge of tourism in the alpine region. The first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 further strengthened the enthusiasm for the Alps. The presence of travellers necessitated the provision of accommodation, hence the emergence of simple alpine inns and guesthouses in the early 19th century. Technical advances and the democratisation of travel in the latter half of the 19th century led to a rapid rise in tourism, which in turn saw Switzerland experience its first major hotel boom.

TENIGERBAD

Hotel construction came comparatively late to Canton Graubünden. Spas were often key to the development of tourism here: bathing facilities providing board and lodging have featured alongside springs with curative properties for centuries. The Tenigerbad, or Bogn Tenigia as it is known in the local Romansh language, is nestled in the remote Val Sumvitg, a side valley feeding the Anterior Rhine in Canton Graubünden's Surselva region. A mule track leads past the location to the Greina plateau and thence to Canton Ticino. Currently mothballed, the spa’s raison d’être is a spring, records of which date back to the 16th century. Until the early 19th century, the curative waters supplied a simple rural bathing arrangement consisting of wooden troughs in which visitors to the valley could immerse themselves; neither board nor lodging were provided. It was not until 1881 that steps were taken to erect a three-storey spa house. The hiring of an in-house physician signalled the professionalisation of the spa and its attendant health resort business. The following decade saw the house enlarged and investments of a technical nature made: this provided users of the Tenigerbad with almost urban levels of comfort, including a modern sewage system, cooling systems, electric lighting, central heating, and telephone and telegraph connections.

WALDHÄUSER

The high occupancy rate of the hotel and the commercial success of the Tenigerbad led to the construction between 1908 and 1910 of two new hotel buildings on an elevated clearing above the original spa house. Known collectively as the Waldhäuser (Forest Houses) the principal facility was over 80 metres in length and had four floors, each featuring a central corridor providing access to two rows of guest rooms. The pricier rooms facing south had the benefit of wooden balconies. Each floor had the use of a mineral bath. The ground floor of this stone building contained a restaurant, a spacious dining room and several lounges. The hotel was even equipped with a darkroom for developing photographs, a hairdressing salon and a telephone. Forming the centre of the complex was a central lobby on the ground floor: this provided access to a loggia offering views of the valley and an axially attached semi-circular porch with a staircase on one side. The main staircase leading to the upper floors was located next to the main entrance, which meant that it was not structurally connected to the lobby, unlike similar hotel buildings of that period. The hotel boasted an in-house laundry, a pharmacy, a bakery and a post office complete with telegraph. The smaller of the two Waldhäuser buildings, the dépendence, was provided for the accommodation of tourists of more modest means. Surrounding the new hotel complex was an extensive park featuring seating, footpaths and resting places. Forming a veritable self-contained microcosm, the Waldhäuser were equipped with an infrastructure that had never been seen before in the more rural parts of the Surselva region.
WALDHÄUSER UND TENIGERBAD AG
The Waldhaus Company subsequently acquired the Tenigerbad old buildings, the electricity generating plant and the mineral spring, renaming itself Waldhäuser und Tenigerbad AG in the process. The modestly sized climatic spa resort with its curative waters now boasted 220 beds and the patronage of an international clientele. Notwithstanding the good omens, the resort’s destiny was soon cut short by the outbreak of the First World War, which saw visitors from abroad vanish overnight; the Second World War served only to exacerbate the situation. Interim measures and business models brought only limited benefit: increasingly long periods of closure for both hotel and spa could not be avoided.

NEW DAWN – BUT NOT FOR LONG
The early 1960s saw a new owner demolish the Waldhaus Dépendence and replace it with a new building able to accommodate 150 overnight guests and equipped with three pools, one of which was outdoor next to the spa building. The Tenigerbad was modernised to a high medical standard. The new company behind the venture, Tenigerbad AG, began trading under the strapline „Tenigerbad im Somvixertal“ in 1974. It advertised a comprehensive social and cultural programme, including readings, concerts and exhibitions as well as guided walks and excursions. Although the hotel was intended to remain open throughout the year, the first (and successful) season was followed by a downturn in the business’s fortunes, and spring 1977, just three trading years later, saw the facilities close for good. Tenigerbad AG was declared bankrupt in 1978, since when the spa has stood empty and unused.

PROJECT
The semester objective is to develop a future scenario for the destination Tenigerbad. The remote situation within the fascinating natural landscape and the history of the buildings of Tenigerbad and Waldhaus constitute the basis for the development of the project. The aim is to identify the architectural potential of the historic buildings in regard to the cultural heritage and to formulate proposals for their reanimation. In the process, individual parts of the building complex can be demolished or replaced and functions can be introduced which create synergies with the existing parts. Investigations on the evolution of travel and tourism play a role in the development of the project as well as reflections about and the relationship of the resort to the landscape and its significance for the inhabitants of the region.
Keywords:

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Geography:
www.geogr.ch>viewer> tenigerbad, sumvitg

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