

2.b.9 The history of tourism in the Engadin

The Grand Hotels with their generously laid-out sports facilities, inviting lakeside promenades and paths along routes with spectacular views were already typical of the Upper Engadin when the Albula railway arrived in 1903. At that time, St. Moritz had already established its reputation as a playground for Europe's elite. But the railway initiated a second phase of this development. After a tourist infrastructure had been created and had become taken for granted, it became important to highlight the image of the resort by using culture, in particular art, as well as major sporting events to invent a local tradition and anchor it permanently in the collective memory.

The upsurge in tourist travel went hand in hand with a large-scale extension of the transport routes and the development of ever faster, more reliable, safe and comfortable ways of travelling. At their journey's end, visitors soon encountered not only simple lodgings and inns, but from the mid-19th century genuine Grand Hotels that offered exceptional comfort and also satisfied the demand for entertainment with dancing, theatre and concerts.

In his book *A Tramp Abroad* published in 1880, Mark Twain recorded the impressive changes in travel habits that had taken place during the course of the 19th century: "What a change has come over Switzerland, and in fact all Europe, during this century! Seventy or eighty years ago Napoleon was the only man in Europe who could really be called a traveler; he was the only man who had devoted his attention to it and taken a powerful interest in it; he was the only man who had traveled extensively; but now everybody goes everywhere; and Switzerland, and many other regions which were unvisited and unknown remotenesses a hundred years ago, are in our days a buzzing hive of restless strangers every summer." But what had produced this pervasive wish to travel? The eagerness of the European elite to travel to the mountains cannot be explained merely on the basis of better modes

of transport. Rather, this desire was aroused by writers such as Albrecht von Haller, later Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Schiller, with his glorification of William Tell, as well as numerous veduta painters. They contributed greatly to representing the Alps, which had hitherto been feared, as a paradise for visitors. Then came the English, with their sporting ambitions, who caused a furore with their first Alpine ascents and stimulated the collective enthusiasm for mountain climbing.

A new orientation

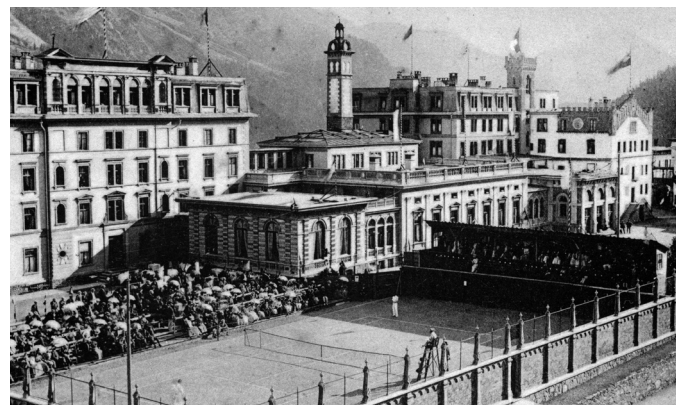
The modern history of tourism in the Upper Engadin begins around 1800 and is closely linked to the loss of a traditional way of life: the political reorganisation of Graubünden in 1797 (cf. 2.b.2) led to the Veltlin region being excluded from the canton, so that the Engadin lost its breadbasket. Left to itself, however, this high-lying valley could live from farming only to a very limited extent. The population had to seek new strategies in order to secure a livelihood. So it is characteristic that an open letter written by an anonymous hand addressed to *Ehrsame Gemeinde St. Mauritz, im Thal Oberengadin* (the honourable community of St. Mauritz in the Upper Engadin) appeared precisely at that time. It pointed out graphically to the leading figures how they



St. Moritz Bad > The Grand Hotel des Bains (Neues Kurhaus), photograph about 1930.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz



St. Moritz > Cresta Run, photograph about 1930.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz



St. Moritz > The Kulm-Park tennis courts, about 1900.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz

could use the St. Moritz springs – already praised extravagantly by Paracelsus in 1538 – in a profitable way. By proposing tourism as a promising source of future income, this letter became an eloquent sign of a new beginning.

In fact, the extension of the springs had begun in 1815 and a modest infrastructure had been set up. Ultimately, the success of the first Kurhaus (pump-room) already required it to be enlarged shortly after its completion in 1856. The Neue Kurhaus was opened in 1864: with its imposing buildings set at an angle to the valley, 129 rooms as well as elegant reception rooms, it represented the first veritable Grand Hotel in the Upper Engadin. Like the subsequent buildings of its type, the Neue Kurhaus was designed to satisfy all the requirements of a demanding clientele in a single establishment. In this sense, it represented its own microcosm, rather like a luxury liner.

The arduous journey by coach over dusty roads and steep passes failed to dissuade visitors from undertaking a health cure in the Engadin; but it certainly explained why the travellers, when they finally reached their goal, stayed there for several months, more or less settled in for the duration, and appropriated the landscape. At a correspondingly early period, therefore, the local authorities organised themselves into a “beautification association”, a predecessor of the Kurverein founded in 1874, that enhanced the landscape with paths and parks, benches with scenic views and lake-side walks for tourists. But the visitors themselves also made a significant contribution to extending the tourist infrastructure.

The landscape as playground

The first winter visitors during the 1860s, when the introduction of high-altitude treatments aroused hopes among many patients, had travelled to St. Moritz for health reasons. They were

followed by a sports-oriented winter tourism that began in the 1880s. Chronicles from the period shortly after the turn of the century report: “English doctor J. F. Holland, who had already spent several winters in Davos with his patients at a time when the town had 1,000 winter visitors, arranged for a select company of English aristocrats to join him on a trip to St. Moritz in 1883. [...] Almost the entire small English winter colony stayed at the Engadiner Kulm, which remained the only winter hotel for many years. Some 100–200 visitors came around 1885, while the number had risen to between 300 and 400 by the end of the 1880s”.

With their inexhaustible enthusiasm for sport, these early, predominantly English, visitors initiated a spate of innovations. They saw to it that keen travellers (also from abroad) no longer perceived a winter stay in the Engadin as an exile imposed by ill-health, but rather as a time and place of manifold pleasures. *The St. Moritz Post*, a tourist newspaper founded in December 1886, whose editor-in-chief and voluntary contributors were based at St. Moritz’s Kulm Hotel, served to disseminate such a viewpoint for the tourists. Under the expert guidance of these first visitors, ice rinks were built for curling and ice-skating. Intrepid sportsmen launched themselves in a prone position on toboggans down the Cresta Run, for the first time in 1884, and the Bob Run was added in 1903/4. In summer too, everything was laid on for sports and other leisure activities. At the instigation of the English visitors, the first tennis court was laid out in the Kulm Park, in 1893 the Engadin Golf Club was founded and the game was soon being played on an 18-hole course on the plain near Samedan – and has continued up to the present.

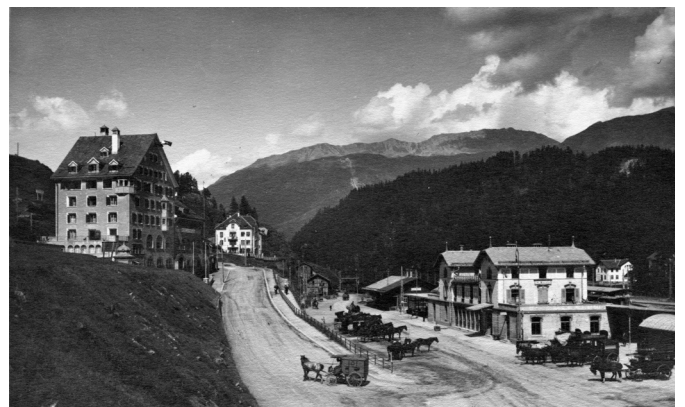
These facilities were created by the visitors themselves out of a desire to enjoy themselves,



Samedan > Golf course, about 1920.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St.Moritz



St. Moritz > A race on the bob run,
about 1920.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St.Moritz



St. Moritz Dorf > The station on the
valley's floor, left the Hotel Margna
built by Nicolaus Hartmann the
younger 1906/07.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St.Moritz

and gave the Upper Engadin an early reputation as the playground of an international elite. Supply and demand coincided in the pioneering period of tourism and together succeeded in founding a strong tradition. The awareness of having created a unique tourist infrastructure with runs and courses, which had to be carefully maintained and marketed, was already clear to the leading figures around 1907. At that time, an extensive winter sports exhibition was held in Berlin, and the persuasive Pastor Camille Hoffmann, who was also President of the St. Moritz Kurverein, was able to present his Engadin home-town in eloquent terms as the cradle of winter sports.

The train steams in

Ever since it had been decided to build the Albula railway, the question arose as to how the rail connections would impact tourism in the Upper Engadin. This question was firstly directed at specific problems and concerns such as at the lively and occasionally vehement discussions on the optimal track layout for the railway route in St. Moritz from a tourist angle (cf. 2.b.4 and 2.b.6). And the demand was naturally made that its construction should also consider the Cresta Run and Bob Run and bridge them elegantly, as they were already in place and thus had “right of way”. The railway planners had to recognise that the Albula line did not run into a remote and wild Alpine valley, but into a carefully managed tourist landscape that had to be respected and even enhanced.

On the other hand, it had become necessary to reorient the entire resort in order to set its direction for the future. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from a treatise entitled *Über die Zukunft des Kurortes St. Moritz* (on the future of the resort of St. Moritz) written in 1898 by lo-

cal doctor and later painter Peter Robert Berry: “Formerly, our feared mountain passes formed a natural and secure barrier against undesired intruders. This barrier will go when the Albula has been tunnelled through, and what then? Then there’s no reason why consumptives should not just as well travel here as to Davos, especially if one were to build specific nests for them in the form of ‘sanatoria’ as an advertisement. This is a danger for St. Moritz that will certainly not go away if we close our eyes to it. On the contrary, the time has come to become aware of its gravity”. So St. Moritz had to respond to the situation and decided, backed up by medical studies, to prohibit the building of sanatoria and make it consistently clear that consumptive patients were not welcome. On the meeting of the St. Moritz Kurverein concerning the impact of the Albula railway, which had in that year opened as far as Celerina, the local newspaper the *Engadin Express & Alpine Post* noted on November 14, 1903 that: “Pastor Hoffmann [had stressed] the necessity that the Kurverein and the entire winter resort of St. Moritz should unite, in putting aside all particular interests, on a joint approach, namely with a view to two great tasks: 1. A unanimous response to the question of consumptive patients, naturally in the sense that St. Moritz concisely explains that it is not a tuberculosis station nor intends to be one and therefore cannot accept any such patients; 2. the creation of a large communal ice rink on which international races can be held.”

Scenic views

As the early tourist posters from around 1880 show, they initially focussed on assuring travellers, with the aid of timetables and by displaying various modes of transport in swift movement, that they would reach their destination. But when



Advertising poster "Chemins de fer de l'est" for the Upper Engadin by F. Hugo d' Alesi, 1895.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz



Advertising poster for ski races in St. Moritz by Walter Küpfer, 1911.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz

this had been effectively achieved and the Albula railway entered the Engadin, the emphasis shifted somewhat. The posters were no longer designed to provide information, the railway had become part of the landscape and no longer needed to be highlighted, so the illustrators focused on evoking the local atmosphere and bringing the landscape and scenic views into the foreground. The large-scale project in which Engadin financiers and hoteliers joined local artist Giovanni Segantini in presenting a grandiose panoramic view of the Upper Engadin landscape at the Paris World Exhibition also fitted into this new approach to tourist advertising. Their aim was to highlight the tourist achievements of the 19th century and simultaneously present them to a broad public. However, these ambitious plans had to be abandoned shortly after their proclamation in 1897 due to a lack of funds. Ultimately, the cooperation between local tourist-based businesses and artists resulted in the more modestly dimensioned but artistically convincing Alpine triptych “Becoming, Being, Passing-Away”. And in 1908, a year before the triptych was shown to an arts-loving public in the Segantini Museum (cf. 2.a.4 and 5.h) built by Nicolaus Hartmann the Younger as a rotunda, the cableway on Muottas Muragl enabled travellers to experience the panoramic scene, previously painted on canvas, in three-dimensional reality. So one might say that technology had overtaken art within a few years: the railways had opened up landscapes that a wider public could previously only experience indirectly via paintings.

Boom in hotel construction

The railway triggered a veritable building boom. The St. Moritz Kurverein already spoke of a surge in the number of summer travellers in 1903. And it was expected that above all older visitors and families, who had previously been

reluctant to venture over the snow-bound passes, would visit the Engadin in winter too.

One of the first and simultaneously most remarkable fruits of this renewed interest in investing in hotel construction was the imposing Grand Hotel. This major project, completed in 1905, was backed by a joint-stock company chaired by local worthies: Karl Koller was responsible for its architecture. Whereas the building was a shining example of profitable entrepreneurship, it was also a bone of contention for the newly founded Graubünden Heritage Society that was keen to ensure a link-up to local building traditions (cf. 2.a.3 and 2.a.4). They attacked the Grand Hotel, which was impressive and splendid but at the same time designed in a cost-effective way as a compact block, by calling it a “dividend box”. It had become an emblem of a new type of tourism that was for the first time aimed at a mass clientele made possible by the railway.

The Hotel Margna designed by Nicolaus Hartmann the Younger and built directly next to St. Moritz railway station was regarded by traditionally minded innovators as a counter-reaction and valid response to these new challenges in terms of both tourism and architecture. In their eyes, it satisfied the contemporary need for modern and comfortable accommodation, was adapted to the local topography and at the same time complied with traditional and locally rooted types of building in its typology, selection of materials and details. It became the yardstick for many other hotel buildings. Whereas the Hotel Margna is still standing today and continues to bear witness to the spirit of that time, the Grand Hotel burned down in 1944 while being used by the Swiss army as accommodation when it was closed to regular guests.



St. Moritz Dorf > Hotel Palace (left) and Grand Hotel, abut 1910.
Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz



St. Moritz > Olympic ski jumping, 1928.



St. Moritz > The start for the 1928 Olympic bobs races.

Upturns and downturns

When the First World War broke out, the great euphoria collapsed, all hotel construction was stopped by a federal decree and many tourist infrastructures fell largely into disuse. The old Grand-Hotel Association, forerunner of an active international community, was obliged to wind itself up. The Upper Engadin hotel trade had to endure years of stagnation and await the 1920s before an upturn occurred, reaching a new record in 1929 with 693, 162 overnight stays. But the Great Depression brought the industry to the brink again. Several establishments had to close and the number of recorded overnight stays had dropped by half in 1932.

The Winter Olympics of 1928 marked a high point of the halcyon years. And it is significant that the Rhaetian railway, the Resort and Tourist Association, the Graubünden Kantonalbank, hoteliers and the municipality i.e. the principal tourist institutions, all worked together, advertised for the great event and secured the necessary funds. As the centrepiece and core of the Games, architect Valentin Koch designed a simple and striking building in the modern classicist style in the Kulm Park, which forms a unique natural stadium together with the opposite hill and the broad plain. And it was here, at this symbolic place that celebrated a common objective, that the people of the Engadin started afresh in 1948: after the difficult and paralysing war years, the second Winter Olympics aroused renewed hopes and were seen as a sign of a new beginning. If St. Moritz had previously paid little attention to the spirit and the history of these two unique sports events in Switzerland, this was now to change with the planned Olympic museum.

In view of the increasing mobility of broad sections of the population and the associated social

changes, the popularity of skiing and other winter sports increased significantly in the 1950s and 1960s. This period also saw the opening up to tourists of the ski areas of Furtenschellas – Corvatsch, Corviglia (Piz Nair) as well as Diavolezza-Lagalb with ski lifts and cable cars. By running such major sporting events as the Engadin Ski-marathon and finally the 2003 World Ski Championships, the Upper Engadin further boosted its international reputation as a prime location for skiing and winter sports.

Contemporary witnesses

If the taste of the times and the newly awoken understanding of democracy led to the palatial hotels acquiring a certain notoriety after 1945, they were effectively rediscovered during the 1980s.

The monument conservationists prepared inventories and there was renewed appreciation for the foundation period and its wish to create buildings of architectural significance. The post-modern period also involved a reawakening to history. Important publications appeared, such as Isabelle Rucki's *Das Hotel in den Alpen* (The Hotel in the Alps), that was dedicated for the first time to a comprehensive study of the history of hotel building in the Engadin. Thus the Kronenhof in Pontresina is a building of historical significance, testifying to the phases of its extension from a farmhouse to a Grand Hotel in an outstanding way. The reception rooms and their ceiling paintings by Otto Haberer, created in 1901, were extensively restored in the early 1990s on the basis of monument preservation principles and set a new standard for dealing with valuable hotel architecture in the Engadin. The major investments of recent years in traditional St. Moritz establishments such as the Kulm Hotel, Badrutt's Palace, the former Kurhaus and today's Kempinski, the Suvretta House and most recently the Carlton,



St. Moritz Dorf > The “world resort” with its striking backdrop of hotels seen from the lake.
R. Canal, Kur- und Verkehrsverein St. Moritz



St. Moritz Dorf > The Palace Hotel, symbolises the dazzling history of hotels in St. Moritz.
Badrutt's Palace Hotel

also bear witness to the fact that luxury hotels in particular have again become attractive to both investors and visitors.

Despite these positive developments, many less prestigious hotels are in danger of losing their historical heritage. This threat ultimately stems from their success in convincingly transmitting a picture of an exceptional combination of urban lifestyle, cultural landscape and mountain world. Their scenic situation leads to demands for more cost-effective solutions by demolishing buildings and rebuilding anew on the cleared terrain or for a lucrative reassignment of large buildings to become second homes. The development of tourism in the Upper Engadin was, from the outset, accompanied by a critical response to this process. The awareness of the balance of the unique co-existence of architecture, landscape and society has a long tradition; it was not least the critical voices from the Upper Engadin that had contributed to founding the Graubünden Heritage Society. The most recent example is the initiative designed to restrict the construction of second homes accepted in June 2005 by the Upper Engadin voters – another mosaic stone in the fascinating history of tourism in the Upper Engadin that can already look back onto a century and a half of development.