



Campsites as Utopias?

*A Socio-Spatial Reading of the Post-War Holiday Camp in Belgium,
1950s to 1970s*

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Abstract

This paper contrasts the objectives that underlie the development of government-funded holiday camps for family vacations in Belgium with the socio-spatial practices of their initial users. Drawing on oral history, archival material, photographs and site plans, we argue that holidaymakers did not just experience the holiday camp as an environment where they could reconnect with their family and pursue authentic experiences in close contact with nature – as their initiators had intended – but that they also embraced these sites as places where they could recreate a romanticised version of “traditional” community life and experiment with facets of a middle-class, modern suburban ideal. To substantiate our narrative, we focus on two holiday camps in the Campine Region: *Zilvermeer* and *Hengelhof*.

Keywords: leisure, holiday, Belgium, experience, heterotopia, middle class

Introduction

“It is unacceptable that the people of our class, the largest class in the country, toil their entire lives without being entitled to even one day of holiday.”¹ With these memorable words Edouard De Vlaemynck, representative of the Belgian socialist labour union, voiced the demand for paid holiday in 1936. The 1930s were a period of “deep and profound political crisis throughout the Western democracies”.² Shortly after, France became immersed in strikes in May 1936, Belgium followed. The demands were simple: increased wages,

reduction of working hours and, last but not least, the right to annual paid holiday. A principal agreement over these demands was reached soon after and two new laws were approved by the Chamber of Representatives: A law effectuating a forty-hour workweek in certain industrial branches and the law of 8 July 1936, which endowed all workers with six days of paid holiday annually.³ The outcome of this strike signified a fundamental transformation of the workers' existence as well as for Belgian society in general. Until then, access to leisure and holidaying had remained – not only in Belgium, but across Europe – an element of social stratification reserved only for the elites. A major reason for the extension of paid holidays during the 1930s was – as historians Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough point out⁴ – that the state expected it to dissipate class tensions; which is why governments promoted tourism so energetically during the depression.

Starting from the 1930s, new institutions emerged across Europe,⁵ which were designed to cater to the growing demand for holidays: cut-price train tickets in France under the Popular Front,⁶ holiday camps in Britain that provided packaged holidays with extensive activities for parents, children, singles and couples,⁷ and inexpensive week-long holidays for working people and their families, organised by *Kraft durch Freude* in Nazi Germany.⁸ However, the efforts to extend tourism to wider social constituencies met with limited success until after the Second World War. It was only around the mid-twentieth century – when the forty-hour, five-day workweek and paid annual holidays of at least two weeks gradually became established – that holidaying came to be understood as a right of citizenship bound up within a European standard of living and that the “travel” of leisured elites was complemented by a rationalised, modern “tourism” for the masses.⁹

Commentators almost universally assumed that this increase in leisure time marked the onset of a new trend. Around the mid-twentieth century, leisure studies consequently entered the formal field of academic research.¹⁰ Optimistic projections regarding the development of this new *Civilisation du Loisir*¹¹ were alternated with more gloomy expectations:

From the spate of literature on the coming Era of Leisure it is hard to tell whether we are headed for an Elysium of culture that will put the ancient Greeks in the shade or for a hell of mass boredom modified by home carpentry, hi-fi, plush motels, and ping-pong. By far the most enthusiastic prophets of the New Day are to be found in the world of trade and popular magazines, the most skeptical [sic] in the ranks of the sociologists.¹²

Authorities and social organisations in Belgium also expressed concern over this evolution and deemed it their responsibility to shape the leisure of the population. It was the contention of the government that the confrontation with worthwhile cultural activities during this newly gained free time would have an uplifting effect on people and hence would be beneficial for both the individual and society as a whole. The development of holiday infrastructure was therefore not to be handed over to commercial enterprises, but was to be taken up by social and cultural organisations that had people's best interests in mind. For instance, Marcel Vandewiele, the Vice-Chairman of the High Council for Social Tourism¹³ stated:

No one will deny that the commercialization of leisure can give rise to the shameless exploitation of an [...] inexperienced audience. [...] When we strive for better work conditions, for a veritable emancipation [of the workers], for the humanisation of the entire workers-existence, we cannot accept that leisure policy is abdicated to the voluntarism and the limitless urge for financial profit of the private sector.¹⁴

From the early 1950s on, more than half a century after the first "holiday colonies" (*colonies de vacances*) for children were established by the Belgian seaside,¹⁵ the government stimulated¹⁶ the construction of holiday camps for workers and their families, many of which were established by provincial authorities and social organisations with a clear political and denominational orientation,¹⁷ such as *Vakantievreugde* and *Vakantiegenoegens*.¹⁸ The camps for family holidays that these social organisations along with governmental authorities initiated, were promoted (by these institutions) as places where workers could strengthen their familial ties and recover from the pressure of working life in an industrialised society. In its programme statement to promote camping as a suitable form of social tourism, *Vakantiegenoegens* stated:

The growing need for recreation is a direct consequence of the countless restrictions that characterise the workers' existence, such as: employment situation, urbanisation, excess comfort, consumer society, lack of acknowledgment for person and family, hectic lifestyle, and so on. All these aspects lead to an estrangement of oneself, of one's family and of nature. This causes a pressing need to liberate oneself, a need for peace, space, green, water [...] for a more sober life. [A need] to search for the experience of an alternative set of values [and] a different lifestyle, such as camping.¹⁹

Tourism, and particularly camping, was regarded as a simpler, freer and more spontaneous lifestyle that enabled people to transcend their daily lives – a cathartic experience. Within the confines of these new holiday sites, holidaymakers were to rediscover essential values and lead a more simple life in close contact to nature. This brief escape from everyday life, which was infested with constraints imposed by industrialisation (strict schedules, prescribed behaviour, obligatory dress codes), would enable vacationers to get back to themselves and to renew emotional bonds within the family unit.²⁰ The free and leisurely atmosphere of the holiday camp was to allow holidaymakers to find more worthwhile experiences and to reconnect with their inner selves. The conviction that people were “estranged” and needed to counter that estrangement by seeking authentic experiences was consonant with the then dominant continental philosophy of existentialism and was a driving force behind the rise of mass tourism.²¹

As sociologist Ning Wang points out, “the authentic self is often thought to be more easily realized or fulfilled in the space outside the dominant institutions, a space with its cultural and symbolic boundaries which demarcate [...] responsibilities from freedom, work from leisure, and the inauthentic public role from the authentic self”.²² The camps for family holidays that were developed under governmental impulse in the second half of the twentieth century were destined to become such special sites. Within these venues, vacationers could camp, enjoy nature, wander the woods, light campfires, picnic [...] – all “liberating” experiences that would free them from the requirements and constraints of working life and would allow them to forge tighter bonds with their loved ones.

This paper contrasts the objectives that underlie the development of camps for family holidays in Belgium with the socio-spatial practices of their initial users – particularly those residing on the camping grounds. Drawing on oral history,²³ archival material, photographs and site plans, we argue that holidaymakers did not just experience the holiday camp as an environment where they could reconnect with their family and pursue a more “simple” life in close contact to nature – as their initiators had intended – but that they also embraced these sites as places where they could recreate aspects of community and experiment with facets of a middle-class, suburban ideal.

We subdivided the paper into four parts, each of which highlights specific features and peculiarities of (holidaying in) the holiday camp. The first section introduces the two holiday camps that we focus on – *Zilvermeer* and *Hengelhoeft*; the second part dissects the spatial set up of the holiday camp; the third part focuses on its social dynamics and, capitalising on this

socio-spatial reading, the last section conveys an understanding of what it meant to be a holidaymaker in the camp.

Family Holidays in the Campine Region: A (Re-)turn to Nature?

Both holiday camps²⁴ opened their doors in a time span of only five years: *Zilvermeer* in 1959 and *Hengelhof* in 1964. The former was built by the province of Antwerp, and the latter by *Vakantiegenoegens*. Both camps are located in the Campine region, a rural, scarcely populated area situated chiefly in the north-east of Belgium, which is well known for its natural beauty and its appeal to tourists. The region obtained this character in the second half of the twentieth century, when several large park zones were delineated and a number of recreational domains and holiday camps were established. Tourist activity at *Zilvermeer* started spontaneously in the 1930s and was “regularised” by the end of the 1950s when the province of Antwerp decided to construct a holiday camp around the two large ponds on this site. This holiday camp was named *Zilvermeer* or “Silver Lake” – a straightforward reference to the natural assets of its location: the silvery white sands and the abundance of water. Jozef Schellekens, who was Antwerp’s provincial architect at that time, was commissioned to outline a plan. Schellekens designed a modern holiday camp, consisting of a moon-shaped beach building (surrounding the swimming pond), a boathouse (next to the rowing pond), a restaurant, a cafe, a hotel, a “family village” with fifty bungalows, a large camping ground, a youth hostel, several administrative buildings, a store, a museum, an “enchanted forest” and various sports fields. Even though only a few of these constructions were operational when the camp first opened,²⁵ *Zilvermeer* was a veritable success from day one.

Half a decade later *Hengelhof* also welcomed its first holidaymakers.²⁶ This holiday camp was advertised as a “holiday village for family vacations” and was located in the centre of the province of Limburg, amidst 300 hectares of pine forest, birch forest, heath and meadows. Similar to *Zilvermeer*, its name, *Hengelhof*, also highlights the natural resources of its surroundings. It is derived from “Hengelo”, which is a contraction of *hengel*, a sloping terrain and *lo*, which means “wood”.²⁷ The plans that architect Van de Vondel sketched for this camp were far less exuberant than the original design that was drafted for *Zilvermeer*. It consisted of a camping ground with approximately 100 pitches²⁸ and few edifices. One voluminous two-story (main) building housed, along with a large refectory and a bar,



Figure 01: Original plan of the provincial recreational domain Zilvermeer, designed by architect Jozef Schellekens in 1956.

(source: Architectuurarchief Provincie Antwerpen, Antwerpen – collection: Schellekens Jozef).

administrative offices, a spacious multifunctional room and several rooms where young (childless) couples and senior citizens could reside during their stay. In addition to this large building, forty compact pavilions lay dispersed over the campgrounds, describing an elliptical figure. Each of these pavilions could accommodate one (large) or up to four (small) families. The primary goal of this holiday camp was to offer holidaymakers a tranquil holiday in pure nature. However, *Hengelhof* also boasted several facilities to promote more active forms of leisure, such as sports grounds and a “small sea” (as they phrased it) where “both beginners and experienced swimmers could enjoy a recreational dip”.²⁹

In 1959 *Elsevier*, a Belgian-Dutch publishing house released a small booklet: *Camping, A Practical Guide for Modern Tourists*, which was to introduce Belgians to the world of camping. The first chapter was entitled “Back to Nature” and opened with:

Every year again people yearn for the time when the machine can be stopped or the pen put down. This is understandable. Every human being needs to withdraw from its daily task from time to time to live free and careless [...], away from normal work. [...] One of the most cherished ways of holidaying – certainly in the present, restless time – is camping. [...] In this

alternative lifestyle lies a great source of relaxation. Camping reconnects us to nature. It makes us realise that we are not born as apartment-dwellers. Concrete and asphalt are human inventions and it is unfortunate that we have to spend our lives between them. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the urge for the free nature-living increases ever more.³⁰

This emphasis on nature and a “healthy” environment evidently became an important element in both holiday camps, which not only came to the fore in their nomenclature but also in the brochures and advertisements that they distributed. *Hengelhoeft*, for instance, announced its opening in 1964, with the phrase: “Three million square metres [of] space, rest, heath, forest,

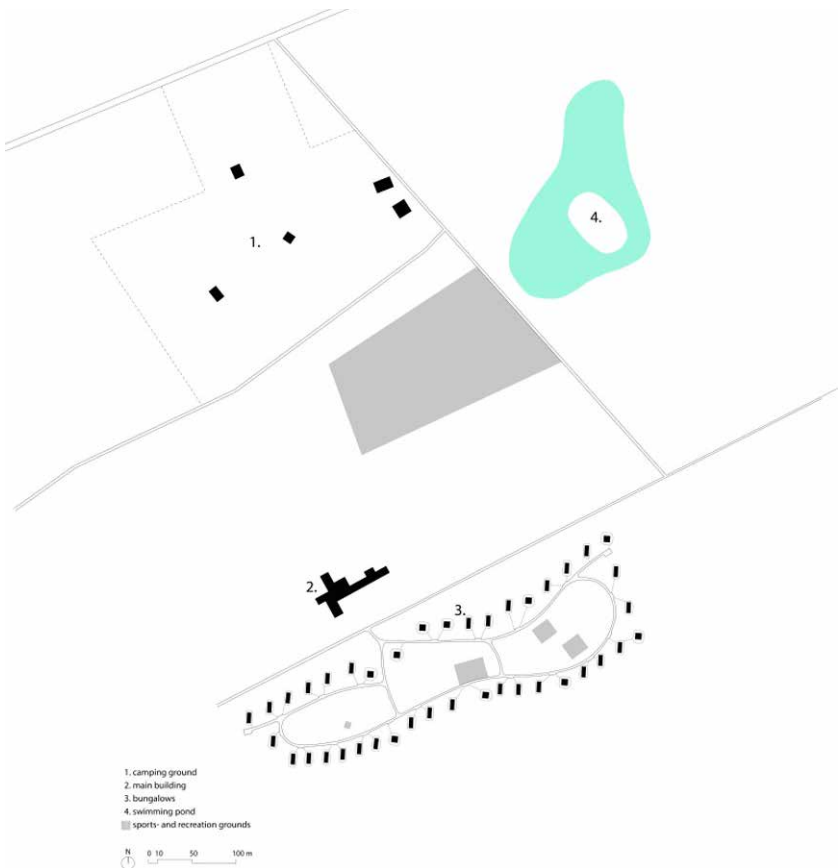


Figure 02: Reconstructed plan of *Hengelhoeft*.

beach and water” and for years on end proclaimed “Hengelhof, breath [sic] green again” as its slogan.

The longing for authenticity, which we discussed in the introduction, was thus realised through a (re)turn to nature; a phenomenon which has been widely studied in different national contexts and from different points of view. In his book *Turning to Nature in Germany. Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation 1900-1940*, historian John Alexander Williams, for instance, studies the naturism movement in Germany, which comprised a wide spectrum of organisations. He argues that this movement – rather than being reactionary – was a complex of forward-looking ideas that sought to redress the problems associated with rapid urbanisation and the emergence of an urban industrial society.³¹ Such movements were certainly not unique to Germany. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a deep-seated ambivalence towards industrialisation and urbanisation has been a powerful undercurrent in Western (intellectual) life. As Marshall Berman argued, this ambivalence has been part and parcel of the experience of modernity, which was simultaneously hailed and hated in often paradoxical and contradictory ways.³² In the late 1960s, this ambivalence became apparent in the “back-to-the-land” movement in the United States.³³ Confronted with the sinister side of science and industry and faced with rampant consumerism and the failings of modern society, many urbanites were drawn to (re)turn to nature. A similar trend fostered the camping fad that arose in Belgium in the decades following the Second World War. In this period, the country underwent rapid economic growth, which resulted in a sprawling urbanisation shaping what is now called the “nebular city”.³⁴ Founders of holiday camps went to great lengths to safeguard holiday sites from possible “harmful” elements referring to the bleak aspects of industrialisation and consumerism, as can be derived from documents pertaining to their development. In 1956, the province of Antwerp, for instance, issued a report to accompany *Zilvermeer*’s general plan, which stipulated that no cafes, shops or discothèques could be built in close proximity to the holiday camp and furthermore advised that “a building ban should be implemented in the entire area”.³⁵

These holiday camps that were constructed in Belgium’s Campine region thus portrayed both similarities and differences with contemporary international developments such as the Butlin’s holiday camps in the UK and the development of *La Grande Motte* in France.³⁶ While these foreign developments were – just like *Hengelhof* and *Zilvermeer* – clearly designed to offer lower societal classes, who could not afford to sojourn at the Côte d’Azur or abroad, the opportunity to holiday, much more emphasis was

placed on the “modern” aspects of this holiday. The aims for the construction of *La Grande Motte* for instance included – according to Furlough and Wakeman – the integration of “backward” people and places (such as *La Grande Motte*) into a modern and economically vibrant New France and the promotion of “[...] a new cultural order in which the commercialization of modern leisure practices would contribute to the consolidation of a capitalist consumer economy”.³⁷ The holiday camps in the Campine region, on the other hand, testify to a desire to offer its holidaymakers an experience of nature and purity that – while embedding them in the modern practice of holidaying – consciously negated commercial and consumerist aspects of modernity. In the discourses and official representations surrounding these camping grounds, they were not so much seen as “modern” infrastructures (which of course they were), but rather as sites where one could find temporary respite from all the negative effects (stress, pollution, crowded conditions) of modernity. Modernity thus created, as it were, its own counterpoints – sites that could counterbalance the artificiality and pressure of everyday life in an industrial society. Notwithstanding the dominant image of a return to “nature”, both *Zilvermeer* and *Hengelhoeft* were – like numerous other holiday camps and recreational grounds in Belgium – largely man-made. The two large lakes at *Zilvermeer* were dug out by industrial sand excavations in the early twentieth century and were only filled with water when the First World War brought these excavations to an abrupt standstill.³⁸ Nature within these camps was thus not as “untouched” as it was led to believe. Tree cutting, swamp draining, strategic planting and walkway construction were common practices that were to assure optimal accessibility and comfort for the holidaymakers, on the one hand, while maintaining the illusion of a sojourn in “pure” nature, on the other.

Autonomous Universe

A socio-spatial analysis, which aims to identify important spatial features of the holiday camp and develop an understanding of how these elements were perceived by its holidaymakers, reveals that the holiday camp was permeated with physical structures and mental constructs that were designed to give the camp a stature of apparent autonomy and imbue the minds of its holidaymakers with the illusion that the camp was an autonomous universe. One of its most visible embodiments are the boundaries surrounding these camps. Such structures were in the first place intended as physical barriers to prevent people who did not pay for a stay in the

holiday camp from entering. However, they also adopted another, equally important, psychological functioning. These perimeter walls served as a mental barrier between the strenuous sphere of the outside world and the hedonistic environment of absolute freedom inside. It became a prerequisite for the development of further, more subtle forms of social and cultural containment which allowed holidaymakers to conduct themselves in a different manner inside the camp than they would in their “exterior” daily lives. Closure within the holiday camp was not seen as a limit, but as a condition for liberty as can be derived from the following quotation, uttered by one of *Hengelhoeft*’s former holidaymakers: “So many beautiful things happened there [in *Hengelhoeft*] [...] once we passed the main entrance, a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I became another man.”³⁹

This citation exemplifies, besides the importance of the physical boundary surrounding the holiday camp, the significance of a pronounced threshold that emphasises the entrance. In most camps, this “task” was fulfilled by a gate, which became an important feature in the act of going on vacation: “As soon as we drove past that gate, the world outside did not exist anymore. We were elsewhere.”⁴⁰ Decorated with flags, guarded by a sentinel and accompanied by signage that alluded to the crossing of a boundary, the physical appearance of these gates echoed that of former road-check posts at (European) country borders, which were still operational at this time. The gates became “architectural” signposts, which simulated the experience of



Figure 03: Entrance gate to Zilvermeer, approximate date: early 1960s.

(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).

travelling abroad for working-class people; a luxury most of them could – in this period – not (yet) afford.



Figure 04: New entrance gate to Zilvermeer, date unknown.

(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).

The importance of the entrance gate is also acknowledged by Barbara Penner in her analysis of the Pocono honeymoon resorts in post-war America. She writes: “resorts marked their physical and symbolical distinctness from the world outside and the homogeneity of those inside [...]. In order to stake out its boundaries clearly and to highlight the specificity of its residents [they] placed a sign at its entrance announcing: ‘You are entering the land of love.’”⁴¹ The gate was for these holiday camps – following Ferdinand de Saussure’s “theory of sign” – a signifier for the transition from one physical and mental space to another: from hardship to relaxation.

Furthermore, the gates were clearly designed for cars, as most of these camps were not easily accessible by public transport. The car contained the family unit, so the passage into the camp was experienced in the car, in the family circle: “There was always someone there [at the gate]. So, when you entered you had to show your card and then you could pass. It did not matter if there were five, six or seven people in the car. That was – in those days – not important.”⁴² Passing through the gate inside the car, in the company of your family constituted an important component of the *rite de passage* that was experienced when entering the holiday camp. Going on holiday in one’s car enacted a cultural convergence: both holidays and cars could signify mythic escape, personal autonomy and displacement in

time and space. The significance of the gate as a passage into a hedonistic world was thus reinforced by the “transit” in the car.⁴³

Both camps also had their own emblems. That of Zilvermeer, for instance, depicted a fish and a conifer cone in front of an ocean blue background. It clearly referenced the natural assets of the holiday camp, which was built around two large water pits amid a pine forest. This emblem was displayed at different locations inside the camp’s territory. There were two at the entrance gate, one on each side,⁴⁴ which explicitly marked the passage into a leisurely “land” of heavenly blue waters and tall pine trees. Furthermore, it was prominently depicted on the camp’s early postcards, accompanied by the slogan: “Greetings from Zilvermeer”. These postcards mimicked holiday postcards that people would send from a sunny, foreign location: “Greetings from the Spanish Riviera”. They not only reinforced the illusion that holidaymakers at these camps were on holiday abroad, but they also contributed to the perception of the camp as an autonomous entity. Building further on this reference, these postcards boasted the holiday camp’s most important attributes as if they were unique points of interest, designed for photo-ops.



Figure 05: Zilvermeer postcard, date unknown.

(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).



Figure 06: Zilvermeer postcard, date unknown.

(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).

Holiday camps also possessed their own “urban” amenities to ensure that holidaymakers would not have to leave the camp grounds during their stay. *Hengelhof* had – alongside its administrative offices – a restaurant, a bar and a lounge for communal activities, all combined in one large building, while *Zilvermeer* built separate structures to house its administration, bar, restaurant, library⁴⁵ and even its own (modest) supermarket. Several of these amenities were organised along a wide boulevard, which replicated a modern, urban street, designed for car mobility, complete with parking spaces and benches in front of the “public buildings”. There was even a (public) phone booth.

Both camps also delineated places to perform religious ceremonies. At *Hengelhof*, open-air masses were held for the campers during the weekend:

There was an open-air chapel [...] next to the pool. It had an altar, which was a thick table of about one to two meters long, with a crucifix on top of it. [...] Back then, we would all attend mass. [...] There were two masses; one on Saturday evening at 6 pm and another one on Sunday morning, before lunch. [...] Everyone would bring their own chair. When it rained, we all wore a raincoat or an umbrella, but, no matter what, mass was held.⁴⁶



*Figure 07: 'Urban' street at Zilvermeer, approximate date: early 1960s.
(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).*



*Figure 08: Entrance to the main building in Hengelhoeft.
(source: KADOC, Leuven – collection: Vakantiegenoegens).*

A similar story is told by the holidaymakers of *Zilvermeer*, where campers could attend mass in a “chapel”: “My nephew played the organ and we had a choir, which practiced in the chapel. It was a kind of concrete shack [...] which was quite large. Every Sunday morning, around 10 am, it was packed with people.”⁴⁷ Belgian holiday camps thus not only possessed most of the facilities that contemporary small villages had but – in spite of

their focus on nature and “authenticity” – they also eloquently echoed the contemporary changes that were taking place in Belgium – the invasion of village life by elements of modernity, such as cars and supermarkets. The camp possessed all the necessary traits to create the illusion that it was an autonomous, utopian place in its own right which offered “modern” comfort in a natural environment that was to enable holidaymakers to experience a more authentic way of life. To achieve this goal, holiday camps cleverly adopted a selection of concepts (such as the aforementioned emblems and holiday postcards) and several architectural features (such as fences and gates), which demarcated these grounds as independent entities where one could temporarily live a life of freedom and authenticity.

Enacted Utopia

The holiday camp was, however, more than just a utopian retreat; it also provided a testing ground for emerging patterns of behaviour that were part of the social rise of the workers’ class. These camps were initially set up as affordable answers to the new need for leisure spaces. Even though all workers obtained one week of paid holiday after 1936, which increased to two weeks around the mid-twentieth century, few of them in these early decades were able to put this newly gained free time to “correct” use. Many at first used their *congés payés* – much to the dismay of the government – to tidy up around the house, to do odd jobs or to earn some extra money. Despite the legislation, most lacked the economic capacity to pay for a “real” holiday: “The lodging capacity does not meet the demands that the recent social legislation has created [...]; the standing of the existing [domestic] facilities does not accord to the desires of the workers and the price for a stay [in these existing facilities] exceeds the means of most [workers].”⁴⁸

By providing subsidies for the construction of large holiday infrastructures, the government hoped to bridge this gap. In 1949, the General Assembly for Tourism wrote in its annual report: “Only [the development of] large holiday resorts which are able to accommodate a large clientele can guarantee a price that is within the reach of the masses.”⁴⁹ When, starting from the late 1950s, such (government-funded) holiday resorts gradually opened their doors and workers started to frequent them, many found themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Most had never been on holiday before and thus did not know “how to” holiday. A sense of displacement enabled them to experiment with new behavioural patterns – a real-life version of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*.⁵⁰

Early postcards and photographs of visitors at these holiday camps depict men in costume, with long trousers and necktie, paddling on water bicycles and women in their Sunday dress with high heels, ploughing their way over sandy beaches and through forests. These outfits differed substantially from the daily attire they wore to work or to carry out household chores. While the government and social organisations promoted family holidays as a time to return to nature and to a more authentic way of being, it was adopted by holidaymakers (in the holiday camp) as an opportunity to enact a type of modernity. To go on holiday meant: to travel by car, to purchase novel camping gear and to show your modern self to your peers. Holiday camps perfectly accommodated such behaviour. Nature within these camps was not rough or wild, but rather a “domesticised nature, especially adapted for leisure purposes”. Jeannie Kim also pinpoints this peculiarity in her paper on *Mission 66*, a project set up by the American government to “modernize the park system and update its facilities”.⁵¹ According to Kim, this park system was designed to be experienced by the family in the car or on trails specifically designed to accommodate women in high heels. Kim argues that the great outdoors thus became a “comforting domestic interior, a reassuring space, with dependable trails, labels, narratives, photo opportunities, and orientation-movies.”⁵² Likewise, the increasing comfort available on the camping grounds – where tents gave way to caravans and later to mobile homes, equipped with kitchen, bathroom, television and even laundry facilities – signifies the tendency of many campers to increasingly treat



Figure 09: Zilvermeer postcard, depicting men in costume on water-bicycles, date unknown

(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).

their holiday place as a “home away from home”: Returning each and every weekend, furnishing the place with beautiful things, decorating it, making it more and more comfortable, were activities shared by many habitués of the camps.⁵³



Figure 10: Women in fancy dress at Zilvermeer, date unknown.

(source: *Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol*).

From a social point of view, post-war holiday camps – paradoxically – have much in common with commercial shopping malls that popularised in the same period. Both developments provided spatial centrality, public focus and human density – paramount capacities in a time when rapid urbanisation induced a loss of social cohesion, particularly in Flanders, the region where these two camps are located. Many of the holidaymakers at these camps cherished this newly found community spirit and soon became “regulars” who returned annually and who also frequented the camps outside of the summer holiday period. This enabled the formation of organisations and clubs. *Zilvermeer*, for instance, had its own marching band (*Muziekkapel*) and *Hengelhoeft* its own bike club. The enactment of holidaying thus did not limit itself to dress codes and personal rules of conduct; it also led to experiments in group behaviour. A remarkable example of such enacted group behaviour, came to the fore during an interview, when a camper described how at *Zilvermeer*, a group of adult men – the interviewee included – gathered in a club, which on a voluntary basis organised games, initially for children and youths, later on also for adult campers. They not

only set up football tournaments between the different “vicinities” of the camping ground, but they also enacted robberies and abductions as a form of play. Within this club, the members had given each other code names, which were used during games and activities.⁵⁴ What was in fact staged inside the holiday camp was a romanticised version of “traditional” village life. It was inclusive, based on solid community ties and it allowed for experimentation.

Life inside the holiday camp was, however, a far cry from a truthful reproduction of village life. It was an idealised version of it. Delinquent behaviour or disturbing conduct, which could negatively affect the pervasive atmosphere of relaxation and leisure inside the camp, was instantly suppressed. The village was – comparable to the mall’s interior space⁵⁵ – repackaged in a safe, clean and highly controlled form. This almost Orwellian control in the holiday camp was not only sustained by the camp’s governing board, it was also bolstered by the “community” of fellow holidaymakers, who had it engrained in their minds that deviant conduct had no place in this leisurely environment. This was graphically expressed by one interviewee who described a quarrel that occurred between two men during festivities at the camp:

At a certain point, two groups were formed around two men that were quarrelling. [...] They obviously had too much to drink as they stood at the centre of the dance floor [...] soon everyone became quiet and people started asking each other what was going on. I approached these men and told them: “This does not happen here. Stop fighting. We are here to have fun”. As I positioned myself in-between them, one of them [...] throws a punch and hits me right in the face. This blow was of course destined for the other guy, but since I had come between them [...] when the other campers saw this, they immediately jumped up and drove these two [quarrelling men] apart. Thereafter, within a time frame of one hour, both men and their families were evicted from the holiday camp by the camp’s governing board and were told to never return.⁵⁶

This anecdote rapidly brings to mind the society that Thomas More described in his influential book *Utopia*. The novel is characteristic of utopian models that imagine the gathering of a collection of like-minded individuals who share much in common. Utopia in More’s book is an island with only one entrance and one exit. Only those who belong to this island know how to navigate their way through the treacherous openings safely and unharmed. The post-war holiday camp is, however, not an entirely truthful

translation of More's idea(l)s. The utopian world that is evoked within the boundaries of the holiday camp is specifically designed to offer its vacationers an escape from outside reality. Post-war Belgian holiday camps staged a "blissful" atmosphere. They not only provided the necessary scenography and props, but also the essential regular "cast": the personnel. For instance, the head of *Zilvermeer* obtained the title "director" (*regisseur*),⁵⁷ a term directly borrowed from the theatre jargon and a straightforward reference to the holiday camp as a stage upon which leisure life was enacted. Many holiday camps also had guards – a "bright and breezy" alternative to armed forces. At *Zilvermeer*, these guards wore green uniforms, equipped with shiny white handgun holsters, which were always empty since they were not allowed to carry firearms. This "costume" gave them the appearance of – as one interviewee noted – a hybrid between a police officer and a scouts leader;⁵⁸ an association that eloquently mirrors their function. They were the prompters (or *souffleurs*) of the holiday camp, who ensured that no one participating in the play fell out of character and that the show was not disrupted.



Figure 11: *Zilvermeer* guard, date unknown.

(source: *Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer*, Mol).

Staged Heterotopia

Without dismissing or even downplaying the validity of the previous two readings, perhaps the most pertinent understanding of these post-war holiday camps is offered by Foucault's powerful idea of *Des Espaces Autres* or *Of Other Spaces*. In this 1967 address, Foucault describes how every culture and every civilisation produces

real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, or effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. In contrast to the utopias, these places which are absolutely other with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias.⁵⁹

Foucault lists a number of heterotopias, for instance: the honeymoon trip, the cemetery, the sauna, the motel and adds “[q]uite recently, a new kind of [...] heterotopia has been invented: vacation villages”. Foucault continues that these heterotopias have “the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other.”⁶⁰ This citation offers a valid point of departure to elucidate why post-war holiday camps adopted elements of both “traditional” dwelling patterns (village life) and of post-war suburban housing developments.

Clear references to “traditional” dwelling patterns were introduced into the holiday camp in the form of mental constructs. Inwardly, these camps signalled safety, shelter and retreat, and provided holidaymakers with a sense of meaning and an effective anchor. The holiday camp met an acute need for sociability that was experienced by (sub)urban dwellers. They became places to revive social and cultural life and to counteract modern isolation. Within the confines of the camp, campers aimed to reproduce a romanticised version of a community based lifestyle that was gradually disappearing due to the post-war *diaspora* and increasing “capsularisation”: “[Inside the camp] we had a core of friends. [...] we would have a barbecues⁶¹ together and in the evening, the men would play cards [near one caravan] while the women chatted near another.”⁶² A similar story is told by the holidaymakers of *Hengelhoeft*: “When the weather was nice, we were of course all outside. But, when we had bad weather [...] we would gather in a group of four or five [men] to play cards while the women knitted or

chatted.”⁶³ These accounts are consistent with what Wang has called the search for intra-personal authenticity, in which holidaymakers search for the authenticity of, and between themselves.⁶⁴

However, not only the campers applied themselves to recreating a more community-based lifestyle. Holiday camps also contributed by offering local services that were previously common practice, but which after the 1960s gradually disappeared due to the proliferation of supermarkets and chain stores. During the summer, a soup car and an ice-cream wagon would tour the *Zilvermeer* camping ground on a daily basis to offer campers fresh soup and delicious ice cream in cones.⁶⁵ Beyond these “little” day-to-day services, larger events were also recreated inside the holiday camp. Every summer, there was an “authentic” Flemish carnival (*Vlaamse kermis*) at *Zilvermeer* and, on 15 August – an official Belgian holiday in honour of the Assumption of Mary – campers and camp executives would organise a parade that would traverse the camp grounds:

On the 15th of August, we would organise a costumed parade, which cut across the camping grounds, through the streets, while playing music. [...] We would gather at the large square near the *Zilverbos*, where we would every year also organise a Flemish carnival, with activities such as “can knockdown” [*pottengooien*] [...] We also had a real merry-go-round.⁶⁶

This reproduction or “re-enactment” of a kind of community life associated with “tradition” did not hamper or contradict the modern suburban lifestyle that was introduced on the holiday camp’s camping grounds. The layout of these drive-in camping sites clearly resembled the pattern of a suburban neighbourhood, complete with cul-de-sacs, rows of (semi-)identical free-standing dwellings, front gardens, ornate porches and – eventually – individual picket fences. One of *Hengelhoef*’s campers noted:

Every so often, a new set of regulations was introduced on the camping grounds. [...] This of course required a complete reorganisation. Everyone had already planted a garden, sowed grass [...] and that all had to change. Everything was gradually regularised, which was, on the one hand, positive, but which, on the other hand, meant that we lost some of our freedom. Behind our trailer, we had built a small shack to store our bikes, to place Anny’s [the wife of the interviewee] washing machine and tumble dryer and so on. But, of course, everyone just built according to how they saw it fit. After a while, it all became a bit too much.⁶⁷

An analogous evolution occurred at *Zilvermeer* where, by the end of the 1970s, the director of the camp, clearly annoyed by the freewheeling that took place at the camping ground, addressed a letter to all campers, stating:

Following an inspection of the camping ground, we have noticed that many trailers are in severe violation of camping ground regulations: [...] Any form of fencing or planting is strictly prohibited. All fixed constructions, additions, lean-tos, shacks, windscreens, walls, concrete tiles, masonry in cement, plaster or any other material, poles, and so on – in short, all materials that do not belong on the camping ground – should be removed.⁶⁸



Figure 12: Simulated “suburban street” at Zilvermeer. Each (individual) plot is clearly delineated by a picket fence and all plots have their own driveway, approximate date: late 1980s.

(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).

Also the caravans that campers resided in during their stay became increasingly luxurious year-by-year. While in the early 1960s, most vacationers camped in a tent, a rapid evolution occurred over the course of only two decades: from tent to trailer. These trailers were equipped with a cooker, a sink, a toilet and a dresser. Advertisements even referred to these trailers as “moveable country houses”. The spatial setup at the camping ground thus bore a clear resemblance to the spaces of everyday domesticity in suburban developments, and encouraged the playing out of a selective and idealised version of domestic life and of the gender roles it entailed.⁶⁹

Petites tentes et
grandes caravanes

Les campings en Belgique

2. - Sur un emplacement loué à l'année, l'abri du nomade est devenu une résidence secondaire que l'homme repeint et que la femme astique

L'effacement des vacances, caractéristique des temps modernes, est un signe inquiétant (1). Si le travail et les loisirs se succèdent de manière harmonieuse, au rythme adapté à chaque personnalité et que l'habitat fut spacieux, aéré et pittoresque, le besoin irrésistible de partir n'existerait pas.

On changerait peut-être de décor, au moment où l'on ressentirait l'envie de bouger. Mais ce ne serait pas la hantise qu'il faudrait, sur le calendrier encore vierge, les petites croix indiquant les jours de fête, les ponts et la période de congés payés. Pourvu dire, le 1er janvier, si le 11 juillet, l'homme bien ou mal ou si le 15 août permettrait de prolonger le week-end montre qu'on vit mal pendant l'année, que le métier est un gagne-pain dont on ne retire que des satisfactions matérielles.

Malheureusement, c'est le cas de la majorité des travailleurs. Très rares sont ceux qui exercent une profession répandue

à une vacation incline dans des circonstances, correspondant à leurs goûts. Il se sont généralement des privilèges qui peuvent aussi diviser de la période et du genre des vacances tous libérés.

Les autres, même en vacances, vivent dans la contrainte. L'aspect nouveau du camping le montre.

Il pourrait être la formule idéale : le retour à la nature, la redécouverte du silence, de l'effort physique, d'une existence simple, la joie de l'imprévu, des itinéraires choisis au hasard, des petites étapes à travers des régions inconnues, des rencontres avec le gens du pays ou avec des maîtres venant d'autres villes, d'autres pays et avec qui on pourrait fraterniser.

Cent mètres carrés au soleil ou 80 mètres carrés sous un ciel nuageux

Mais c'est la théorie. En pratique, c'est la suite des bureaux,

Allemands, Hollandais, Belges, Français du Nord ou Parisiens vers un but bien déterminé, toujours situé au sud : 100 m au soleil, sur une plage de la Méditerranée ou de l'Atlantique, d'où ils ne bougeront plus pendant le temps de leur vacances.

C'est en ce qui concerne les campeurs belges qui ne quittent pas le pays, l'occupation pendant le week-end et les mois d'été sans un ciel nuageux avec belles éclaircies, de 80 m à l'année au lieu d'installer une petite maison sur roues, baptisée de caravane. On est loin des origines du camping et du caravaning qui remontent à la fin du 19ème siècle en Amérique du Nord : au début du 20ème siècle en Europe ; la roulotte, en 1928, est devenue la seconde résidence des citadins.

Marie-Paule KETELBUTERS

(Suite en page 2)

(1) Voir « La Cité » du 3 août.



● La majorité des emplacements de camping est occupée en Belgique par des caravanes sans roues. Leurs propriétaires les ont transformées en petites maisons.

Figure 13: Newspaper article: "At the camping plot that one rents for a year, the nomad's shelter has become a second home that the men repaint and the women clean".

(source: La Cité, 4 August 1978).

25

E. INDAGRA

AUTOSTRAD

WETTEREN

Le Bungalow de vos rêves... De Bungalow van uw dromen...

"CHALET MOBILE,,

Une maisonnette complète pour seulement : 75.000 F.

Een huisje voor slechts : 75.000 F.

Figure 14: Advertisement for a "Chalet Mobile", which loosely translates as a "moveable country house", date unknown.

(source: KADOC, Leuven – collection: Vakantiegenoegens).

There is a substantial amount of literature on gender and architecture that argues that the spatial set up of the built environment tends to underscore, support and reinforce conventional gender norms, while occasionally subverting them.⁷⁰ This is also true for these holiday camps. Based on the interviews, we discovered that gender-specific behaviour abounded in these sites:

Marcel: “When the weather was nice, our team, all men, would go bike-riding every day. We would make a tour of about fifty to sixty kilometres and by the time we came back home, we would take a quick shower and lunch would be ready.” [...] Anny, the wife of Marcel adds: “But at lunchtime, they were all there. I never had to call out for them. At twelve o’ clock, they were there and that was all very normal.”⁷¹

This gendered behaviour at the camping ground was confirmed by all other interviews in which both husband and wife participated.⁷² It clearly illustrates the enactment of the middle-class ideal of “his work, her house”, in which the husband is the sole financial provider for the family and the wife tends to the house and children. Images of the nuclear family on holiday were incessantly woven with the quotidian and the corresponding gender patterns of this middle-class family ideal were repeatedly affirmed in commercial advertisements, popular media and holiday brochures distributed by social organisations.



*Figure 15: The “nuclear” family on vacation at Zilvermeer, date unknown.
(source: Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer, Mol).*



Figure 16: Advertisement for the Bidon Bleu – Camping Gaz, clearly depicting distinct gender roles on the campsite.

(source: KADOC, Leuven – collection: Vakantiegenoegens).

Nevertheless, research has shown that this middle-class *petit-bourgeois* ideal, which in the post-war period became entangled with the concept of the nuclear family, was not consistent with everyday practice in Belgium; certainly not in working-class families. In their daily lives, women could rarely afford to stay at home while their husbands earned a living. Many worked outside the home or earned an income by doing paid work in their home.⁷³ Well aware of this situation, the government, along with social organisations, explicitly tried to promote family “holidays for all”, which meant that also women were to be freed from their daily responsibilities: “family-events [should] arise in which mothers, free of care for their family, can enjoy a couple of peaceful days during which they can relive their honeymoon weeks”.⁷⁴ Holiday camps strongly encouraged this “holiday for all” concept by offering services that could alleviate women’s chores. For instance, at *Zilvermeer*, there was a “camping kitchen”, which was basically a take-out window, where campers could take their empty cooking pot and purchase a prepared meal for the whole family at a reasonable price.⁷⁵ This emancipatory ideal was, however, not shared by the holidaymakers at the holiday camp, who in practice adopted distinct gender roles. Holidaying at these camps gave workers and their families the opportunity to enact a modern middle-class ideal wrapped up in a suburban lifestyle. In her book on the connection between political policy and family dynamics in the United States during the Cold War, historian Elaine Tyler May asserts that embedded in the bliss of the nuclear family, housework was seen not

as work but as personal fulfilment. Performing household chores became a satisfying labour of love.⁷⁶ Such dynamics can also be traced throughout these holiday camps, where mothers continued to cook, to do the laundry, to look after their children, to clean up and to do the dishes (albeit often in more simplified and less labour intensive ways) – and were seemingly happy about it.⁷⁷

The holiday camp thus functioned as a testing ground, where people could “try on” facets of modernity and see how they fit. It, on the one hand, delineated a place to recapture a “lost” sense of community; a romanticised version of “traditional” village life, while on the other hand enabling holidaymakers to reproduce a form of middle-class suburban living.

Even within the attempt to (re)create a streamlined version of society within the boundaries of the camp, these post-war holiday camps, however, also revealed some less attractive characteristics. Constructed to allow those with modest salaries to enjoy a “real” holiday during their two weeks of *congés payés*, these camps – merely by existing – confirmed, and in a certain sense perpetuated, the social inequalities that existed in the Belgian society in the immediate post-war period. Even though their primary objective was to provide affordable holidays for workers, a secondary, far less righteous, motivation for creating these camps was alluded to by former Minister of National Education and Culture, Henri Janne in his address to the conference of the High Council for Social Tourism:

The privileged groups of society were immediately [after the approval of the 1936 law on paid holidays] confronted with the breach that it made of [former] social conventions. They mocked the “paid holiday” and referred to its beneficiaries with the same name [“paid holidaymakers”], as they did not deem them capable of spending their holidays in a decent manner. They frowned upon these “paid holidaymakers”, who – in their Sunday dress (for them this was a real holiday!) – arrived at holiday destinations, armed with their lunchboxes [...] (these workers were not rich). They were seen as an occupation army.⁷⁸

Post-war holiday camps thus offered blue-collar workers a controlled safety zone that guaranteed homogeneity. They sought to “reassure” through the erasure of difference, thus offering some sort of alleviation for workers who found themselves on the lower ranks of the societal ladder. Inside these camps, they experienced an erosion of conformist social stratification. “Standing” or “respect” in the holiday camp could not be gained through professional achievements or material wealth, but through the ability of

holidaymakers to socialise and their willingness to participate in group events. The post-war Belgian holiday camp was, in this sense, an antidote to civilisation, while at the same time offering a training ground for learning to enjoy relaxation and leisure.

Conclusion

This paper contrasted the concepts and idea(l)s that underpinned the development of government-funded holiday infrastructure in Belgium with the socio-spatial practices that occurred within it. It presented different readings of the post-war holiday camp, ranging from “autonomous universe” and “enacted utopia” to “staged heterotopia” and – through these readings – exemplified how this “type” of vacation infrastructure was characterised by a certain ambiguity. The government developed these camps to offer workers and their families the opportunity to elope their murky day-to-day surroundings, spend their holidays in close contact with “pure” nature and experience authentic qualities that were deemed lost under the pressure of modern daily life; holidaymakers saw these camps as a “stage” to re-enact (a romanticised version of) “traditional” community patterns, while simultaneously experimenting with – and acting out – facets of modernity. Going on holiday was perceived by the new leisured masses as a modern act *pur sang*. Holidays at these camps were not just seen as an opportunity to reconnect with nature and pursue authentic experiences, but were also appropriated as a way of recapturing a lost sense of community while experimenting with facets of modernity and a modern middle-class suburban lifestyle.

Belgian post-war holiday camps in some ways prefigured the theme parks and gated communities that – later on – became the subject of vehement postmodernist criticism. They offered experiences that were – in many ways – staged and artificial. “Rough” nature inside these camps was actually a domesticised environment that accommodated holidaymakers as modern *flâneurs* and the personnel at these camps fulfilled specific roles to ensure a spotless play. The post-war holiday camps in a way thus contradicted their envisaged goals of purity and authenticity. This, however, did not seem to bother holidaymakers. What counted for most was that inside these camps, they could (temporarily) appropriate a small plot of land and enact their own, idealised version of a modern middle-class suburban lifestyle in a somewhat natural setting, enjoying the opportunity to relax and learning to be a tourist.

Notes

1. Joseph Laurent Rens, "De Stakingen in juni 1936 en de Arbeidersvakantie," in *Veertig Jaar Sociaal Toerisme 1937-1977*, ed. Joseph Laurens Rens et al., (Brussel: Commissariaat Generaal voor Toerisme, 1978), 6.
2. Erik Hansen, "Depression Decade Crisis: Social Democracy and Planisme in Belgium and the Netherlands, 1929-1939," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1981): 293.
3. Wouter Dumont, "Fenomenologie van de Massamanifestaties in België in de Jaren Dertig," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 1-2 (1999): 145-226; Ronny Gobyn and Winston Spriet, eds., *De Jaren '30 in België: De Massa in Verleiding* (Brussel: ASLK, 1994).
4. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, "Introduction," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 15.
5. An interesting publication on the history of holidaying in the West is Orvar Löfgren's *On Holiday. A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
6. Ellen Furlough, "Making Mass Vacations: Tourism and Consumer Culture in France, 1930s to 1970s," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (1998): 247-86; Tom Avermaete, "Traveling Notions of Public and Private: The French Mass Tourism Projects of Candilis-Josic-Woods," *Oase. Architectural Journal* 64 (2004): 16-46; Gary Cross, "Vacations for All: The Leisure Question in the Era of the Popular Front," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (1989): 599-621.
7. Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy, *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (Oxford: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986); Sylvia Endacott and Shirley Lewis, *Butlin's 75 Years of Fun!* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011).
8. Hasso Spode, "Fordism, Mass Tourism and the Third Reich: The 'Strength through Joy' Seaside Resort as an Index Fossil," *Journal of Social History* 1 (2004): 127-155; Shelley Baranowski, "Strength through Joy: Tourism and National Integration in The Third Reich," in *Being Elsewhere*, ed. Baranowski and Furlough, 213-36.
9. Literary theorist James Buzard traced the emergence of a notion of tourism as distinct from travel in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Tourists are considered more socially diverse than their elite predecessors and were frequently identified as "part of the modern mob". For a detailed account of this differentiation, see: Baranowski and Furlough, "Introduction," 1-31.
10. Tony A. J. Veal, *The Elusive Leisure Society. School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism Working Paper Series* 9 (2009): 25.
11. Joffre Dumazedier, *Vers une Civilisation du Loisir* (Paris: Editions Seuil, 1962).
12. Robert Bendiner, "Could you stand a four-day week?," *The Reporter* 2 (1957): 10, quoted in Veal, *The Elusive Leisure Society*, 25.
13. The High Council for Social Tourism was founded by Royal Order of 26 January 1939. Its task was to "to promote the development of touristic activity [in the country], using all appropriate means" and to "offer all the beneficiaries of paid vacations and their families the appropriate means to spend their vacation in a healthy, relaxing and educational manner". [Author unknown], *Commissariaat-Generaal voor Toerisme, Jaarlijksch Verslag dienstjaar 1939* (Brussel: Commissariaat-Generaal voor Toerisme, 1939), A2.
14. Marcel Vandewiele, "Toespraak," in Rens et al., *Veertig Jaar Sociaal Toerisme*, 20.
15. Martine Vermandere, "A Socio-Historical Approach to the Phenomenon of Children's Holiday Camps at the Flemish Seaside," in *Architecture and Society of the Holiday Camps. History and Perspectives*, ed. Valter Balducci and Smaranda Bica (Timisoara: Orizonture Universities, 2007), 113-20.

16. Following the Regent's Order of 2 July 1949, the government could award subsidies to provinces and municipalities for the building and renovation of youth hostels, camping facilities, recreational zones, artificial lakes, etc. for up to 60% of the total building cost.
17. We described the different approach to holidaymaking in socialist and catholic holiday camps at length in: Janina Gosseye and Hilde Heynen, "Designing the Belgian Welfare State 1950s to 1970s: Social Reform, Leisure and Ideological Adherence," *Journal of Architecture* 5 (2010): 557-85.
18. *Vakantievreugde* was established in 1936. Its task was to provide affordable holidays for workers affiliated with the Socialist Labour Union. *Vakantiegoogens* is the Catholic counterpart of *Vakantievreugde*. It was founded in December 1936, as a subsidiary of the Christian-Democratic workers union. See: Emmanuel Gerard, *De Christelijke Arbeidersbeweging in België, 1891-1991. Volume 2* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991); Luc Peiren and J-J. Messiaen, *Een Eeuw Solidariteit 1898-1998: Geschiedenis van de Socialistische Vakbeweging* (Brussel/Ghent: Ludion, 1997) for more information regarding these two organisations.
19. KADOC (Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving), Leuven, *Vakantiegoogens*-Archive, E-Kampeersclubs, box 89, "Ontwerp Programmaverklaring Kampeertoerisme voor de Erkenning van het Kampeertoerisme als een Volwaardige Vorm van Sociaal Toerisme," 15 December 1975, 1.
20. For an interesting account on family holidays in the post-war Soviet Union, see: Diana P. Koenker, "Whose Right to Rest? Contesting the Family Vacation in the Post-War Soviet Union," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (2009): 401-25.
21. Authenticity has been an important research topic in sociological studies of tourist motivations, beginning with Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist. A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976). See also: Carol J. Steiner and Yvette Reisinger, "Understanding Existential Authenticity," *Annals of Tourism Research* 2 (2006): 299-318; Ning Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience," *Annals of Tourism Research* 2 (1999): 349-70.
22. Wang, 'Rethinking Authenticity,' 361.
23. Early on in the research, we discovered that basing the oral history on a broad survey was not an option for two reasons; one, neither one of the two holiday domains that we investigate in this paper preserved lists of holidaymakers dating back to the research period; and two, our target group – individuals who visited these holiday domains as adults (preferably along with their family) in the period 1950-1970 – is dwindling and neither easily detectable, nor reachable via current social networks or communication media. We therefore based the oral history portion of this paper on snowball sampling and conducted eleven in-depth interviews. Even though this number represents only a small fraction of the vast group of people who visited these campsites in the post-war period, we believe that their narratives – fragments of which we have included in this paper – along with the visual material and administrative documents that we obtained, paint an accurate picture of the 1950s to 1970s camping experience in the Belgian Campine Region. We have interviewed two employees of *Zilvermeer*, one of whom worked at the domain for more than three decades since the day it opened, and eight former campers who began frequenting these domains in the early 1960s. These campers all visited these campsites on a yearly basis for several decades. They all started frequenting the holiday domain with a tent at first, after a few years they bought a travel trailer and finally a full-fledged mobile home, which remained on the campsite the whole year around and which were also frequently used for weekend stays. All interviewees confirm – and this statement is also corroborated by the visual material that we have obtained – that by the late 1960s the greater part of the investigated campsites was occupied by mobile homes and that only a small tract of land was left for

- tents and travel trailers. The majority of our interviewees were working-class people whose occupations ranged from truck driver to printer to soldier to office clerk.
24. A full overview of all Belgian government-funded camps for social holidays that were constructed in the post-war period cannot be produced, as it is (1) difficult to trace which camps received governmental subsidies for their construction; and (2) impossible to determine precisely when these camps opened their doors.
 25. Some of the attractions that Schellekens had planned for the *Zilvermeer* were never realised. Others were only constructed years (or even decades) later and often no longer follow the original plan and guidelines that Schellekens devised in 1956. Koen Vandebos, *De Zee in de Kempen. Veertig jaar Provinciaal Domein Zilvermeer* (Antwerpen: Provincie Antwerpen, 1999).
 26. Boudewijn Reggers, "Vakantiebehoeften en -wensen: Een Onderzoek bij de Verlofgangers van het Vakantiedorp 'Hengelhoef," (unpublished Master's thesis, Centrale Hogeschool voor Christelijke Arbeiders, Heverlee, 1965); Kwinten Krauwels, "Het Recreatiepark in Vlaanderen anno 1958-1978. Een Architectuurtheoretische en Sociaalhistorische Analyse," (unpublished Master's thesis, K.U. Leuven, Leuven, 2008); Pascale Petitjean, "Vakantiedorp Hengelhoef," (unpublished Master's thesis, Provinciaal Instituut voor Voedingsindustrieën en Toerisme, Anderlecht, 1983).
 27. Krauwels, "Het Recreatiepark in Vlaanderen," 89.
 28. By 1978, this camping ground was enlarged to 400 camping pitches. Krauwels, "Het Recreatiepark in Vlaanderen," 106.
 29. [Author unknown], "Hengelhoef (Houthalen). Er is nog plaats in Hengelhoef...", *Vakantie 1964 - Bijvoegsel aan De Volksmacht*, 15 February, 1964, 1.
 30. Aad Kroon, *Camping: Een Praktische Gids voor Modern Toerisme*, (Brussels/Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1959) 9-10.
 31. John Alexander Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany. Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
 32. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
 33. Jeffrey Jacob, *New pioneers: The back-to-the-land movement and the search for a sustainable future* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1997).
 34. Pascal De Decker, "Het Gewapend Beton van het 'Wilde Wonen' in Vlaanderen," *Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 4 (2005): 22-25; Bruno De Meulder, Jan Schreurs, Annabel Cock, Bruno Notteboom, "Patching up the Belgian Urban Landscape," *Oase. Architectural Journal* 52 (1999): 78-113.
 35. Provincial Recreational Camp *Zilvermeer*, unclassified archive, [author unknown], *Toeristisch- en Ontspanningscentrum te Mol. Verslag over de Indeling van het Terrein* (Antwerpen, 1956).
 36. Ellen Furlough and Rosemary Wakeman, "La Grande Motte. Regional Development, Tourism and the State," in *Being Elsewhere* 348-372.
 37. *Ibid.*, 349.
 38. More information regarding the sand excavations in Mol and its surroundings can be read in: René Beyst, "De Kwartzandontginningen te Mol. Een Historische Terugblik Aansluitend bij 125 Jaar S.C.R.-Sibelco," *Molse Tijdingen* 6 (1998): 184-213; Evelien Moonen, 'De Geschiedenis van de Zandontginning in Mol,' *Molse Tijdingen* 13 (2005): 276-87.
 39. Interview with Marcel Schoeters and Anny Vandeperre, former campers at *Hengelhoef* (Mortsel, 27 March 2010).
 40. Interview with Stanny Heylen, former camper at the Provincial Recreational Camp *Zilvermeer* (Mol, 25 January 2011).

41. Barbara Penner, "Rehearsing Domesticity. Post-war Pocono Honeymoon Resorts," in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, ed. Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Badydar, (London: Routledge, 2005), 106.
42. Interview with Jef Diercken and his wife, campers at the Provincial Recreational Camp Zilvermeer (Mol, 25 January 2011).
43. In the post-war period, a stark increase in car ownership occurred. While in the 1940s only one in (approximately) 75 Belgians owned a car, by the early 1960s, this figure had already increased to one in twelve. One decade later, one in four Belgians owned his/her own car, which basically implied that a majority of Belgian households had a car at their disposal. See: http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/statistieken/cijfers/verkeer_vervoer/verkeer/voertuigpark, consulted on 23 January 2013.
44. Interview with Ward Vanhoof, former guard of the Provincial Recreational Camp Zilvermeer (Mol-Sluis, 1 February 2011).
45. Interview with Vic Van Roosbroeck, former camper and librarian at the Provincial Recreational Camp Zilvermeer (Leopoldsborg, 24 February 2011). See also: Jan Hertogs, "Vakantieboeken, the Sequel: Vic (80) Houdt al Dertig Jaar een Campingbibliotheek Open," *Humo* 3495 (28 August 2009): 42-5.
46. Schoeters, Vandepierre, interview.
47. Heylen, interview.
48. [Author unknown], *Commissariaat-Generaal voor Toerisme, Jaarverslagen 1948* (Brussel: Commissariaat-Generaal voor Toerisme, 1948), 93.
49. [Author unknown], *Commissariaat-Generaal voor Toerisme, Jaarverslagen 1949* (Brussel: Commissariaat-Generaal voor Toerisme, 1949), 27.
50. *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* is a 1953 French comedy film directed by and starring Jacques Tati.
51. Jeannie Kim, "Mission 66," in *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Post-war Culture, from Cockpit to Playboy*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Annmarie Brennan, Jeannie Kim (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 170.
52. Beatriz Colomina, "Introduction," in *Cold War Hothouses*, 12-13.
53. Marie-Paule Ketelbuters, "Petites Tentes et Grandes Caravanes. Les Campings en Belgique," *La Cité* (4 August 1978): 1-2.
54. Heylen, interview.
55. Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 23.
56. Heylen, interview.
57. Interview with Alex Lefevere, active staff member of the Zilvermeer since 1979 (Mol, 24 February 2011).
58. Vanhoof, interview.
59. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997): 332.
60. Ibid.
61. The act of barbecuing already exemplifies how the romanticised re-enactment of village life inside the holiday camp was "contaminated" by elements of modernity. Notwithstanding that "barbecuing" was a modern activity, it was easily adopted in these camps because it was considered "authentic" – grilling raw meat on an open fire – and an integral component of a healthy vacation outdoors. See: Smet, "Binnenhuisinrichting, de Barbeque," *Raak* 10 (1974): 13.
62. Heylen, interview.
63. Schoeters, Vandepierre, interview.

64. Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity," 364.
65. Interview with Maria Verbocht and Christ Deelen, campers at the provincial Recreational Camp *Zilvermeer* (Middelkerke, 4 February 2011).
66. Heylen, interview.
67. Schoeters, Vandepierre, interview.
68. Archive Provincial Recreational Camp *Zilvermeer*, Mol, unclassified archive, Hendrik Verhulst, "Letter to all campers of the *Zilvermeer*," 5 February 1980.
69. Penner, "Rehearsing Domesticity," 104.
70. Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, Jane Rendell eds, *Gender, Space, Architecture. An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000).
71. Schoeters, Vandepierre, interview.
72. The interviews themselves are also indicative of these traditional gender patterns. The men invariably dominated the conversations while the women only lent their support by interjecting affirmative comments.
73. Hannelore Vandebroek and Leen Van Molle, "The Era of the Housewife? The Construction of 'Work' and the 'active' population in the Belgian population census (1947, 1961 & 1970)," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 1-2 (2010): 51-83.
74. [Author unknown], *De Arbeidersvakantie in het Raam van de Vrije Tijd* (Brussel: A.C.W., 1952), 5.
75. Alex Lefevere noted that this facility was mostly used on Sundays – the Catholic "day of rest". The camping kitchen ceased its activities around the early 1980s when virtually all campers had their own cooking appliances in their trailer and the clientele was dwindling. Lefevere, interview.
76. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1998).
77. This can be illustrated by a quote from a 1978 Belgian newspaper article, in which a female camper states: "*J'aime nettoyer. Et sinon, je m'ennuierais parce que mon mari passe ses journées à la pêche.*" ("I love cleaning. And if I didn't, I would only be bored, as my husband passes his days at the fishing pond.") Source: Marie-Paule Ketelbuters, "Petites Tentes et Grandes Caravanes. Les Campings en Belgique," *La Cité*, 4 August, 1978, 1-2.
78. Henri Janne, "Toespraak," in *Veertig Jaar Sociaal Toerisme*, 13-14.

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