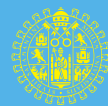


EVA GARCÍA REDONDO Y LEONCIO VEGA GIL
(Coords.)

LIBER AMICORUM

HOMENAJE AL PROFESOR JOSÉ MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ



Ediciones Universidad
Salamanca

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Homenaje al Profesor
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND ARCHITECTURE FOR AN OPEN SCHOOL IN THE SECOND POST-WAR PERIOD IN ITALY

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I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE for having been offered the opportunity to participate in this remarkable project aimed at celebrating, with a publication in his honour, my friend and colleague José Hernández Díaz. With his research and his many academic initiatives, José honoured the panorama of studies in history of education at international level. I remember the wide range of conferences he organised in Salamanca, which I attended on various occasions, and his commitment as a member of the Doctoral School in Pedagogical Sciences at the University of Bologna.

Therefore, I would like to offer a brief contribution concerning my recent research on the relationship between education and architecture for an open school in the Second post-war period in Italy. The aim of the study, which is still underway and subject to further exploration, is to prove that, in certain crucial moments, namely soon after World War 2 and during the Sixties, new demands for changes in the Italian society generated the need to rethink the traditional school building, in order to create an open and community-oriented school.

This is an issue on which architects, urban planners and pedagogues converged, giving rise to significant collaborations, starting from the construction of the Italian-Swiss Village of Rimini in April 1946, which would be considered in the

following years a reference point for a model of school, conceived as a centre for human and social development and promotion.

1. THE ITALIAN-SWISS VILLAGE IN RIMINI: A MODEL OF COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PEDAGOGY AFTER WORLD WAR 2

Inspired by the requests for an open and community-oriented school, the Italian-Swiss Village was established in Rimini in 1946, on the ruins of a city that was almost completely destroyed by bombs. The initiative was conceived by the teacher from Zurich Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996), in collaboration with Architect Felix Schwarz (1917-2013).

The hope of implementing an educational experiment based on self-government and on participation underpinned a floor plan and architectural layout that, as Schwarz once again said, had to attempt to «*enhance the value and experiment with all the possibilities of democratic education*»¹.

Firmly believing and repeatedly saying that a different form of education can change the world, Margherita Zoebeli referred to the joint intention, developed with the Swiss architect, to launch a pedagogic and social experiment that would finally be free of the authoritative and oppressive forms of the past. The Village environment thus became the main mediator of education, allowing its inhabitants to carry out activities centred on discovery, invention and experimentation, without any strict plans imposed from the outside.

Following the tragic events of wars and dictatorships, a clear awareness had developed that, considering the dichotomy between the Spartan *school-barracks* model focused on educating the soldier, and the *school-agerà* one inaugurated by Socrates, the latter had to be chosen to foster an open and, finally, inclusive society.

The famous wooden shacks, conceived for military purposes, now acquired a new and different purpose, based on an aesthetic and pedagogic organisation of spaces, grounded on the principles of an active and cooperative school. Margherita Zoebeli underscored the fact that the floor plan and architectural layout were intended to ensure both individual and social development. The kindergarten and elementary school offered the opportunity to experiment with cooperation as a daily practice. Desks were replaced by tables seating four or eight students to encourage group work. Concerning furnishings, it is important to consider the precise description provided by Ms. Zoebeli. It reveals the original combination of Steinerian, Deweyan, Agazzian, Montessorian and Freinetian elements.

¹ SCHWARZ, F., «Il soccorso operaio svizzero per i bambini riminesi», *Cittànuova. Settimanale indipendente di ricostruzione*, I, (1946). p. 2.

Open institutions, as opposed to the typical closure of totalitarian regimes, soon proved to be an ambition shared by both architects and pedagogues alike, with the intention of implementing a renewal compared to the rules previously established by fascism. In fact, in June 1947 the magazine *Domus* dedicated a monograph issue to the architecture of schools. Entitled *Architetturaeducatrice* [Educational Architecture], it witnessed the collaboration of leading pedagogues and architects, who believed it would be possible to combine progressive pedagogy inspired by Dewey and the new architecture. On that occasion, Architect Giancarlo de Carlo (1919-2005), who would later collaborate with Margherita Zoebeli in expanding the Village in Rimini, claimed that the school should be the heart of social life in the contemporary city, the driving force of its development, concluding that «*the town planning problem of the school [would] become the town planning problem of the city*»².

However, the Italian institutional approach to school buildings did not change much, compared to the past. Indeed, Bruno Zevi bitterly stated in the columns of the magazine *L'Espresso* that Italy was the most uncivilised country concerning schools, as very little had been done to transform the many existing schools-barracks into open communities that would encourage social exchange³.

2. THE 1960S AND THE NEW REQUESTS FOR RENEWAL IN THE SCHOOL-EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Starting from the early Sixties, taking into account the changing needs of the Italian society, the necessity was felt to encourage reflection on the relationship between education and architecture. The Italian-Swiss Village in Rimini was taken as the landmark by leading educators of the time, who emphasized its innovative feature as an ideal space for the life of a children's community. Several municipal administrations, particularly those in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, resorted to Margherita Zoebeli's consulting services to create kindergartens. We can note that, starting from that specific moment, the architecture of kindergartens was particularly receptive to the inspirational criteria of active pedagogy, decidedly far more than that of the elementary school and subsequent schooling levels for which spatial organisation did not seem to change much⁴.

As mentioned, these requests were given much consideration for kindergartens, namely in municipalities governed by progressive administrations. For instance, those sponsored by Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) in Reggio Emilia in 1963 stood

² DE CARLO, G., «La scuola e l'urbanistica», *Domus*, 220, (1947), p. 17.

³ ZEVI, B., «Scuole e/o caserme. Assurdo riservarle ai soli allievi», *L'Espresso*, 30 dicembre 1956, p. 239.

⁴ PIRONI, T., «Il rapporto pedagogia/architettura per una scuola aperta, dal secondo dopoguerra agli anni Settanta», *Paideutika*, XV, (2019) pp. 45-58.

apart and, on his death, formed the international centre called *Reggio Children Approach*. Architecturally conceived as a living organism, flexible and adaptable to ever new needs, their environment had to favour a strong relational atmosphere: «*The old educational theory of separation makes room for the new educational theory of participation*»⁵. Hence a central role was assigned to a common space (the *square*), surrounded by various studios/laboratories intercommunicating via filter spaces (verandas and full-length windows), which replaced walls in order to share the feeling of belonging to the entire community at all times. The aesthetic and architectural experience of *Reggio Children* involved the social participation of the whole city.

It was only after 1968, starting from the Seventies, that conventional architecture based on an «authoritarian» and «monumental» school model was further questioned. As De Carlo wrote:

*«In architecture, organisational structures can be defined authoritative when the organisation of spaces does not encourage the community to interact and communicate at all times and on absolutely equal terms. The formal configurations must be considered monumental when they adapt to the aesthetic codes of institutions and do not welcome the free expression of users»*⁶.

In fact, De Carlo introduced the concept of *school in the city*, to be implemented via the *disintegration* of the school building and its distribution in the urban fabric. He distinguished between specific or «core» educational activities to which dedicated spaces had to be allocated, and «crown» activities, such as laboratories, to be integrated into the city. Hence, he envisaged social and cultural activities inserted in the school, and school activities disseminated in the town's environment.

The inspiring concept was a school open to the city, able to transform itself into a permanent educational centre, since, according to De Carlo, only the interaction between school, city and territory would have allowed multiple educational experiences. The image of a school open to the community, to the city, was adopted by the Italian regulation (Ministerial Decree 18-12-75), which is still in force today. Besides recognising the deficiencies of the conventional classroom, which only allowed teacher-led lessons, it introduced the concept of *educational continuum*, envisaging the connection with the city's social and cultural activities. However, it must be acknowledged that, to date, the current regulation is generally not applied. The innovative experimentations described have not been implemented on a wide scale, with evident discrepancies between practice and theory.

⁵ FILIPPINI, T., VECCHI, V. (Eds), *I cento linguaggi dei bambini*. Reggio Emilia, Reggio Children (1996).

⁶ DE CARLO, G., «Ordine-Istituzione-Educazione-Disordine», *Casabella*, XXXVI 368-369, (1972) pp. 65-73.

Consider, for instance, the town planning decision to decentralise school buildings to the outskirts of the inhabited area, thus excluding schools from the urban fabric.

Today it is even more urgent to offer concrete answers to the great challenges of our time by seriously considering the relationship between pedagogy and architecture, believing that the accuracy of the internal spaces of a school, conceived as a genuine pulsating heart of an educational community, tuned into the surrounding landscape, entails a more inclusive climate and stronger motivation to learn. Finally, it is the most effective antidote against vandalism, bullying and racial intolerance.

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