Editorial 2

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Scuole – schulen – schools – écoles – escuelas

Abstract

The recent health emergency has marked a moment of crisis for the class unit that has constituted, since the first half of the nineteenth century, the minimum dimension through which our culture has organised the process of mass education. In the light of these conditions and following a debate that has been going on for more than a decade, it therefore seems unnecessary to return to the subject of schools. We have therefore decided to dedicate this issue of FAM to the school, setting it out along three lines of study, which more than others we felt it was important to try to tackle in parallel: pedagogy, language and society, identifying three areas that are in themselves autonomous, but also certainly dependent in the construction of learning spaces and in the daily experience of those who attend them, starting with children.

Keywords

School — Pedagogy — Language — Society

It seems far from pointless to go back to talking about school.

The recent health emergency has marked a moment of crisis for the *class unit* which, since the first half of the nineteenth century, has been the minimum dimension through which our culture has organized the mass education process.

The idea that a child's education should be mediated by a circumscribed community that accompanies him/her in the learning process has been put to the test by recent prescriptions on social distancing.

This concerns both pedagogical and spatial aspects – the remit of architecture.

It did seem that the *city* could offer an answer to this crisis, in line with an idea of exchange between school and city that derived from the best experiences of the Sixties and Seventies. However, even this hypothesis, which prospectively seemed the most reasonable and capable of profoundly redesigning the current limits of the Italian school, soon evaporated, became unsettled among countless bizarre and imaginative solutions, and was forced to withdraw in the face of the didactic and spatial inertia of a far from dynamic educational establishment.

At this point, after the phase of contingent responses aimed at guaranteeing the return of students to the classroom, it is time to tackle the issue using a critical and scientific approach, trying to patiently unravel the complexity of an activity which is naturally subject to different disciplinary and ideological polarizations. Above all, it appears necessary to avoid the shortcut of proclamations and clichés, even those with a progressive pull.

That nothing will be the same as before, as we keep repeating to ourselves in chorus, is valid as an act of faith or an apotropaic formula and nothing else.

The images accompanying the editorial and the following three interviews reproduce some of the ceramic tiles designed in 1997 by the students of the primary schools in Fagnano Olona, under the guidance of the teacher A. Vaccaro.
Photo by Francesco Pavan.

The times of architecture are not those of pandemics nor those of pedagogy, which in turn do not even correspond to the times of language. And the times of architecture are certainly not the times of the city.

Therefore, every society that takes care of educating the new generations must strive to periodically link together these areas, while shunning any scientific rigidities.

Consequently, it was decided to focus this issue on three lines of study, which more than others it seemed important to try to address in parallel: pedagogy, language and society; three areas that are autonomous in themselves, but also unquestionably dependent on the construction of spaces for learning and on the daily life of those who frequent them, first and foremost the children.

Pedagogy because it is more evident than ever that only a virtuous relationship between pedagogy and architecture can shape spaces for learning in which the environment itself is an "educator", and because architecture is capable of favouring the narrative dimension of the teaching experience, to become a place of life, meetings, relationships and learning.

Language because if – with Loris Malaguzzi – «the environment is decisive with respect to acquisitions of an affective, cognitive and linguistic character», never as now, in such a complex and plural society, does the codification or re-codification of a common linguistic code of learning, be it spatial or strictly verbal, seem to show implicit albeit profound relationships between the design vocabulary used for schools and verbal language, itself subject to continuous modifications due to cultural and social changes.

Society because the ideal objective of an educating society that takes on the responsibility, together with and beyond the school, for educating children finds its natural counterpart in the increasingly pressing demand from society to have children – and therefore future adult citizens – who are capable of acting responsibly, creatively, innovatively and effectively, individuals capable of acquiring new skills in a lifelong-learning process.

And in the background, always the motives of architecture, because this is an architecture journal and because it is believed that an effective point of view could be offered to pedagogues, educators and administrators starting precisely from the experiences of certain architects who, more than others, knew how to give the school theme a civil, symbolic, and figurative slant each time, starting precisely from the educational capacity of the space, its social value, with a searching attention to those ancestral intuitions which children, sooner than adults, develop towards the world they live in.

The following essays, which in the initial idea of the editors should each have belonged to one of the three lines of study proposed, actually demonstrate that the reasoning developed cannot be easily pigeonholed or harnessed in pre-established categories, and that, precisely for this reason, every author makes continuous forays into the field, driven by a need to build the conditions for a complex reasoning which clarifies the multiplicity of the elements at stake when it comes to schools and school buildings. This is evident from the three interviews – conducted respectively by Riccardo Rapparini, the editors of this issue, and Micaela Bordin, which were supposed to respectively open the three sections and which, on the other hand, in the final draft, it seemed more effective to group together.

In the first one, Beate Weyland introduces the major theme of the relationship between pedagogy and architecture, underlining the need to build exchange modalities between the different disciplines capable of producing (maieutically) virtuous design processes, starting from the construction of a common language: «In the book *Designing Schools. Between Pedagogy And Architecture*, written together with Sandy Attia and published in 2015, we wanted to indicate five keywords at the intersection between pedagogy and architecture, which are often interpreted differently by the two worlds, and which can make it easier to understand how necessary it is to create a common language. *Form, space, flexibility, beauty, innovation*, are terms widely used both in the pedagogical and architectural fields, especially when it comes to school projects. But what meaning do they have for the school world and what for designers?».

In the second interview, Silvana Loiero reflects in structural terms on the very decisive function of language in the construction (of thinking) of and about the world and how, in relation to this, it is necessary «to talk about the learning environment in a broader sense, not only as a physical environment but also as a cultural and mental 'space of action', in which interactions and exchanges take place between students, objects of knowledge, cultural and technical tools, and teachers, and how it is possible to have meaningful experiences on cognitive, affective-emotional, interpersonal and social levels».

Lastly, in the third and final interview, Marco Rossi-Doria extends the outlook and shows the need to elect the city along with its spaces as a privileged place for democratic learning, starting from the profoundest thing a school can represent for society: «From the point of view of the 'city', the 'school' is a stronghold of emotional unity as well as ethics, I would

even go so far as to use the adjective 'republican' for a city, that is, it is the stronghold of the Republic in the city's neighbourhoods. This is a target which lies behind everything. And this is the first thing».

It is clear, therefore, that reflecting on these premises, the attempt of these brief introductory notes can only be that of recognizing convergences between seemingly distant areas, identifying analogies, and bringing out common reflections, which the reader of the essays that make up this issue will be in turn free to reorganize according to other criteria and distinct categories.

The analysis of such general issues as the relationship between pedagogy and architecture in Italy starting from the period after WWII is addressed by Claudia Tinazzi, in whose essay we read the desire to look at recent Italian achievements in the light of the twentieth-century tradition to reconstruct the thread which links this cultural tradition to the contemporary experiences of the "Alto Adige case". In fact, for the author, only within this large fresco is it possible to understand the exceptional nature of this unique aspect of the Italian panorama and the reasons why the attempt to export this model «has generated an interesting process of methodological contagion so far [...] whose final results, at times uncertain, raise questions [...] on the impossibility [...] of entrusting the transformation development of our school system only to the competition process and to the 'tailor-made' training of the teaching staff», rather suggesting a slow but necessary time «to give space and body back to the school».

A slow time to which other authors also refer for whom the *city* is the privileged viewpoint from which to look at a specific school. The essay by Anna Irene Del Monaco traces the Roman experience of school and university

buildings from the end of the nineteenth century to the Seventies, underlining the close link between the projects analysed and the city, seen as an essential cognitive background and cultural context of comparison for the definition – also linguistic – of the single interventions. In fact, referring to the first decade of the twentieth century, Ciro Cicconcelli, one of the protagonists of that experience of the renewal of studies on school building, complains that there was still no «qualified level of studies on school building and that the main reference was still churches and barracks, respectively elaborated on the basis of the British and German traditions», and that, «if in terms of urban planning there are some general principles, there are none as regards the sizing of schools and the distribution of these within the urban fabric. School buildings are built without realizing the importance they have for the urban organism and without clearly seeing the economic, pedagogical and social aspects framed by the very life of the community».

Moving on to Turin, Caterina Barioglio and Daniele Campobenedetto present some typological experiments conducted since the 1970s through school buildings serving the residential expansion areas built following Law no.167 of 1962 and developed through the P.E.E.P. council-house building programmes. The authors analyse the question of the search for repeatable models as a possible solution to the problem of school buildings, but also underline how «the practices of contemporary use of these buildings reflect the disconnection between the tools – distributive, constructional, normative – put in place by planners and administrators, and the stresses to which the school infrastructure is subjected by the transformation of the city and educational culture». According to the authors, this separation of uses, with respect to didactic models and original policies, opens up the need for narratives capable of *recomposing their complexity*, fully exploiting the «transformation potential of an infrastructure widely distributed throughout the municipal territory».

Although with a different slant, Annalucia D'Erchia questions similar issues, analysing the figure of Arrigo Arrighetti and the numerous school projects he developed when he was Technical Office Director of the Municipality of Milan: «These are unfinished structures, dominated by growing patterns according to models that have constant, recognizable, familiar elements and alternate flexible parts with others that are not, parts dedicated more specifically to the education of learners and parts with a collective and public vocation, some of which are also open to the city [...] It is precisely in these experiences, therefore, that the specific sensitivity of the relationship between the school and the city develops, both from the point of view of the social role it assumes and in the urban design which it defines».

Straddling architecture, society and pedagogy, Francesca Serrazanetti tells the story of Giancarlo Mazzanti's firm (*El Equipo Mazzanti*) and the strong impact on the Colombian suburbs of his projects, capable of "acting" in a performative sense on the space they define and on the community who inhabit it. By clarifying the methods and motives for the associative and compositional "games" implemented in the projects of El Equipo Mazzanti, the author shows how «in going beyond the physicality of the project and its formal execution, architecture plays a guiding role in the transformation of the city and in the construction of citizenship. In Giancarlo Mazzanti's design methodology, the architectural space becomes, we can say, a learning mechanism in itself».

The Community – like those on which the work of El Equipo Mazzanti "acts" – is also the keyword to interpret the work of Hassan Fathy, a necessary dimension so that, through an idea of cooperation and self-construction, a fairer economic and social structure can be envisaged. Viola Bertini writes: «Training the inhabitants, teaching traditional construction techniques, revitalizing local crafts through craft schools, encouraging spontaneity in the field of applied arts are actions that therefore take on a profound social and cultural significance. Social, because a possible development model was envisaged which, despite being far from reality at times, staked a claim for a civil value for architecture. Cultural, because the handing down of ancient knowledge to the new generations was an attempt to build a renewed identity».

Starting from similar themes – so much so that his essay opens with a long quote from Hassan Fathy – Camillo Magni analyses the cultural, social and architectural context of certain particularly significant experiences in the context of international cooperation processes in the Global South countries. Looking at these processes with a politically critical gaze, interested in identifying the differences between "colonial" practices and interventions capable of promoting the development of local communities through architecture, particularly through the construction of school buildings, Camillo Magni states: «Looking at the school buildings built in the last decade as a part of international cooperation [...], despite the heterogeneity of places and professionals, we can find a common design matrix capable of combining contemporary languagesand vernacular atmospheres. [...] In a somewhat chaotic form, these projects demonstrate an uninhibited way of drawing on very distinct formal repertoires, through which to combine diverse cultures [...]. The positivism that supported the Movement [...] here leaves room for a pragmatic proceeding by those who set themselves the goal of solving concrete problems through architecture and who are not afraid to contaminate the project in order to accept all its contradictions».

The transitive role that the school organisms of the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, El Equipo Mazzanti, or the achievements of International Cooperation in the Global South countries have towards their social environment, is also the *educational prototype* of Guido Canella, which inspired Tommaso Brighenti in his essay. These prototypes, in fact, which have their origin in the experiments on primary school conducted during the course of Ernesto Nathan Rogers on which Canella was assistant and which would find their maturity in the years of the Milanese *theatrical system*, are, to use Canella's own definition, real *formal embryos*, in which «the dictation of

society became more incisive». In short, organisms which programmatically freeze the linguistic, material and stylistic declination in order to «arrive at a 'cognitively founded' choice, in which the student could 'indulge, to the point of binding, respect for a precise program and a decisive transformation', arriving at a synthesis consistent with a formal or construction logic». The theme of experimentation on language and of the compositional processes that determine the ways of formulation is instead deepened by Elvio Manganaro's essay in speculative and figurative terms on the thread of geometric abstraction as a tool, which in itself proves – at least for modernity – intrinsically pedagogical, although – the author notes – «it is as if the linguistic combinatorial process, that is the insistence on the configurational possibilities of a language reduced to a few elementary signs whose meaning resides in the world, had severed the mystical impact of abstraction».

And if the concept of space as a "third educator" permeates many of the essays in this issue, it is certainly a central theme which transversally unites Claudia Tinazzi's reflections on the state of the art of Italian school building, the subtle discussion of the projects of El Equipo Mazzanti conducted by Francesca Serrazanetti, as well as Lucia Pennati's narration of Dolf Schnebli's experience in Locarno and the particular relationship between a progressive vision of education and the design of spaces assigned to it, with respect to which the pedagogical capacity of architecture and art find concrete expression: «The architect [...] takes an active role by designing a flexible and anti-authoritarian educational environment, which from its composition down to the single detail, provides teaching and self-teaching tools. The educational environment prepares the child to be part of a new society and the educational function of architecture is not carried out exclusively by a spatial distribution or technological choices, but also through the presence of numerous works of art».

Starting from similar considerations, Francesca Belloni's essay reflects on the relationship between pedagogical instances and the layout of educational spaces starting from Le Corbusier's experience in Marseilles, to then analyse some contemporary realizations of the European panorama, identifying recurring typological and distributive patterns in which the ability of architecture to organize spaces proves to be a valuable pedagogical tool, while maintaining its precise disciplinary characteristics: «This means returning in some way to the origins of the architectural discourse to distinguish between settlement principles, typological variations, and spatial qualities in relation to the ways of life and their characteristics. All of this through some cases, not necessarily exemplary, but certainly indicative of the possibilities implicit to the discipline».

It is from this same point of view that Andrea Ronzino's analysis of Alison and Peter Smithson's project for the University of Sheffield extension seems to begin; apparently distant from the proposed theme, in reality this precise analysis of the project shows how the architecture conceived by the Smithsons introduces organizational, distributive and linguistic devices conceived in relation to the scholastic use and the education which it embodies and in some way must be able to promote, by producing a space *in between*, i.e. from time to time open to interpretation: «The *space between,* open and fluid which [...] can be recognized in the virtuous antagonism between *drawing* and *word* appears to represent a 'field of action' within which we are called to move, decode and interpret the language of architecture of Alison and Peter Smithson. A suspended 'space' – but always and forever available – in between».

Despite the difference in interpretations and the diversity of the themes dealt with, what is important to underline is that each individual essay and the reciprocal interrelationships within the three sections and between the sections themselves show how in this issue dedicated to school architecture the historical, design and critical gazes overlap and intertwine to outline a composite framework inspired by numerous sources and – precisely because this is an architecture journal – attempts to show the means – be they typological choices, linguistic declensions, constructive elements, theories, words or drawings – through which space can become a "third educator".

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