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The training of teachers in the National Museum of School (Museo Nazionale della Scuola), Florence (1925-1945)

Izobraževanje učiteljev v Narodnem šolskem muzeju (Museo Nazionale della Scuola) v Firencah (1925-1945)

Izvleček

Prva razstava iz leta 1925 v Narodnem šolskem muzeju (Museo Nazionale della Scuola) v Firencah, ki je prikazovala šolsko življenje in napredek v izobraževanju, je leta 1929 postala stalna razstava Državnega didaktičnega muzeja (Museo Didattico Nazionale). Glavna naloga muzeja je bilo nadaljevanje usposabljanja učiteljev prek predstavljanja domiselnih didaktičnih eksperimentov, ki so jih spretno zasnovali eksperimentalni didaktični centri in šolski muzej. Razstavni prostor je tako postal prostor za prikaz napredka šole in točka centralizacije in nadzora za didaktično prenovu italijanske šole, kjer naj bi se usposabljal učitelj, zlasti osnovnošolski učitelj, ki je imel ključno vlogo pri prenosu nacionalne identitete in s fašistično ideologijo skladne kulture novim generacijam skozi medij izobraževanja.

Abstract

The first exhibition in 1925 at the National School Museum (Museo Nazionale della Scuola) in Florence, that illustrated school life and educational progress, became in 1929 a permanent form as the National Didactic Museum (Museo Didattico Nazionale). The primary task of the museum was meant to be that of furthering the training of teachers by showing them the ingenious didactic experiments cleverly devised by the Experimental didactic centers and scholastic museum. The exhibition space thus became a display area for the progress of the school and a point of centralisation and control for the didactic renewal of the Italian school, where the schoolmaster was to be trained, in particular the elementary schoolmaster, who was invested with a key role in the transmission of national identity and of a culture consistent with Fascist ideology, to the new generations through the medium of education.

Ključne besede: šolski muzej, učiteljstvo, Florence, zgodovina izobraževanja

Key words: school museum, teachers, Florence, history of education

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My purpose is to study the training of teachers in the School Museum of Florence in this historic period. The research, conducted through an analysis of the available sources and suitable materials (bibliographic, archival, photographic), shows in emblematic fashion how an entire series of communicative, theatrical and propagandistic strategies was actuated, and was then filtered through the educational, pedagogic and social potential of the museum, so as to construct a collective awareness adapted to the exigencies of the new society promoted by the Fascist Regime.

In this connection, the present research project has as its objective an historical investigation of the role and contribution of museums in the informal educational process, focusing on a particular example, the National Museum of the School in Florence, setting it in the context of the history of Italian museums in the twentieth century and in particular in the two decades of Fascism.

The museum is a cultural institution that acts as custodian of a society's official historical memory, a semantic and epistemological accumulation, actuated according to motivations and choices that reflect the anthropological-cultural system of those who produce it, who deem certain objects as worthy of being preserved not for their utile value but for their significance as 'semiophores', which according to Krzysztof Pomian¹ play an important role in organising the transmission of values, the passing on of a civilisation's traditions to future generations, as theorised by Jacques Le Goff² who makes the connection between 'monument' and 'document'.

The principal European museums have participated in the definition of the new bourgeois knowledge and, in the reading of Michel Foucault,³ they also function, together with other political, social and administrative institutions, through rational classifications, in the relations between knowledge and power; control and order that totalitarian regimes, in their permeation of society, have not failed to invoke.⁴

An emblematic case was the *Museo Pedagógico Nacional* in Madrid, which was founded by the educationalist Manuel Bartolomé Cossío in 1882. It played an important role in the development of educational studies, but was obliged in 1941 to unite its own activities with those of the CSIC (*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas*), the Franco government's organ of political control.⁵ The regime most attentive to the school-museum relationship was that of the Soviet Union, which set up new museums in the service of universities and research institutes, where courses were organised with the involvement of teachers and scholars, in organic relationship with the world of state schooling.⁶

1 Krzysztof Pomian, *Che cos'è la storia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001).

2 Jacques Le Goff, *Storia e memoria* (Torino: Einaudi, 1972).

3 Michel Foucault, *Sorvegliare e punire* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), p. 161.

4 Peter Vergo, *The New museology* (London: Reaction Books, 1989).

5 María Bolaños, *Historia de los museos en España* (Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 1997).

6 Giovanni Pinna, "I musei nelle dittature: Germania, Italia, Spagna," *Nuova Museologia* n. 21 (2009), p. 2.



National School Museum (Museo Nazionale della Scuola) in Florence, since 1925
(<http://www.indire.it/home/storia/> accessed 10. 10. 2019)

To return to the case of Italy, the museum-school relationship took concrete form from the mounting of a national didactic Exhibition in 1925 in Florence, which displayed educational and pedagogical material from Italian schools, with the objective of casting light on the results obtained by the Gentile Reform of 1923, reflecting the regime's desire to bring schools into line with Fascist principles. The Exhibition that illustrated the Italian school life and educational progress in 1929 was given permanent form as the National Didactic Museum at the University of Florence, a space for the observation, documentation and study of the progress of the national culture, for the training of teachers. In 1937 it changed its name to National Museum of the School, being more concerned with the development of new ideas and experimentation in the pedagogic field, with the historical study of national education and of Italian educational institutions, revealing the role historically played by Italian civilisation and culture and evaluating the nation's educational tradition.⁷

The exhibition space thus became a display area for the progress of the school and a point of centralisation and control for the didactic renewal of the Italian school, where the schoolmaster was to be trained, in particular the elementary schoolmaster, who was invested with a key role in the transmission of national identity and of a culture consistent with Fascist ideology, to the new generations through the medium of education.

We know that Fascism took an interest in education, having identified it as a strategic point in the development of future Fascists, paying special attention to elementary education.⁸

In the educational sector there was an attempt to centralise at the didactic level, and to identify strategic structures able to control the school, putting a

7 Statute of 26 August 1937 which set up in Florence a "National Didactic Museum" attached to the Royal University.

8 Jürgen Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1996). Ester De Fort, *La scuola elementare dall'Unità alla caduta del fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).



National School Museum (Museo Nazionale della Scuola) in Florence, since 1925
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brake on its autonomy. The school, taking on the nature of an ideological apparatus, was to ensure the complete adherence of young people to Fascism, in accordance with the triple injunction “credere, obbedire, combattere” [believe, obey, fight]. With the dissolution of all trade unions in 1926, the teachers’ associations were re-grouped into “la corporazione della scuola”, the association for Fascist teachers.

The primary task of the Museum was meant to be that of furthering the training of teachers by showing them the ingenious didactic experiments cleverly devised by the scholastic museum and experimental didactic centres.

The *Carta della Scuola* [School Charter],⁹ issued in 1939 by Giuseppe Bottai, Minister of National Education 1936-1943, was a series of reforms of the national school system, expressing the Regime’s educational principles, that was intended to confer on the school a corporate nature under direct state control. In practice only a small number of its directives were applied. In the text of the ‘XXIII Dichiarazione’ that deals with teachers, emphasis was placed on the importance of preparing schoolmasters by means of experimental didactic centres and scholastic museums.

The scope of the new national didactic centres,¹⁰ set up to encourage study and research for the renewal of the school system, was “to document personages and events of the Italian educational tradition; to constitute the power-centre for the didactic renewal of the Italian school”.¹¹

The Florence centre was the first, and it was supposed to co-ordinate the other ten new national and provincial didactic centres at the various school lev-

9 Approved on 15 February 1939. G. Bottai, *La Carta della Scuola. Principi, fini e metodi della Scuola fascista*.

10 L. 30 novembre 1942 n.1545 – Istituzione di Centri Didattici. Pubblicata nella G.U. n.6 del 9 gennaio 1943.

11 Decreto interministeriale 25 gennaio 1943.

els, to be set up in the entire national territory.¹² Bottai intended them to bring about the renewal of the school through the training of teachers.¹³

The national centres were to specialise in one sector and to deal with particular technical problems such as school buildings, professional orientation and didactic material, but also programmes, teaching materials, textbooks. Among the purposes of the national centres were those of developing studies of didactic methodology, conducting research on educational subjects, encouraging the development and experimentation of new methods of teaching, and making provision for the professional training of teachers at all levels.

The provincial didactic centres conducted research into the problems of the school, they were supposed to deal especially with rural elementary schools, and to evaluate individual experiences, involving the families with courses of educational culture. They were also supposed to organise conferences and exhibitions, seen to the collecting of didactic materials, form pedagogical libraries and promote publications.

The centres, endowed with juridical personality in public law, were intended as technical organisms to assist the Minister and the Provveditori in studying the performance of any activities of a pedagogical or didactic nature. "Ciascun Centro Didattico è sottoposto alla vigilanza del Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale: ogni attività dei Centri deve essere preventivamente autorizzata dal Ministero" [Each didactic centre is subject to the control of the Ministry of National Education: every activity of the centres must be previously authorised by the Ministry].¹⁴ Moreover, a superior controlling body was set up.

The activities of each centre were directed by trusted men appointed by the Minister, not for particular qualities or merits, but because they could be relied on to implement his directives. "In this way the centres constituted a docile instrument of political intervention endowed, albeit indirectly, with certain powers of stimulus and control over the activities of the teaching body".¹⁵

The Minister Bottai instituted,¹⁶ annexed to the Museo Nazionale of Florence, the National Didactic Centre and Pedagogic Library,¹⁷ under the direction of Nazareno Padellaro, who was a member of the Commission for the drafting of a single state text for the elementary schools. The Museum¹⁸ differed from previous initiatives in its significance and duties;¹⁹ it was in fact an instrument for the training of

12 Dina Bertoni Jovine, *La scuola italiana dal 1870 ai giorni nostri* (Roma: Ed. Riuniti, 1972).

13 Giovanni Bottai, "Funzione dei Centri Didattici nella rinnovata scuola fascista," *Annali dell'ordine elementare* XVII n. 2 (1941), p. 69.

14 L. 30 November 1942 n.1545 art. 15.

15 Rino Gentili, Giuseppe Bottai e la riforma fascista della scuola (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1979), p. 146.

16 Royal decree 19 July 1941.

17 The inauguration took place on 28 October 1941.

18 The Museum was set up as an 'ente morale' by royal decree on 11 October 1941.

19 "Il Centro Didattico Nazionale di Firenze," *Annali dell'ordine elementare* XVII n. 2 (1941).

teachers, who during their visit could see the didactic experiments and make use of the content elaborated and of the pedagogic innovations of the centre.

It corresponded to the corporate ideal of the Fascist state, and the national centre in Florence “always represented the most important fulcrum of official educational activity”,²⁰ offering itself as a model, thanks also to the presence of the educational Museum, which by combining tradition and innovation represented a *trait-d’union* for studies in the pedagogic and educational field, tracing a line of continuity between past and future. The combination of the Museum and the Centre aspired to demonstrate “that progress of pedagogic and didactic studies which the School Charter envisages and promotes”.²¹

In practice it was a technical organism of Fascist education capable of orienting, directing and co-ordinating the entire national didactic movement. Its usefulness was emphasised also in practical terms, as for example in the case of the room of school architecture, or the room of statistics, which supplied data for orienting research. Lastly, the exhibition was also intended to reconstruct the history of the school by means of old texts, portraits, original documents and copies, educational works, etc, illustrating didactic activity in various historical periods.²² Although we do not possess information on the numbers of visitors to the museum, nor is there concrete documentation on the methods of teacher training,²³ there exists an original film of the period²⁴ that shows a typical day’s visit to the museum.

The Florence Centre published a bulletin on children’s book, *Libri per la Scuola dell’Ordine elementare*, intended as useful for forming a national literature. The pages “devoted to books of fairy stories, books of fables, books of war”²⁵ accorded with the introduction of the single state text, and with the militarisation of the schoolboy that was summed up in the phrase “libro e moschetto balilla perfetto” [book and gun, perfect little member of Fascist youth organisation].

One of the National Didactic Centre’s first initiatives regarded the experiment in the contemporaneous teaching of two or more classes, entrusted to a single schoolmaster, to be tried in village schools.²⁶

The problem of teacher training was a well known and much debated subject: despite the efforts that had been made, there was poor preparation and a

20 Bertoni Jovine, *La scuola italiana dal 1870 ai giorni nostri*, p. 452.

21 “Il Centro Didattico Nazionale,” *Annali dell’ordine elementare* XVII n. 1 (1941), p. 37.

22 Pamela Giorgi, *Dal Museo Nazionale della Scuola all’INDIRE* (Firenze: Giunti, 2010), p. 38-43.

23 The following course is mentioned: “Il Centro ha già iniziato la sua attività pedagogica con un corso di conversazioni didattiche dell’ispettore centrale Giorgio Gabrielli sull’insegnamento della lettura e della scrittura in prima classe. Alle lezioni intervennero centinaia di maestri e tutti i direttori e ispettori della provincia di Firenze.” “Il Centro Didattico Nazionale di Firenze,” *Annali dell’ordine elementare* XVII n. 2 (1941), p. 127-128.

24 Archivio Storico Istituto Luce Centro Didattico Nazionale. “*Firenze - Come funziona il Centro Didattico Nazionale*” 05/01/1942 - Co211, duration 00:01:59 b/n – sound.

25 “Il bollettino di letteratura infantile” *I Diritti della scuola* n. 4 (1941): 64.

26 Circular n. 40588 of 7 January 1942.

low cultural level in the great majority of middle and upper school teachers, and especially among the elementary school teachers whose shortcomings and deficiencies were due to a number of factors, but particularly to past educational policies. Moreover, the Gentile reform of 1923 had suppressed the system of apprenticeship.

The School Charter, which by adding a year of practice to the four-year course extended to five years the period spent at an Istituto Magistrale, was according to Bottai a way of giving importance "... to didactics, understood no longer in philosophical but in technical terms, and precisely as state didactics institutionalised by the creation, in accordance with the law of 20 November 1942, of the ministerial didactic centres".²⁷ We may conclude that the institution of the National Didactic Centre in Florence, and its attached museum, were connected to the new reform of the Istituto Magistrale, which on its own had proved inadequate for the training of schoolmasters.²⁸

"Teaching does not exhaust its educational duties by the strictly limited performance of scholastic activity because its work must be formative and therefore integrated by those forms of cordial collaboration with the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio [Fascist Youth], to whom the Duce has entrusted the delicate task of the military and political education of the young."²⁹ In practice, as Lamberto Borghi has affirmed, "His *Carta della Scuola* of 1939 was principally intended to make of the school a source of cheap manpower for the Fascist economy and turn it into an instrument of the corporate State."³⁰

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27 Tina Tomasi, *Idealismo e fascismo nella scuola italiana* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1969) 176.

28 "Centri Didattici e preparazione dei maestri elementari," *Annali dell'ordine elementare* XVII n. 3 (1942).

29 Circular of 12 February 1939 "Rapporti tra scuola e GIL".

30 Lamberto Borghi, *Educazione e autorità nell'Italia moderna* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1951), p. 299.

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Summary

The training of teachers in the National Museum of School (Museo Nazionale della Scuola), Florence (1925-1945)

Chiara Grassi

I am carrying out a research into the history of education, with particular focus on school memories and formative institutions and I am currently following a project which is documenting the experience of the School Museum of Florence. The first Exhibition of 1925, that illustrated school life and educational progress, became in 1929 a permanent form as the National Didactic Museum. The primary task of the Museum was meant to be that of furthering the training of teachers by showing them the ingenious didactic experiments cleverly devised by the Experimental didactic centres and scholastic museum.

We know that Fascism took an interest in education, having identified it as a strategic point in the development of the future fascist man, paying special attention to elementary education. The exhibition space thus became a display area for the progress of the school and a point of centralisation and control for the didactic renewal of the Italian school, where the schoolmaster was to be trained, in particular the elementary schoolmaster, who was invested with a key role in the transmission of national identity and of a culture consistent with Fascist ideology, to the new generations through the medium of education.

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