Prerequisites for Post-Disaster Regeneration of Historic Cities

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Editors

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The *Fa' la cosa giusta!* exhibition

Generating synergies between schools, museums, and our shared heritage

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Abstract

Organised by publisher Terre di Mezzo, the Fa' la cosa giusta! (Do the right thing!), exhibition has been held annually in Milan for the past 16 years and is currently Italy's leading exhibition on ethical consumption and sustainable lifestyles. Throughout its history, the event has maintained a strong focus on cultural and educational processes. The 2018 and 2019 editions featured a dedicated section called SFIDE - la scuola di tutti (Challenges - a school for everybody), which explored the role of schools, education and opportunities for educational innovation, offering training sessions for teachers, students, and families alongside exhibits. The 2019 edition of SFIDE featured a new two-day event format, delivered in collaboration with the University of Milano-Bicocca's Department of Human Sciences and Education, on the educational and professional development potential of cooperation between schools and museums. In the mornings, a panel of 12 museum representatives and 12 teachers presented and discussed educational projects that had been specifically designed to explore and leverage museum resources. The characteristics shared by these projects were inclusivity, a cross-curricular approach, joint initiatives by schools and museums, and innovative teaching-learning methods. In the afternoons, selected projects were showcased, and a workshop area was made available where museum education officers and teachers could meet, share their experience, and initiate collaboration. The aim was to explore the potential avenues of cooperation between schools and museums in an informal setting. We found that an exhibition can offer a fruitful venue for the exchange and discussion of ideas and projects among museum representatives, teachers, and a diverse range of visitors. The event brought to light a range of critical situations in which leveraging cultural heritage can meaningfully contribute to fostering lasting ties between school-going children and the places where they live.

Keywords: Museum, Cultural heritage, School, Participation, Exhibition, Milan, Italy

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a novel strategy for communicating and disseminating actions jointly implemented by cultural heritage sites and schools. The underlying assumption is that museums, archives, libraries, and places of culture in general can become powerful sources of connection with one's living environment (Murphy, 2016; Marini Clarelli, 2011). This is especially so when, for a variety of reasons, people's connection with the place they live has been disrupted. Indeed, it is known that cultural assets, when meaningfully engaged with, can stimulate patterns of active participation and responsibility-taking in students and teachers as well as in members of the broader community (Black, 2005). The particularly innovative aspect of the communication and action-oriented project analysed here is the fact that it was implemented in the highly informal setting of a fair-exhibition[1] and thus in an unconventional context for addressing the theme of education and cultural heritage. This novel positioning served to bring the designers of heritage education closer to its consumers. It changed the rules of engagement by allowing the beneficiaries of cultural education offerings to come up with proposals of their own, thus giving rise to new patterns of sharing and participation. The event in question was "Fa' la cosa giusta!" (Do the right thing!), an exhibition on the theme of sustainable and ethical lifestyles, now in its 16th edition, that involves thousands of people and has generated a vast network of relationships over time, elaborated in more detail below. The concept underpinning our project is that a context like a fair, similarly to a public square (Hanru, 2019), can function as a place of genuine encounter, fostering participants' desire to learn, dialogue, exchange information, create new networks, and propose action. In an era when much educational and cultural experience is technologically mediated and/or consumed without the need for any direct exchange of ideas, we are not taking a nostalgic view of the past, but rather advocate to exploit the benefits of personal engagement fully alongside those of technology. We focus on an encounter between practitioners from a range of educational and cultural contexts that took place over two days of the fair, on 8 and 9 March 2019, within the framework of the exhibition's education section, SFIDE - la scuola di tutti (Challenges - a school for everybody). In 2019, one of the key themes explored in this section of the exhibition was heritage education and museums. The authors of this chapter were curators of a cooperation process between museums, schools and the general public. It was an experiment in an approach that can fit in the field of research into informal education (Moscati, et al., 2008), following the lead of the University's Third Mission[2] and University Social Responsibility[3]. This action aimed to involve diverse communities so that a mutual exchange of practices relating to teaching and inclusion could take place. In essence, the authors set up a community of practice whose members offered mutual

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1 Here we use "fair" and "exhibition" as synonymous terms that allow us to capture the dual nature of this event: a true fair centred on critical consumption and sustainable lifestyles, but also an exhibition with space for presentations, debates, workshops and collective action.

2 "Teaching is the first mission of universities, based on interaction with students; research is their second mission, in interaction mainly with the scientific or peer communities. With the Third Mission, universities come into direct contact with subjects and social groups other than the established ones and thus make themselves available to modes of interaction whose content and form are highly variable and context-dependent". Source: "qualità e impatto della produzione scientifica, relazione anvur 2013" (quality and impact of scientific production)

3 A research strand launched in the 2010s. Among the most motivated promoters is the Asean University Rector, whose website offers the USRS framework, www.aunsec.org.

support. Representatives of twelve museums, mainly located in the Lombardy region, together with twelve teachers, presented a series of educational projects to the public based on inclusiveness, interculturality, interdisciplinarity, research, and innovation. In addition to communicating and disseminating existing programmes, participants had the opportunity to explore collaboratively potential new educational projects across a range of areas. We believe that the informal setting in which these exchanges took place contributed significantly to their success. Hence, we begin our in-depth analysis of the event by examining its wider backdrop: "Fa' la cosa giusta!", which originated as an exhibition on fair trade and ethical lifestyles. The next section of the chapter traces the emergence and evolution of the fair, which - over its sixteen-year history - has increasingly extended and enriched its scope, in keeping with the feedback and suggestions received from participants. This process led to the involvement of museums and schools in the 2019 event and was informing plans for the 2020 edition.

8.2 The "Fa' la cosa giusta!" exhibition: past and future

"Fa' la cosa giusta!" is Italy's leading fair on critical consumption and sustainable living. It was launched in 2004 by the publishing house Terre di Mezzo, itself founded 25 years ago to tell the story of the Terre di Mezzo or the "in-between territories" where all people meet; where the social, beautiful and ugly dimensions of our world all come together; where fragility has become, and continues as a resource". "Fa' la cosa giusta!" was started with the aim of disseminating "good practices" and showcasing high quality examples of ethical and sustainable consumption and production, in collaboration with local government, civic associations and businesses. The fair is a place of encounter and dialogue with exponents of organic farming, critical fashion, responsible tourism, co-operation, sustainable mobility, and circular economies, namely, all those who promote a contemporary lifestyle that lays the ground for a sustainable future. It represents a responsible way of doing business, organising our purchases, conceptualising work, and using our planet's resources, while generating new connections and opportunities. In 2019, the three-day event involved over 70,000 visitors, 200 volunteers, 700 exhibitors, 450 seminars and workshops, and 3,500 students. In addition to Milan, where the national fair takes place, there are annual local events in the cities of Trento, Perugia and Palermo, and extraordinary, one-off events have been held in Turin, Genoa and Piacenza. Many new projects have originated in this "square", a public space which functions as a place of intersection and encounter. Among them were creative writing workshops for school children, events on the theme of critical fashion, and of course the "SFIDE-la scuola di tutti" section of the fair that is the particular focus of this chapter. A further key example is the "Scuola delle buone pratiche" (School of Good Practices), which was permanently introduced in 2010 with the aim of offering local administrators a place to learn and share good and innovative administrative practices. Many topics have been addressed under this umbrella including "Managing the local territory virtuously" and "Lawfulness and the public sector", which inspired a campaign against gambling that led to the collection of signatures in support of proposed legislation.

In sum, this exhibition offers a touchstone to those interested in developing an ethical style of living based on sustainability, nature, and a more humane economy that is respectful of all persons and rejects any form of exploitation. Sharing and debating possible alternative lifestyles, in a setting removed from consumerist and predatory

speculation, has generated the appropriate conditions for addressing various critical problems that have arisen over the fair's history. A notable example of this was the organisers' decision to engage in the theme of reconstruction following a series of major earthquakes, by offering a forum for joint reflection on the practices implemented by local authorities and ordinary citizens in the wake of the disaster, and the definition of

Fig.9.1 The Fair: Terre di Mezzo, 2019 (source: authors)

Fig.9.2 Sfide area in the fair Terre di Mezzo, 2019 (source: authors)

shared lines of action for the future.

In particular, in 2017 the exhibition hosted a conference entitled "Rebuilding a community in the wake of a deep wound such as an earthquake".[4] The initial questions posed to delegates were: What are the core elements required to rebuild a fragmented community? How can we identify reconstruction strategies that are future-oriented, while at the same time strengthening, reassuring, and empowering local communities? Over 120 people, including mayors, public administrators, experts, and ordinary citizens participated in a deeply moving encounter. It focused on the area of central Italy that had been devastated by earthquakes in August-October 2016, its suffering but dignified people, and the problems faced by local authorities, emergency services, and volunteers during and immediately after the natural disaster, as well as over the medium and long term. Key speakers at the event included Fabio Sbattella, head of a research unit specialising in emergency psychology and humanitarian intervention at the Catholic University of Milan. He defined the role of psychologists in emergency scenarios as fostering individual and collective well-being by activating resources that are already available within the community and may be deployed to counteract the material, economic and social damage caused by the calamity. Picking up the threads of everyday life and recovering the joy of living can be facilitated by a collective process of encounter, solidarity, narration, immersion in one's own and others' pain, and listening to others. Telling the story of the earthquake, or the flood, going over the details, venting one's anger, blaming the tragic events on injustice, fate, or chance, recalling the miracles, expressing the fear that disaster may strike once more, all that helps people to grieve, to cope with uncertainty, and to regain strength and confidence in the future.

Another interesting talk was given by Alessandro Delpriori, an art historian and mayor of Matelica (Macerata) on the topic of: "After the earthquake, recovering artistic and cultural assets in support of community identity". He described his efforts to save and restore local works of art from the area affected by the earthquake. He believes that saving churches, frescoes, decorative windows, paintings and sculptures means allowing local people to return to the places and symbols with which they identify as a community, in

4 We have chosen to highlight this initiative here, because of its close connection with the theme of this Silk Cities E-book: Prerequisites for post-disaster regeneration of historic cities 2021.

turn a key prerequisite for rebuilding their lives and futures. The mayor had launched a programme entitled "Matelica open museum". It entailed recovering damaged art heritage assets and housing them securely, not in a single large building that would be geographically distant from the local population, but in multiple buildings located close to the sites from which the artworks had been retrieved. This was to ensure that local communities would not feel as though they had been deprived of their works of art, but rather would still have them nearby. "Recovering artistic and cultural heritage means recovering the identity of a territory, of a community; it means restoring the connection between a territory and its past in order to look to its future".

Finally, Emanuele Tondi, mayor of Camporotondo di Fiastrone and Director of the Geology Dept. at the University of Camerino shared his perspective on the disaster as a local government leader and expert on earthquakes: "My university colleagues and I knew that a major earthquake was going to strike sooner or later. It was going to strike because the graph on patterns of earthquakes clearly tells us so. Destructive earthquakes hit this area about once every 350 years. We knew that the last great disaster had occurred between 1700 and 1730, so another big earthquake was bound to happen, although we hoped that it would give us a little more time to get ready, another 20-30 years. Instead it struck sooner, during my term of office as mayor". Tondi stated that to avoid the loss of human life and the collapse of buildings it would be sufficient to comply with the recommended standards for earthquake resistant construction, which unfortunately is not always the case.

Thus, at the beginning of 2017, reflection on how to reconstruct areas that have been devastated by earthquakes or other natural disasters causing radical and unpredictable change prompted a new way of interpreting and engaging with reality more generally. Hence, "Fa' la cosa giusta!" has increasingly focused on practices conducive to constructing communities of thought; proactively reinforcing the social fabric of our communities (without passively waiting for adverse events to strike) in a way that is respectful of nature, our planet, and humankind; and seeking to establish forms of economic and cultural production that do not involve exploitation but foster sustainable development, peace, and diversity.

8.3 Where the idea came from

A key means by which "Fa' la cosa giusta!" has sought to foster the emergence of communities whose practices value their local area and heritage is the inclusion of museums and cultural heritage assets more broadly in the education section of the exhibition from 2019. Following the first edition of SFIDE in 2018, a group of teachers who had been involved in organising it, proposed to introduce the theme of cultural heritage and museums in the subsequent exhibitions. Indeed, schools had contact with museums traditionally, although in the past this contact was usually confined to one-off field trips that were not necessarily integrated into a broader teaching-learning strategy. Nonetheless, in recent years, numerous museums have begun developing innovative educational programmes and educational experimentation has become a key part of their mission (Zuccoli, 2014). Hence, the SFIDE teachers felt that including museums in the exhibition would facilitate the transfer of innovative practices, as well as encourage schools to engage with local heritage and initiate new forms of collaboration with cultural heritage sites. Sharing this view, Piero Magri and the exhibition organisers invited the University of Milan Bicocca, which had been active in this field for some time, to join the project. The team met with representatives of the various museum networks located in the Lombardy area to define how to structure the event and what institutions to involve in it.

The idea – underpinned by the concept of favouring active participation in the fair or in the public debate, as discussed above – was to invite the participation of small museums scattered across the region[5], each with their own specific cultural heritage assets, which had received little publicity before, due to their small size, and were therefore relatively little known. These museums were often located in places in need of cultural revival and a process of re-appropriation of cultural heritage by the local community. Together with the Lombardy Region, the body responsible for attributing cultural heritage sites with museum status, the organisers decided to ask each of the interested museums to present one of their existing educational projects, which was required to have been co-designed with a team of school teachers. This project was to be adaptable to students at all levels of schooling, be multidisciplinarity, in the sense of being relevant to more than one school subject and based on innovative teaching-learning methods that would facilitate the inclusion of pupils from different cultural backgrounds. The participating cultural spaces had not been damaged by a natural disaster, but many were located at peripheral sites or difficult to access and thus at risk of being overlooked or forgotten. These heritage sites were investing in strategic alliances with schools, given that schools are among the places where children can potentially be introduced to active cultural education that is respectful of all cultures and abilities and provides opportunities for learning to engage in active and ethical citizenship practices. Nourishing children's and youths' knowledge of their local area, as well as nurturing their desire to take care of it, and in the future to conserve its heritage and communicate it to others, is indispensable to ensure the long-term survival of museums and the cultural assets deposited in them. It is a crucial step, if we expect the younger generations – understood as interpreters rather than merely as consumers of culture – to take responsibility for these heritage sites in the future.

The following museums applied successfully to take part in the SFIDE event: Archaeological Museum of Val Sabbia, Gavardo (BS); GAMeC Bergamo; Civic Museums Casalmaggiore (CR); MUST, Museum of the Vimercate area; Villa Lonati, City of Milan; Civic Collections of Art of Palazzo Maliani Cicogna, Busto Arsizio; MA*GA of Gallarate; Museum of Stories, Bergamo; MUSIL Museum of Industry and Labour of Brescia; Peoples and Culture Museum - PIME, Milan; Palazzo Reale, Milan; Villa Carlotta Museum, Lake Como. Each of these museums presented a project that it had jointly developed with schools, which had been implemented on site at the museum, and in some cases also in schools themselves or at other locations in the community. All projects had involved members of the public as well as school students. The strengths of the various projects included: listening to and valuing the students' voices, inclusion, interdisciplinarity, and the elaboration of concepts such as heritage, memory, future, citizenship, conservation, and participation. Sharing these projects in the context of a fair, a "square" - a public space, facilitated the exchange of good practices and made it easier for participants and visitors to view these practices as potentially transferable and adaptable to other settings.

8.4 Reconnecting (younger) citizens with heritage

The entire process was characterised by a high level of civic participation, from the initial preparatory phase to the two-day event itself. The question that continued to ring in the ears of the organising team over its months of work was one that English-speaking scholars – and especially James Cuno - have been reflecting on for years. Who owns cultural heritage? Or more precisely, who is responsible for taking care of it? Once again, we found that the answer was the community. It therefore came naturally to us to adopt collaborative research methods (Beauchesne, et al., 2005; Desgagné, 1997; Desgagné, et

5 Museums in the city of Milan were also eligible to take part.

al., 2001; Lenoir, 2012), which saw researchers, museum staff, educators and teachers working together as equal partners.

In keeping with the University of Milano-Bicocca's ethical and socially responsible commitment to its Third Mission (i.e., community engagement, alongside the traditional missions of research and education), the researchers worked with – as opposed to about – educators and teachers, at round-table sessions that were informal in style despite taking place in institutional settings. Importantly, these meetings facilitated the identification of problem issues and solutions with the input of the participating local administrators. Furthermore, the sharing of information and discussion that took place at these sessions produced the final set of short presentations to be showcased at SFIDE. Notably, it was decided to focus the presentations on two main areas: work experience projects (alternanza scuola-lavoro) and involving members of the community in the passing on of knowledge. More generally, these encounters met the need of museum education officers to engage in informal exchanges of ideas with teachers and researchers. Overall, they prompted broader reflection, long called for by the research community in the field of cultural heritage education and on the relationship between schools and museums. Other valuable outcomes included the joint identification of solutions to problems that were common to different projects and settings and the fact that the dynamic space offered by the fair-exhibition facilitated the use of different languages, methods and approaches according to their contexts. The conference setting fostered two-way dialogues between teachers and museum education officers, and the exhibition setting provided opportunities for the museums to illustrate their educational offerings to different groups of visitors who were able to experience these offerings directly. Moreover, new networks and projects took shape and, above all, museums and schools were able to work collaboratively on the design of new joint projects.

Fig.9.3 One exhibit made by Educational department of Villa Carlotta. (source: Alessandra De Nicola, 2019)

Finally, when conference delegates interacted with the members of the discussion panel a further theme of debate emerged: the relationship between museum practices and school practices. Drawing on their existing repertoire of experiences, teachers, educators, and practitioners worked collaboratively to raise novel perspectives. Key among them was "assessment is crucial". The introduction of work experience (alternanza scuola lavoro) for secondary school students offers students an extraordinary means of emancipation, especially for those who normally find it more difficult to affirm themselves during everyday school activities. However, work experience, like the other activities that are conducted within the museum framework, should be carefully evaluated, so that they can be attributed an appropriate weight within the students' overall educational path. Museums provide opportunities to bypass the formal aspects of education. They represent a new space; a place in which education can be delivered in a free but protected environment. These were the voices of some of the participants. Their contributions defined new challenges for the future. How should heritage education programmes offered by museums be evaluated? What is the place of museum projects within school programmes? How can cultural heritage projects produce a significant impact in terms of inclusion?

The value of the SFIDE event was confirmed by the participating museum education staff, who particularly appreciated the opportunity to share and explore in an informal setting the positive practices and projects that were the outcome of many years' work in isolation in small, local settings. The event drew on a set of existing projects, informally illustrated as case studies, in which two educational agencies (a school and a museum) had formed an alliance, studied the needs of their respective communities. and jointly designed responses to those needs. The collaborative exchanges moderated by the authors of this chapter, with the support of the regional institutions, fostered the creation of a new community and the generation of a new, shared vision of cultural heritage.

8.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we set out to describe and contextualise Fa' la cosa giusta!'s initiatives on the theme of education - schools and their relationship with cultural heritage - museums, libraries and archives. Over the last years, the organisers of the exhibition, together with the teachers in charge of curating the education section and a team of researchers from the University of Milano Bicocca, chose to focus specifically on small and often under-valued museums in Milan and the surrounding region. It is important to recognise the valuable educational work undertaken by many museums in recent decades, as borne out by the significant increase in their educational offerings, which have often featured new modes of access to cultural heritage via active learning, innovative methodologies, and continuous collaboration with teachers and students at partnering schools. The general consensus is that cultural heritage is "common property", which should be accessible to all so as to involve as many people as possible in consuming, communicating, studying and conserving it. More specifically, in areas affected by high levels of school drop-outs and unemployment, together with a mix of cultural groups that do not readily interact with one another, making cultural heritage available to each and every person represents a key investment in the future.

The diverse range of positive experiences and voices shared at the Fa' la cosa giusta! / SFIDE event suggests that having schools engage with the cultural assets present in their communities and encouraging museums to revisit their collections and offerings in a way that values the stories of all their beneficiaries can be key steps towards enhancing community participation in our shared cultural heritage. An interesting aspect of the event was the diverse range of subject areas covered by the participating museums,

a feature which encouraged teachers to get involved.

Whether science, art, history, or ethnographic museums, to mention only some of the categories represented, all of them offered students the opportunity to engage directly with cultural objects and to take part in educational experiences that cannot take place at school. Visiting a different learning environment from that of their school is in itself a meaningful educational experience for students. It helps them to take ownership of their local area more consciously. During the SFIDE event, the fair became an ideal space for different subjects to meet, a place without barriers where all questions and proposals were allowed and where those who work in schools and museums were stimulated by new networking opportunities. The environment of the fair, with such diverse players present, is the ideal place for the informal exchange of stories, heritages and best practice. Sharing experiences with a wide audience, allowed for a broader debate and reflection across diverse disciplines. It has triggered processes of innovation in teaching, starting with a gaze on the search for more sustainable methodologies. The challenge for the future is to expand the debate, to increasingly bring museums and cultural heritage into public squares, streets, and fairs, so as to eliminate traditional barriers and restore and constantly nourish the connection between the community and its cultural assets. The underlying principle is that we do not need to wait for a disaster to happen to cultivate a new way of looking at our cultural heritage. Rather, we should seek through our everyday actions and practices to foster a renewed appreciation of culture, especially local cultural assets, which schools should leverage to the full in their educational programmes. In sum, forging bonds with our shared culture, and developing inclusive and innovative learning strategies and methods based on material and immaterial cultural objects, are set to become a crucial new frontier in heritage education for the future.

Fig.9.4 Practitioners, curators, educators, teachers, students, participating to discussion. (source: authors)

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Post-disaster reconstruction, disaster management, risk reduction and urban resilience form important themes of Silk Cities activities as the initial geographic focus of Silk Cities is the Middle East and Central Asia which during recent decades have suffered a variety of destructive incidents, ranging from natural hazards to conflicts and wars...

-Preface, IV

Silk Cities

Silk Cities is an independent professional and academic initiative for knowledge exchange, research, engagement and raising awareness on under-explored contextual and global challenges and opportunities. Its initial geographic focus was on those countries along the Silk Roads in the Middle East and Central Asia. This region is the home of long lasting urbanism and civilisations, therefore enjoys rich tangible and intangible heritage built over millenniums and centuries of history. However, the region also suffers from contextual and global challenges affecting societies and cities. Additionally, it has suffered from a variety of destructive incidents especially in recent decades, ranging from natural hazards to human induced origins, from earthquakes to wars.

Fostering international dialogue and knowledge sharing, the geographic coverage of Silk Cities reaches out further to other cities, regions and countries which are prone to similar issues and global challenges.