

## **PEDAGOGY AND ARCHITECTURE: between awareness and responsibility**

*By Beate Weyland*

In the long process of construction/restoration of a school building, the architect and the people in charge of the formative/educational methods operate in areas which are for the most part separated and parallel, while meeting (if they ever do so) only when the structure has already been built, or connecting one another during the stages in which the design of the buildings is too definitive to create an effective and profitable collaboration.

In order to bring the pedagogic field closer to the architectural one, fostering a dialogue respectful of the mutual competences, it is necessary to understand and express with more precision both the pedagogic/didactic references, to which the school refers to, and the architectural ones, that found the basis of the planning. This would allow to establish a relationship of mutual awareness and responsibility, besides a constructive and profitable dialogue during the first steps of the difficult and complex process of laying the foundations of a school.

### *The contribution of pedagogy and education to define a school*

Having a clear idea of the pedagogic/didactic direction of the school provides important guidelines not only for the school system (teachers, students, parents) but also for the planning of buildings, conceived as the ultimate place where the teaching/learning processes are celebrated and where new social relationships among people start developing.

The most renowned pedagogists have always reflected on the educational spaces and areas and many ideas have long been taken in, especially regarding the planning of kids furnishings and finishes.

The most important contributions of the pedagogic dialogue on the school architectures have already been outlined between the nineteenth and twentieth century with the Apertiana (Piseri, 2008) and Froebeliana Schools (Froebel 1982-1986) and with those of the workshop school by Celestine Freinet (2000).

In the twentieth century, with the contribution of the Agazzi sisters, a full discussion begins on the concept of "school as a home" (R. Agazzi, 1898), and with the innovative and experimental method by Giuseppina Pizzigoni (1930) the importance

of spaces for the experiences and the movement begin to be understood (the open-air school of the "La Rinnovata" school in Milan).

The reflections of Maria Montessori (1955,1962, 1981) on the renovated way to conceive the spaces within the school, but mostly concerning the furnishing and the finishes inside the schools, become the starting point for accurate in-depth analysis, that must be then associated with the study of Rudolf Steiner (1983, 1992) on materials and colors which constitute an integral part of the environment and which qualitatively affect the performance of the spaces.

Also worth considering are the proposals provided by the most important representatives of the "Reformpädagogik" (Eichelberger, Laner, 2007), a reformed pedagogy so-called in the German speaking areas that – starting from the new schools, moving on to Dewey and then to the latest reflections within the constructivism – aims at placing the subject at the center of the teaching/learning processes, by introducing the concepts of the teaching workshop, an open methodology divided in stations, with extensive repercussions on the requests of appropriate spaces.

Quite interesting are also the valuable guidelines offered by Loris Malaguzzi regarding the innovative elaborations put to test by the society of the Emilia region, with the contribution of Reggio Children (A.A.V.V. 1998), and the creative concepts by Bruno Munari (1971, 2005), who, although he is not a pedagogist, has provided important incentives and contributions for the educational/teaching reflection, with his concept of *art becoming environment*, in which the user is stimulated, not just mentally, but also on a multi-sensorial level.

These pedagogy historical contributions constitute examples for schools, by showing how it is possible to plan spaces and environments starting from a clear view and from a specific direction on how to intend the relationship teacher-students, student-student, school community/afterschool community, etc. Knowing in-depth one's approach to didactics and education allows to develop visions and proposals also about the places where they are supposed to take place.

### *The issues concerning the planning*

The *normative standards* of the school staff, the guidelines and regulations for *school building* required by the law, *the context* in which the building is integrated and *the client, the users* with their specific educational/didactic needs, *the architect*:

all these factors concur in the process of building a school. The architect's job is to develop a project that will meet the aesthetic and creative criteria, respect the existing regulations, satisfy the needs of the client and know how to interpret and transform into volumes, spaces and environments the users' pedagogic/didactic guidelines. Quite often these turn out to be complicated and difficult stages.

The issues – that must be taken into consideration by the school players participating in the planning group in order to prepare the architects to develop their project – are, according to Scheidegger (2004), the following:

- Which pedagogic objectives and which contents must be translated into spaces? And how must the users of the structure place themselves in the planning of their (new) learning/teaching environment?
- Which kind of learning culture is the school aiming at? And which are the requests needed for the spaces and the environments?
- How is the school organized? (by separate spaces for single classes, by mixed level elementary classes, by places based on learning stations, etc.)? And which organizational structure will come out?
- Which is the idea of school time (students' work pace, free activities area, full-time ...)? And how much time is thought necessary to organize the rooms?
- Is the school perceived as the act of assembling different and smaller units or rather is it conceived as a community open to all its users?
- Has the school decided to open itself up to the territory, and therefore to its city, or would it rather opt for a clear-cut separation between the places of formal and informal learning?

On the basis of these guidelines, it is possible to develop a typology of school and also to pinpoint examples and samples of corresponding school architecture.

### *The Alto Adige as a privileged observation post*

The new February 2009 regulations for school building in Alto Adige (Implementing regulations under the article 10 of Law 21 July 1977 n.21) envisage a new focus on didactics and on the school participation in the processes of planning, approving and implementing the restoration works or of constructing a new school

building (public or private), new gyms and external facilities, areas devoted to playgrounds and sports.

This constitutes a major innovation indicating a widespread awareness towards the importance of finding new communication channels between the pedagogy/education and architecture worlds. This awareness is confirmed on a national and international level by a series of initiatives (conventions, setting-up of associations and institutional networks, travelling exhibitions) aimed at stimulating reflections and awareness on the mutual responsibilities and on the theoretical and operative, educational and planning references.

Moreover, in the last few years, the school buildings are connected to other and different functions (squares, multipurpose rooms, offices and multifunctional areas for different associations, local libraries, centers for children and parents and in some specific cases, or exhibition spaces). This process has been included in the regulations taking into account as a basic principle for the architectonic planning the "opening of the school towards the outside," as defined by the article 2. Also this aspect constitutes the starting point for interesting reflections on how the school culture is opening up to the concept of culture of the social community and on how architects creatively interpret these new needs both of the client and of the users. These regulations provide a new special focus on the processes of planning, approving and implementing the works (art.15,106,100) by stating that "An organizational concept indicating the pedagogic direction and the foreseeable future of the school under discussion must be placed at the basis of the school building project". According to the law, the following players will participate at the meetings with the group of consultancy and coordination for the project development: representatives of the school, representatives of the professional training division, the school principal. Where it is possible, also students, parents and teachers should be involved in the setting up of the schoolyards.

This new policy has been welcomed also by architects, who often detect a lack of specific guidelines on the didactic and functional direction of the areas they are about to plan, and by the school itself, that finds a legitimate place where it can express its own needs.

It is important to examine the range of action and responsibility of the major players in the planning project and, especially, of the school principal concerning the educational and didactic aspect and of the architect on the theme of translating the school architecture into a creative-functional planning.

As a matter of fact, bringing the pedagogic field closer to the architectural one requires a relationship of mutual awareness and willingness among the players that could produce a constructive and profitable discussion during the first steps of the difficult and complex process of building a school.

The Alto Adige stands as an interesting research field for its geographic position, an area where the Northern/Middle-European/German culture meets the Italian culture, open to contributions given both to the pedagogic reflection and to the architectural planning by the international arena.

Moreover, this region can boast a prominent and internationally renowned role in terms of its architectonic infrastructures. All the architects registered in the professional association of architects of the Bolzano province are graduated in architecture not just in other Italian regions (the universities of Milan, Venice, Florence and Rome) but also abroad, in Austria and Germany. The fact that this region does not have a university school of architecture allowed the architects operating on the territory to place themselves on an international network since the beginning. These links beyond the limits of the Bolzano province have produced a network of knowledge, acknowledgments, publications and academic activities that strategically place the Alto Adige contemporary architecture scene within the national and international context.

Another equally important aspect concerns the awareness displayed by this region on the issue: starting with the new above-mentioned regulations on school building, then moving on to the studies and the initiatives of the German principal Josef Watschinger, mostly renowned within the German-speaking areas for his thematization of the concept of new learning culture and new school architectures, and ending with the initiatives promoted by the ASSA, the Association of South Tyrolean independent schools, which has chosen precisely to study in-depth the issue of school architecture and is establishing an association called "Lehr und Lernraum Kindergarte /Schule" (Learning and teaching areas for the school), putting on the web schools, universities, the professional association of architects and other institutional and non-institutional players in order to promote focus and awareness on the issue.

*A pedagogy for architecture and an architecture for education* allows to reflect on the reality from an educational point of view (Scurati, 2001) and stands as a heuristic and constructive discipline. As a matter of fact, the main thing is not finding the best

architecture or the best pedagogy to take into account. The focus must be placed on what a school really is and wants to be, on what can indeed be done, on what then is suggested in terms of visions and images that can contribute to the architect's creation and project.

Therefore, let's not forget that also the architect gets closer to the teacher because he leaves on the territory signs that will last in time and from which young people can also indirectly learn from. The school architecture is also a text, something that allows to comprehend reality. A good architecture also trains the aesthetic sense, which, according to Friedrich Schiller back in 1795, defines the human nature; in his words: *"...der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt..."*.

A school tells a story. It is a text conveying a cultural heritage; the image that a society plans to hand down of itself to posterity. As the school it contains, the building conveys education. And as the teacher, also the architect teaches.

Finding proposals to introduce a fair and conscious discussion among teachers, municipal administration and the architect represents an urgent need that must be met. Through the efforts which are currently been undertaken towards this goal, we hope to detect possible decisional patterns aimed at facilitating the project process precisely in the moment when the players meet and exchange their ideas.