



Heritage Education as a Strategy for Curricular Innovation and 21th Century Competencies

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Abstract

The guidelines for the 21 century key competencies invite to cultivate creative and critical thinking, problem solving and emotional skills as empathy, imagination, curiosity, wonder, emotional intelligence, ability to perceive and to appreciate diversity and to inspire exploration of different horizons, meanings, possibilities and solutions. European studies confirm the impact of cultural heritage (CH) in building these multiple high competencies. Therefore, CH not only builds up knowledge and skills in the field of heritage itself, but also broadens horizons and contributes to the development of personal and social skills. For these reasons, Heritage Education (HE) has been introduced in the EU curricula to develop new and effective educational paths. HE should be promoted at all levels and in all types of teaching in order to introduce educational and curricular innovation. The School is one of the Authors' work-field, with the goal of collaborating for innovative curricula and transformative didactic/education. In our School projects, HE is inspired by active and participative educational methods, cross-curricular styles, partnership between the fields of school education and other professional environments, wide inclusive shapes of communication and expressions, namely the artistic ones, civil ethic values. Many projects have been implemented in and with many Italian Primary and Secondary High Schools, based on knowledge, interpretation, valorization and communication of local cultural heritage, e.g. monuments, statues, artworks in museums, in cities and other cultural fields. Our educational landmarks encompass narrative strategies and languages, including digital storytelling; laboratorial activities with artists and other cultural professionals; exploration of cultural sites; production of artworks and other creative products. The educational messages and responsibility towards social values of CH (individual and collective identities, social cohesion, sense of community, intercultural dialogue, etc.) its conservation and enhancement are emphasized by all the project activities. Many projects engage students in socio-environmental issues, to encourage civic attitude, participation and research of sustainable solutions. The appreciation of this kind of projects by students, teachers and other participants and formal evaluations confirm the worth of themes and methodologies of this innovative approach. HE appears as new promising domain to generate basic, transversal and soft skills and to conceive curricular innovation.

Keywords: heritage education, active participatory methodologies, curricular innovation, citizenship responsibility.

1. Introduction

The new 2018 EU Agenda for Culture [1] recommends the improving of creativity and creative sectors for their intrinsic values, but also because innovation is a necessary process in our post-modern societies and innovative skills have to be cultivated among the young generation for giving rise to new ideas, different outputs, methods, products and values. Innovation implies creativity; it means another thinking and learning habit that requires specific skills. The EU guidelines for the 21 century key competencies [2] and the Educational policies by 2025 [3] invite the school institutions to equip students with basic, but also transversal and soft competences, like creative and critical thinking, problem solving and affective skills as empathy, imagination, curiosity, wonder, emotional intelligence, ability to perceive and to appreciate diversity and to inspire exploration of different horizons, meanings, possibilities and solutions (in the domains of core personal, social, civic knowledge, attitudes and skills). The EU educational policies aim at aligning these 21 Century's competences to the New Strategic Agenda "EU for 2019 – 2024" (European Council, 2019) [4] - stressing that the Member States "must step up investment in people's skills and education" - and to the Agenda 2030 goals [5]. New educational strategies, learning environments and ways of teaching should be explored and experimented, in order to achieve these challenging objectives. Many European researches state the power and impact of cultural heritage (CH) in building these multiple high competencies, citizenship, social responsibility and to improve the quality of citizen/community lives. In the Report "Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe" (a fundamental Report edited by an EU Consortium of cultural Agencies and Institutions) [6], some notable findings emphasize the impact and stimuli of cultural



heritage (CH) on personal development, individual and collective identities, employment, creativity and innovation, local economies, education and lifelong learning, social cohesion and cooperation. CH provides also an essential stimulus to education and lifelong learning, including a better understanding of history as well as feelings of civic pride and belonging, and fosters cooperation and personal development. The Florence Declaration on Heritage and Landscape as Human Values [7] recommends to invest on the value of CH and landscapes for promoting peaceful and democratic societies. The Namur Declaration [8] reinforces this perspectives and emphasizes the role of heritage in building peaceful society by knowledge, citizenship, economy, territorial governance, sustainable development, quality of life. CH fosters knowledge and skills in the domain and issues connected with heritage itself, but includes wider cultural horizons and contributes to the development of skills from literacy to social competences, i.e. from the basic to transversal and soft skills.

2. Heritage education for lifelong learning and education

Heritage education (HE) is a multi-targeted, multidisciplinary and multi-approach formative pathway based on the assumption of the power of CH in triggering interest, motivation and emotional-aesthetic reactions, engagement in civic, social and ethic responsibility, EU values and traditions, by directly experiencing or analysing CH. It adopts and employs active participative methodologies, partnership with a lot of representatives of the civil society (institutional, public, private), diverse shapes of communication and expressions included the artistic ones. By the contact with material or immaterial heritage, learners can build up new knowledge, intellectual and operational skills and a wide range of competences on issues such as heritage safeguarding and conservation or societal well-being and community regeneration. Therefore, HE is considered a valid resource for lifelong learning, citizen participation, community cohesion. According to a 2017 Eurobarometer survey on the subject [9], 88% of European citizens agree that Europe's CH should be taught in schools, since it tells us about our history and culture. Heritage education (HE) is recommended by UNESCO [10] to promote awareness among young people and involve them in global heritage conservation. Supporting HE was one of the objectives of the European Year of Cultural Heritage and it is still pursued through the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage [11] that marks HE as crucial element for the EU educational policies. Therefore, HE has been introduced in many EU curricula to develop innovative and updated/modern educational paths (EU Commission of Ministers 1998) [12], to foster individual and collective identity and build new inclusive, intercultural, sustainable EU societies. HE is conceived as a teaching approach entailing active and participative educational methods, cross-curricular styles, partnership between the domains of education, culture and professional/work environments; involving multiple stakeholders; employing a lot of open inclusive variety of communication and expression shapes; covering profound and transformative themes and issues. For this unique multidisciplinary and multifaceted and intercultural approach, HE can be considered an irreplaceable capital and resource for a strategic Education answering the 21 century (and EU) challenges.

In Italy, the visits and "trips" to museums and monuments are among the traditional extracurricular activities. Teachers agree about the educational value of heritage, but meet difficulties in including HE in the curricular plans and pathways. In Dec. 2015, the "Piano Nazionale per l'Educazione al Patrimonio" of the Minister of Culture [13] introduces and re-launches the recommendations of the EU Council and encourages the massive introduction of HE in all school curricula.

3. Some educational projects based on HE

The School is one of the Authors work-field with the goal of collaborating for innovative curricula and transformative didactic/education and introducing inspiring languages, narratives, performances. Many projects have been implemented in and with many Italian primary and secondary High Schools, based on knowledge, interpretation, valorization and communication of local cultural heritage, e.g. monuments, statues, artworks in museums, in cities and other cultural fields. Our educational landmarks encompass narrative strategies and languages, including digital storytelling; laboratorial activities with artists and other cultural professionals; exploration of cultural sites; production of artworks and other creative products, and finally plans for sustainable management of CH and landscape. The educational messages and responsibility towards social values of CH (individual and collective identities, social cohesion, sense of community, intercultural dialogue, etc.) its conservation and enhancement are emphasized by all our project activities. Many projects engage students in socio-environmental issues, to encourage civic attitude, participation and research of sustainable solutions.



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In this paper we want to provide three well experimented models of educational/curricular projects based on CH, and oriented towards an inter-transcultural/disciplinary approach.

3.1 The project “Green Routes”: the landscape and the City as CH

This project has been carried out at Taranto (Puglia Region, Italy) a wonderful city interested in a dramatic pollution that has changed the environmental parameters and citizen life styles. Young people, students do not are able to see optimistically their lives and futures. The project “Green Routes” (<https://www.greenroutes.it/>) intended to engage the local population, namely students, in a participative process in order to design (or to wish) more sustainable scenarios and futures, by little but meaningful interventions of urban ecological and social regeneration and educational pathways for sustainability [14]. Some high school classes (IIS Vincenzo Calò of Taranto and Agrario of Massafra) were invited to explore the City and to realize artistic gardens to place in the most polluted - run down City neighbourhoods, to revitalize and revitalize environmental and cultural heritage and at the same time to improve the citizen interest and care for their City and communities. This strategy aimed to introduce the local problems of ecological sustainability, to encourage a civic responsibility and inspire ideas for a better future and City regeneration. The students realized their artistic gardens with the collaboration of a garden designer and some artists. Other students of the same schools worked along a school year with two artistic photographers on the Taranto surroundings landscape, to explore other meanings and images by a visual narration of the City, beyond the usual polluted “portrait” (Med Movie Taranto) and organized a final exhibition in Taranto. The photographers introduced a new landscape idea as “heritage of a community”, where natural environments weave relationship with socio-cultural and urban-industrial dynamics. The presence of the artists increased the students’ propensity to be engaged and creates new opportunities and visions about City material and immaterial heritage. The students, by these projects, felt themselves engaged in a curricular task, but also in an ethical and social goal. They faced up natural ecological problems (i.e. damage/conservation of natural heritage), social problems (loss of identity and traditions) and elaborated a responsible civic message for recovering ecological relationships, reconciling community and environment and emphasizing the beauty of Nature. Innovative cultural perspectives and interpretations, emotions, hopes, wishes and values have been acquired by the inspiring and imaginative power of the artistic participation/contribution.

3.2 The project Live Museum Live Change: an archeological site to valorize a CH

Live Museum Live change (<https://traianolivemuseum.com/>) is a project aiming at rediscovering and valorising the cultural and social values of a unique archaeological site: the Museum of Imperial Fora in the Trajan Market (Mercati di Traiano) in Rome. Also in this project the Authors engaged students, artists and other social actors to foster different visions of the site and emphasize various approach to its knowledge and interpretation [15]. Some classes of two Roman high schools (Liceo Mamiani and Liceo Dante) have been engaged for the realization of new experimental narrations of this cultural heritage by digital storytelling (DS) inspired by and in collaboration with Artists. The DS is considered a reflexive, transformative, inclusive, educational practice; it produces a deep cognitive, emotional and social impact both for the storytellers and for the recipients that are empathically involved by the narration [16]. The DS is relevant to teaching and learning and is increasingly introduced in school curricula both for promoting the disciplinary and digital learning and to build citizenship attitudes. All the students realized their DS, mobilizing creative and innovative perspectives/interpretations and narrations of that unique cultural heritage; they showed interest, involvement, active participation and responsibility and revealed surprising abilities in the realization of this task. Another relevant experience has been carried out by one of the engaged classes, directed by a musician and composer. This artist, together with the students, converted in music the main themes, sounds and architectural shapes of the site, creating a sound geography-image of the Mercati di Traiano. The musical composition has been realized after some visits at the site, the observation and a “rationalization” of the architectural shapes of the site to research rhythmic elements and features to translate in musical rhythm, various debate about its cultural values, some interviews of visitors, the recording of local sound/voices, the study of ancient musical instruments, the exploration of some classic-formal music compositions and finally an electronic transformation of all the audio recordings and of the architectural rhythms. Their musical composition has been placed in the site for a new unique narration that combined the physical-objective experience and the artistic one, with a great reward of the students and the artist for the product in itself, but also for their active participation in a social-cultural and citizenship project. These experiences have constituted a significant innovation in the School traditional curricula, generally based on the classic disciplinary-theory study. Students and



teachers agreed on the educational and learning values, on the inspiration and creative impact of these intercultural methods and of the power of engagement in a real civic-citizenship commitment. They all claimed for the introduction in school of more similar experiences, for the education/training of "new citizen and professionals" in this changing complex world.

3.3 “We are Mont’e Prama”: an action on CH to provide community identity

The focus of this action – which was part of a broader project focusing on communication strategies linked to the archaeological area of Mont’e Prama – is the extraordinary statuary pre-historic heritage discovered and restored at Mont’e Prama (Cabras-Oristano, Sardinia, <https://monteprama.it/>). These statues are placed now in two Sardinian Museums: the National Archeological Museum in Cagliari and the one in Cabras. The Mont’e Prama statues have an huge historic and artistic value, because their uniqueness in the whole Mediterranean area; however, in spite of their cultural importance, they are scarcely renowned and appreciated also in Sardinian island. A communication and valorization Plan has been launched by the Sardinia Region. ECCOM (with local partners) has been in charge of this Plan and among other activities organized some Laboratories of participative narration in order to promote knowledge and appreciation of this unique heritage. Two classes of the Cagliari high school “G. Siotto Pintor” and other two of the Oristano artistic High School have been engaged in some Digital Storytelling (DS) workshops in a school-work alternating training. The commitment was demanding and implying a great responsibility (how to communicate the Mont’e Prama heritage to engage and attract people, to build an idea of “common heritage” to protect and valorize?) that students addressed changing their approach from the initial perplexity to an enthusiastic participation. After the Lab activities, some, visits to the Museums and archeological sites, meeting with museum operators and professionals of cultural communication, all the students built sound, correct and involving DS narrations, rich of stimuli, emotions and personal points of view. Their styles were creative and varied and their messages were appealing and involving and conveyed great awareness and responsibility. A special qualitative evaluation [17] assessed the acquisition or improvement of basic competencies as communication and literacy (storytelling and narration, creative written and language); digital competencies; interpersonal social and civic competencies (public education, conservation and valorization of the Mont’e Prama cultural heritage); cultural expression and awareness; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (in the realization of the commitment). Also transversal and soft competencies have been improved: critical, reflective and innovative thinking; artistic skills; creativity; presentation and communication skills (visual, oral and written communication); organizational skills; information management; team working, cooperation and collaboration; management of projects; ability to plan; citizenship; cooperative learning; civic/political participation; commitment to action; achievement of objectives and societal commitments; self-esteem; autonomy; enthusiasm; perseverance; self-motivation; awareness; sense of responsibility; ethic approach to social, cultural and politic problems; positive attitude towards culture and cultural heritage; empathy.

4. Evaluation and conclusion

These pioneer experience aims at building experimental reproducible models in other school contexts and with other cultural heritage, but also in lifelong education. The three related examples attest the opportunity to develop at school HE innovative curricula to create or improve a lot of recommended skills and creative knowledge, because they offer more opportunities to meet and face real and problematic situations, territorial issues, matters of sustainability and future. Moreover, they open at multi-perspective approach for the richness of the topics, practices and methodologies. The artists’ participation has been critical in order to inspire and activate the students’ new competences, perspectives, visions, interpretations, emotional engagement. Likewise the engagement of different actors/professionals, institutions, civic agencies enriched these projects with different thinking and practical framework generally excluded in the School curricula. These experience reinforced the students’ soft skills, that are scarcely cultivated in the traditional curricula. The contact with other worlds outside the school horizon contributed to open other visions and built new competencies of which the students tell consciously and with satisfaction.

Undoubtedly, other research activities and studies to measure the effective educational power of the HE are desirable. In our experiences the favorable evaluation of the project by the students, teachers and other participants and formal evaluations confirm the value of didactic interventions based on heritage from various educational points of view. HE appears as new promising domain to generate basic, transversal and soft skills and to conceive curricular innovation. The question if the CH can be a resource to empower citizen and to build sustainable, peaceful, democratic communities societies, as



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desired/wished by the EU, is critical and still poor investigated by researches. Our projects could provide a little contribution to answer this challenging question.

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