

EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL HERITAGE: SCHOOL BUILDINGS

The aim of this paper is to present some of the preconceptions on which was based the choice of the theme for the Portuguese website – educational heritage – and how the website was built. The importance of educational heritage is enhanced, as a means of acknowledging some of the cultural features, which bound European citizens, and how it is possible to work on these using the media. We will try to illustrate this with school buildings built in communities of different cultural traditions, whose knowledge makes sense when compared and confronted with others in their present place. The image storage possibilities in CD, saved in a remote e-mail or in a specific site, and pictures taken by digital cameras or scanner, allow independent work by students and the organization of evocative presentations of different themes. The use of internet research is presented as a powerful and fast mean of data storage; it also allows the comparison of realities – a journey within cultures.

Education, memories and material culture

In the last decades, a set of memoirs of “less important people” has appeared (Andrés-Gallego, 1993), connected to their daily life and accompanied by a set of artefacts which recall the repetitive and common ways of life– the search for subsistence, the type of basic organization, the working relationships and gestures, the development of a set of orders and values, and the transmission of knowledge to the youngest – according to their social class. All these life-styles are characterized by social class divisions of genre and age, registered in the daily artefacts and spaces, which have shaped practice and distinguished meanings. It is from this perspective that archaeologists, anthropologists, pre-historians and Marxists could speak of material culture, in both the most ancient human groups or in more recent epochs. It

is as educational historians, heirs of this historical–cultural tradition, that we speak of the materiality of the scholastic culture and why it is important to understand the organization of educational spaces. These appear as an articulated set, which transpires in hygienic, pedagogic, disciplinary and, obviously, in architectural conceptions. The buildings originated a pedagogical statement, which leads to social and language power. Its persistence in time affects the implementation of other pedagogies, compelled by successive reorganizations. Knowing the history of the school building is to travel through time and acknowledge the different ways of appropriation of what today seems to have only a unique and uniform use; to recognize the importance that communities gave to scholastic education and the place which children had in society.

The history of education and scholar spaces

Only recently has the study of the scholastic space and time been highlighted in educational historiography. (Julia, 1995; Magalhães, 1999; Nóvoa, Santa–Clara, 2004).

Educational History has enhanced the school space, not as a scene or continent, in Escolano's words, but as a kind of speech which is materialized in the school architecture that “established a system of values, such as order, discipline and rationality” (Escolano Benito, 2000, p.183). The space of these familiar places cannot be reduced only to the physical description. It is a vivid space, loaded with meanings, which included the ‘known place’. These spaces should be considered as ‘lived spaces’, connected to personal representations and collective rules, rhythms and actors’ roles. Viñao Frago believes that there are bonds between the physical configuration and the internal disposition of people and objects in the concrete spaces, and the pedagogical means and methods used. (Viñao Frago, 1998, p.101)

To look at a building and its spaces is to invoke functions and also bestowing them with meaning about experiences through the recollection of how they were lived in. The spaces were, therefore, symbolized and rebuilt beyond their primary functions. The delimitation and disposition of spaces reflect the pedagogical innovations and speeches which represent them also as a strict dependency with time rhythm and scholar practices. Localization of buildings within the urban limits reveals the social importance which education is given: or its marginal stature, when schools are relegated to the city limits. For example, Comenius himself built the schools in the city centre near the greatest public buildings: churches, curias or markets.

We will try to present the transformations which buildings have suffered, going beyond the localization and physical or topographical approach and searching for anthropological interpretations which reveal the social and cultural meaning (Felgueiras, 2002).

The scholastic material has gained only very recently the attention of historians, usually those who have tried to unite the study of the past to action in favour of museological conservation. In many European countries, a movement in favour of protecting the scholastic heritage has been formed and has created a high number of museums, showing the importance of the study of scholastic equipment and didactic material. In this movement are involved many teachers, a large number of them already retired, as well as students, historians and museologists. The initiatives in this field were a success, confirmed by the public joining in with enthusiasm. As years passed by, it was necessary to rethink ways of reaching the public and revealing the content in an interesting way. The internet has allowed the access to another type of public.

School buildings in Portugal

In Portugal, the elementary schools were few until the 20th century. The Government appealed to individuals to solve the problem. As well as the Government, several groups have participated in school construction – trade unions, churches, philanthropists, freemasons, social centres connected to political parties, companies – leaving their mark as they supported education.

The individuals, who built schools, would offer them to the Government, looking for some benefits, such as titles of nobility, to be allowed to guarantee a job as a teacher to a relative or only for economic, philanthropic or social reasons.

The first drawing conceived for a primary school was the result of Count de Ferreira's will (1866). Count Ferreira left a legacy for the construction of 120 primary schools throughout the country.

In Portugal, schools built by individuals or collectively by societies were integrated into the State system in 1936 or even during the military dictatorship period (1926 – 1933). This way, all references to their origin have vanished. A result is the idea that the establishment of the educational system and the school network was the almost exclusive result of action by the “Estado Novo” dictatorship.

Inventory papers of the assets of primary schools and about the action of the “Brazilians” (Felgueiras 2000) revealed the participation of the civil soci-

ety in the process of establishing elementary education. This allows us to interrogate the past in several ways and also to assert that private initiative alone is not enough to achieve one of the tasks of a modern and more fair society: the access of all citizens to education.

In the Portuguese case, activities in favour of education, in the 19th century or beginning of the 20th century, were often connected to other initiatives of a philanthropical character, such as protection of minors, similar to measures taken in central European countries, such as Germany, France, or Switzerland.

The structure of the website about the educational heritage

Regarding the perspectives mentioned above about the importance of the buildings and the way they are inhabited in different epochs, we chose four sub themes: school buildings, games on the playground, books and didactic material and scholastic buildings. We defined the school buildings sub-theme as the main one, because from the different typologies of buildings one can ‘read’ the changes in education politics and pedagogical orientation. This allows us to relate with local or more general data, such as pedagogical material and furniture used, and to understand better a certain epoch. The games on the playground, which pass across generations, spaces and civilizations, lead us to a transversality of toys and games. Many of the games which no longer exist in our societies are played by children from underdeveloped countries. In addition, those who access the website will find toys and games which are common in different times and countries, allowing a journey between cultures.

There is an introductory text about educational heritage which emphasises the difference between our educative society and those from the past or present, where universal education of children still was not or is not a reality. Each of the three sub themes is chronologically structured with a short explicative text, followed by pictures. When necessary, there are links to further explicative texts, or clarifying specific terms, and also to other aspects of the website. Moreover, the readers can get to know elements of the history of Portuguese education and can compare it to the reality in their own region or another country, widening their comprehension of the diversity of Europe. It is thanks to this differentiated circulation and adaptation of conceptions and experiences that it is possible to speak about a wide common cultural heritage across countries, despite all the differences.

Reflecting on the use of the website

We are not describing the website content here, as it would be repeating what is already there which can be accessed on the internet. It is important to reflect in the way that the content can be used in a scholarly context or by students.

The website about educational heritage has concise texts and several pictures, which make it easy to read, although we doubt that the adolescents, who research on the Net in an independent way, would spend enough time reading the whole sequence. They will only do it if they need to for a project, or if they are curious about confronting the past and the present. More profound research of the presented information would occur if the website is to be used on a scholarly context, allowing students to question about the differences and similarities between their current schools and the ones of the past; comparing their routines with the ones of other students in other European countries. They also can access the themes of the “NEOTHEMI” website, find new connections between them, widening the concept of material and immaterial culture, awaking to the importance of the working actions and rhythms, which mould our individual and social identity.

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