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The International Feast of the History. A Concrete Project for the Dissemination of History and Heritage

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I present a series of educational projects, new challenges and perspectives that the International Centre of methodology for teaching history and heritage (DiPaSt) of the University of Bologna has undertaken in the last years regarding the teaching of history and heritage education. I would like to start by asking a question: can historical and cultural heritage act as a tool to compensate for the gaps, shortcomings, and the sense of loss, which afflict and define the society in which we live? In addition, this in turn leads us to another question: which tools and which methodologies can we use?

Every time when a professor starts a new course of Medieval History or Methodologies of teaching history, most of the students tell him that they do not like history. Therefore, the professor usually spends half of the time of the course explaining why it is important to study and to teach history. Because history is not the merely textbook, or a sequence of dates, wars, battles. Nevertheless, history is us, we are history.

For these reasons, fifteen years ago, a group of professors of the University of Bologna got together and created the "Feast of the history". Nowadays, the Feast is widely recognized as one of the most important events in Europe.

Keywords: History; Heritage; Roots; Education; Teaching

Nell'articolo sono presentate una serie di progetti didattici ed educativi, sfide e nuove prospettive che il Centro internazionale di Didattica della Storia e del Patrimonio (DiPaSt) dell'Università di Bologna ha intrapreso da diversi anni nell'ambito dell'insegnamento e apprendimento della storia e dell'educazione al patrimonio. La domanda dal quale potremmo partire è: la conoscenza del patrimonio storico culturale

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può essere considerato uno strumento per colmare le mancanze, i difetti e il senso di perdita che affligge la società nella quale viviamo? E se sì, quali strumenti e quali metodologie si possono utilizzare?

Perché la storia non è un arido manuale, o una sequenza di date, battaglie e guerre. Ma la storia siamo noi.

A partire dalla disaffezione che molti studenti nutrono nell'apprendimento di tale disciplina, quindici anni fa un gruppo di docenti dell'Università di Bologna si è riunito e ha dato vita alla Festa internazionale della Storia di Bologna. Al giorno d'oggi, la Festa è considerata come uno degli eventi culturali più rilevanti in Europa.

Keywords: Storia; Patrimonio; Educazione; Insegnamento

Introduction. The Roots for Flying: the Protagonists of the History. Some Reflections on History

Cities identify with their monuments and works of art of universal value because these provoke emotion, memories and pleasure. The city is the setting, the basic nucleus for human interaction: a place of participation, innovation, education and culture. A rich, pluralistic, collective heritage that belongs to us all.

The city we see - when we manage to catch sight of it, when we pay a particular attention, which goes beyond the absent-minded looks due to the frenetic rhythm of modern life - is the overall result of the interaction with a collectivity in the course of time. We therefore understand the importance of looking at that history which passes next to us every day.

Educating to the beauty means educating to this immense heritage, which belongs to us in the present, since in those traces we read the thought of the people who preceded us, and the community they were part of.

The Bolognese community, meeting point between Mediterranean and mid-European world, culture and sciences irradiation and attraction point, boasts an heritage of "stories", a gallery of figures, a number of episodes which can be referred to, in order to understand its mentality and attitudes, partly irremediably lost and partly converged to shape current conditions and behaviours.

The chronological range of the historical heritage of the centre and territory of Bologna is particularly wide, and allows to stretch back from the present to the Palaeolithic period, through an unique continuity of legacies and imprints, often held and valorized in museums which are in the lead of goods' valorization, exhibition and reference capacities.

The city of Bologna has become one of the most important cultural and tourist attractions regarding history, and the importance of the International Feast of the History is demonstrated by the fact that its Patrons are the President of Italian Republic and the European Commission Representation in Italy.

The projects are organized by International Centre of methodology for teaching history and heritage (DiPaSt)¹ of the Department of Education Studies "Giovanni Maria Bertin"

of Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, together with local organizations and schools.

An important project which is carried out throughout the year and provides important underpinning for the International Feast of the History is called “The roots for flying: the protagonists of history” which combines research and history teaching carried out by teachers and students on any topic they choose to investigate.

An ancient Canadian Indian proverb says that parents must give their children both roots and wings.

Is it acceptable that the roots could be used to fly? And what does it mean: what are the connections with history and its teaching?

The metaphors we use are often excessive or they oversimplify, but in this case, the expression is appropriate.

Today globalization and migration make it necessary to redefine the idea of citizenship and recognize that we are all part of one humanity and one planet.

The “roots for flying” means to understand, to create, to be as far as possible an agent of our own future, and to learn that each person is like a stratification, a sedimentation of knowledge and active participants of collective events of history.

Each school adopts a particular monument or a topic such as canals, roads, towers or churches. Then, at the end of the school year, students convene in a prominent public building and exchange the knowledge they have acquired. They have the possibility to present the results of their research in front of a commission of experts and administrators and put forward their ideas for the care and safeguarding of the cultural asset they have studied.

Following an evaluation by the commission, the respective schools are awarded the symbolic custody of the asset. In this way, a forum is opened between students, citizens and administrators. Furthermore, this forum regarding work for safeguarding the city’s heritage can create a shared cultural resource.

Then, one of the most important library in Bologna (the “Sala Borsa”) will archive and preserve all the materials produced. Therefore, we have built an archive of educational projects.

This project aims to encourage:

- a) the creation of a permanent network which brings together cultural and human resources that are present in the city and hinterland;
- b) access to archives, museums, libraries, research centers, and cultural bodies;
- c) the possibility to consult scholars and experts;
- d) the display of results in special conferences, exhibitions, papers and multimedia publications.

In this way, opportunities are created for contact and collaboration between various centres and individuals involved in research, training and culture. It is hoped that it will encourage students and citizens to appreciate the value of having knowledge about the past in order to really understand the present and plan for the future. At the same time, it helps to reinforce the sense of civic solidarity which we can also see in the project “From hand to hand” a human chain for San Luca and forge new links between culture and the local economy, commerce and tourism.

1. Hand to Hand: *Passamano per San Luca*

The initiative first began in 2003 with the first “From hand to hand - Passamano per San Luca” which roughly translated means “a human chain for Saint Luke” which recreates an example of civic solidarity that occurred in 1677.

The sanctuary of the Madonna di San Luca San Luca is an important church on a hill just outside the city of Bologna. Perhaps you may not know that Bologna is known for the fact that it has 38 kilometres of arcades, which protect the pavements of the streets.

In 1677, a special arcade was built to link the city to the hill top church: a distance of nearly 3 kilometres. You can imagine this was a difficult enterprise and the help of the whole town was needed. In this way, a long human chain passed the building materials needed to construct the great arcade from hand to hand.

In our reconstruction, citizens, children, students, associations, all, pass the flags of the world from hand-to-hand, which are hoisted, in front of the Sanctuary of the Madonna di San Luca.

This modern human chain has received prizes from two Italian presidents and represents the climax of the week when students and citizens line the great arcade which leads to the church of San Luca re-evoking memories of that first human chain and reminding us of the importance of solidarity between peoples.

The celebration of the International Feast of the History of Bologna begins here.

2. We are History. The Future for History and History for the Future

This might appear like a slogan, pre-packaged words to be used in any situation. Nevertheless, the International Centre of methodology for teaching history and heritage (DiPaSt) believes that helping students to perceive and understand the dimension of history in our reality is the most interesting journey it can undertake with them, especially if we want to legitimise memory and consolidate the past in the present, as part of our everyday lives.

Above all, we ourselves are historical sources, with our memories, our own past. We are the result of influences that have been inherited from the sedimentation and stratification of centuries and millennia as well as influences from the contemporary world.

In our faces, in our bodies and in our thoughts there are several traces of the past. Material culture, the process of evolution and changes in the way in which human beings interact with the natural environment, are visible in us all. In addition, we all have the right to know and cultivate our own history in the face of a society diminished by the imposition of consumer culture.

Nevertheless, why do we need to plead for a future for history? Because history risks reaching its end and not because of well known recurring apocalyptic visions. The human occupation of this beautiful planet represents only the smallest speck of the past and if we fail to resolve the pressing environmental problems that face us, then

history will disappear along with the rest of humanity, while the earth will continue to exist far into the future. We are like history because our personal affairs do not begin with our birth but much before.

To recognize and appreciate our cultural and artistic heritage that has been entrusted to us is a duty for countries like ours, which the UNESCO recognises, has an incomparable heritage. The codes are eloquent if one can read them.

The city opens itself up us, like a flower, when we manage to pay just a little more attention in frenetic daily existence.

A good education involves creating awareness of this immense cultural heritage, which belongs to the present because in these traces of the past, we read the thoughts of those people who came before us, and we can see the products of their societies. To educate in this way is to motivate students to seek out the knowledge, which will help them to have a clearer idea about who they are which leads me to our main focus.

3. The Details of the International Feast of the History of Bologna

What does this International Feast of the History of Bologna consist of?

The idea of holding a feast to celebrate history may seem rather strange; it might appear to be yet another example of the fashion for cities to pick on an exclusive theme to attract attention from the outside world. The International Feast of the history has nothing to do with this: it has been held in Bologna for the last fourteen years and is based on an ever-increasing supply of research, teaching and collaboration with universities, schools and cultural bodies, working together in a network.

The Feast consists of meetings, conferences, exhibitions, guided tours and displays that are mainly held during the third week of October in various locations of the city of Bologna and its province: palaces, squares, streets, churches, cloisters, theatres, schools and administrative buildings. It deals with many of the most highly debated topics in historiography: the roots and origins of the present, unresolved enigmas, the legacy, the mysteries, the premises and perspectives of these questions linked to the environment, the economy, human relationships, and communications. There are no boundaries, no limits. The topics and themes reflect our everyday lives and those of our ancestors here and all over the world: music, food, sport, fashion, art, religion, politics, and technology.

The wealth of history is the food made history, art made history, sport made history, the music made history, everything surrounding us made history.

Bologna becomes a type of theatre offering a series of cultural initiatives. However, the heart of the Feast is the direct involvement of students of all ages from schools and the university. They can attend meetings and conferences with experts of international fame who provide information about the results of their research. In this way, it is more than a simple collection of events, but a real feast in the true sense of the word because there are several elements of the city participating together in this meeting of local and universal history to increase respect for historical heritage and awareness of the main issues of the moment. Moreover, the International Feast of the History of Bologna represents the most recent confluence of all the initiatives that were carried out during the previous year with teachers and students.

In the last fourteen editions, almost three thousand events have been held, with more than five thousand participants and more than twenty-one thousand active subjects (such as spokesmen, lecturers, artists, actors, tourist guides, choristers and musicians): the quality of the events, the participation of thousands of protagonists and the numerous amount of presences make this occurrence the largest history event in Europe.

In effect, this Bolognese way of celebrating history through an International Feast of the History has been chosen by several European cities that have decided to organize on their own a local Feast of the History: Parma, Milan and Castel San Pietro Terme in Italy; Cahors and Périgueux in France; Seville, Jaén and Murcia in Spain.

Everything started fourteen years ago, in 2004. The first edition of the Feast was titled Bologna makes History and the most significant event was the first edition of the "Students Parliaments": about three thousand students, representing the schools of Bologna and its province, in the *aula magna* of the University of Bologna, presented the results of their studies about a cultural asset to a commission of experts and administrators and put forward their ideas for the care and safeguarding of the cultural heritage they have studied.

During the following twelve editions (titled "The roots for flying: paths, treasures and actuality of history", "History for the future", "We are history", "The future for history and history for the future", "Beyond the borders: languages and heritages of history", "On the shoulders of giants: legacy and sources of history", "Horizons and roots: what unite us and what differentiate us", "The heritages of history", "Us: history and future", "History: beacon of humanity", "The long path to rights and freedom") the Feast increased every year the number of presences and events.

This year the Feast has reached the fourteenth edition. Its title is "Contexts. Climate, environment and resources between history and future". The organizing committee of the Feast has chosen this topic because it strongly believes that every historical event is influenced by environmental evolutions, climate changes and natural phenomena. These aspects are closely related to human behaviour and they affect every moment of cultural, social and economic life. For these reasons, these dynamics require conscious, responsible and coherent responses that can be found in history. Retracing human history in the light of these connections encourages a better awareness about natural, environmental and anthropic hazards and the conducts to adopt to prevent or limit the disasters effects. As a result, the events of the fourteenth edition of the International Feast of the History of Bologna were focused on: climate changes, earthquake hazards, hydrogeological risks, vulnerability of the territory, wars and migrations, cultural heritage at risk and its protection.

4. The International Award "The Golden Arcades – Jacques Le Goff"

History is always at risk from distortion and exploitation, which undermine knowledge. Nowadays literary journalism and cinema often speculate on the fascination that history holds for the public, which often results in inaccurate, deformed and manipulated visions of history for commercial ends. Moreover, with the growing use of new technologies, it has become much easier to disseminate erroneous convictions

and knowledge. This makes every initiative that encourages correctness and dissemination much more important.

It is this reason that the Feast includes the prize “The golden arcades-Jacques Le Goff” which sets out to reward individuals and work which are dedicated to accuracy and efficient dissemination in the teaching of history.

The first year (2008), during the celebration of the fifth edition of the International Feast of the History, the organizing committee had the honour of awarding the prize to Jacques Le Goff the 9th October in Paris. The second year the award went to Giovanni Minoli, Italian tv journalist, in 2010 to Alberto Angela, historian and archaeologist, and in 2011 to Peter Denley, co-founder of History and computing, of the Queen Mary-University of London. The following two years two Italian historians were awarded: Alessandro Barbero (2012) and Franco Cardini (2013); in 2014 the prize went to Christiane Klapish-Zuber, French historian and pupil of Jacques Le Goff; in 2015 to Louis Godart, archaeologist and director for the conservation of artistic heritage of the President of Italian Republic; and in 2016 to Antonio Paolucci, art historian and former director of the Vatican Museums. This year the committee had the honour of awarding the prize “The golden arcades-Jacques Le Goff” to Jared Diamond, American geographer and anthropologist.

5. The “*Novi Cives: Citizenship Builders since Childhood*” Award

Two years ago, in 2015, during the twelfth edition of the International Feast of the History of Bologna titled “The long path to rights and freedom”, the International Centre of methodology for teaching history and heritage (DiPaSt) of the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna and the Legislative Assembly of Emilia-Romagna region have set up the “*Novi cives: citizenship builders since childhood*” prize to reward individuals, organizations or communities who have distinguished themselves as paragons in civil and human rights field. In 2015, the prize was awarded to Shirin Ebadi, Iranian lawyer and pacifist, Nobel peace prize laureate in 2003; in 2016 to Maria Giuseppina Nicolini, former major of Lampedusa and Linosa; and this year to Silvana Arbia, former register of the International Criminal Court and Senior Trial Attorney at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Conclusion

The many projects which have been carried out over these fifteen years by teachers and students who have participated on initiatives such as “the human chain” and “the roots for flying” show that the school is a place which offers great possibilities; a place in which objective criticism of everyday reality can begin; a place in which we can learn to preserve the memory of what we have been, before this is forgotten forever.

Knowledge is created through active participation on the part of students and this participation takes place both in schools and in the mind. Interest in history is a type of interest that should be encouraged by teachers who set a challenge for their students. This challenge enables them to become key players in interpreting the past, rather than

mere passive containers of indisputable truths. In order for students to become the true authors of their learning, it is necessary to involve them in the exploration of this world in which they are immersed. The research activities and teaching projects, which have been illustrated above, are a significant testimony to this.

The International Feast of the History of Bologna is the happy result of a network of individuals who have worked to bring things together. In no way it can be described as ephemeral or extemporary rather it relaunches and confirms the role of Bologna as a centre for the elaboration and spread of culture.

In the end, these fifteen years of activity have demonstrated how it is possible to organise a broad range of original cultural events which are not limited to merely exploiting human resources and historical artistic locations but open up to a broad horizon. Because of these activities, Bologna can call itself “the city of history”.

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¹ The DiPaSt Centre is a meeting-place for the study and teaching of history and cultural heritage. It aims to encourage the sharing of terminology, methods, practices and tools used in various places and countries. The Centre collects and utilizes the wide range of experience, research, projects and activities that have taken place during recent years at a national and international level in the teaching of history and cultural heritage and in different sectors as archives, libraries, museums, art galleries and other relevant cultural institutions.