

The children in the city. An introduction

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Abstract

This special issue aims to encourage and promote the debate around the theme of the child and the city. The goal is to give voice to contributions that, despite their specificity, show the complexity and the variety of theoretical approaches with which the issue can be investigated. The scope of the complexity pursued here is not possible without an interdisciplinary approach: the present volume collect contributions of scholars of history, history of pedagogy, architecture, children's literature, pedagogy and education. It is thus possible to reconstruct the evolution of the concepts of childhood and the role given to children, as well as the structural and aesthetic changes of cities in the long run. In light of the fact that our urban centres have changed a lot, it appears necessary to reconsider the relation between the children and city, considering not only the places “for children”, but above all the spaces designed and offered “by children” by pursuing an active gaze able to understand the relationship between education and citizenship, participation and membership of the different contexts of life.

Questo numero monografico intende sollecitare e favorire il dibattito scientifico intorno al tema del rapporto tra il bambino e la città, proponendo contributi che, pur nella loro specificità, mostrano la complessità e la varietà degli approcci teorici e degli intrecci con cui il tema può essere indagato. La direzione della complessità qui perseguita non può prescindere da un approccio di tipo interdisciplinare: nel volume sono infatti presenti saggi di studiosi di storia, storia della pedagogia, architettura, letteratura per l'infanzia, pedagogia e didattica. Ne emerge un quadro complesso che permette di rintracciare le evoluzioni delle concezioni di infanzia e del ruolo riconosciuto ai bambini, nonché i cambiamenti strutturali ed estetici delle città sul lungo periodo. Alla luce delle profonde trasformazioni che hanno investito i nostri centri urbani risulta quanto mai attuale riconsiderare il rapporto tra bambino e città, considerando non soltanto i luoghi “per i bambini”, ma soprattutto gli spazi ideati e offerti “dai bambini”, perseguendo uno sguardo attivo che sappia comprendere il rapporto tra educazione e cittadinanza, partecipazione e appartenenza ai contesti di vita.

Keywords: children, educational contexts, formal and informal education, city

Parole chiave: bambini, contesti educativi, educazione informale e non formale, città

The papers presented in this special issue foreground our reflection on the relationship between the child and the city. More specifically, we refer to the aesthetic perception of the city from the child's perspective both as spectator and creator of its appearances through their direct experience, and also through fantasy images that are evoked by walking and playing on streets, squares, gardens, alleys, secret paths, community spaces and open places.

The city thus tells the story of its own characteristics, which are discovered or reinvented by the younger generation through their movements; it is a story that the child repeats to himself; it is sometimes not so different from the descriptions that we have inherited from writers and poets. The city of Paris, as it is described by Baudelaire in *Les fleurs du mal (The flowers of Evil)* can serve as an example in the sense that it is cosmopolitan, intricate, complex, fascinating and dangerous, seductive and ruthless throughout its streets of luxury and poverty, and with its crowds and loneliness, and missed and new opportunities. A city where it is easy to get lost, in which the coordinates are changeable and often empty, but perhaps for precisely these reasons it is so interesting and vital.

Yet, nascent modern cities are not only populated by beautiful women, but also cafés from which they can be admired. The urbanization process, following the industrial revolution, has helped to redefine the contours and boundaries of the city, radically changing the previous existing urban landscape, and imposing new needs, styles and habits: overcrowded houses, poor hygienic conditions, promiscuity, dirt, alcoholism and degradation on the sidewalks, under a sky coloured by the black smoke produced by chimneys, and the daily efforts and the difficulty to plan a better future. All these aspects characterized the life of working-class neighbourhoods contiguous with the middle-class ones celebrated by poets. Dickens (1987) writes:

They crossed one of the most densely populated districts of the city, then they cut to a more filthy and squalid little street than the others and stopped to search the house of the dead woman. The houses on both sides of the street were high and imposing, but fell into disrepair and were inhabited by poor people. A few emaciated, badly dressed people hung around aimlessly. There were also several shops, but all boarded up and falling apart, only the upper floors of the houses were inhabited, but the outer walls were shored up with logs, taxes missed and the plaster was falling apart. In the street gutter a stream of dark and smelly water was flowing, and here and there carcasses of skeletal rats could be seen¹ (p. 46).

Unlike their middle-class peers, who were more monitored so that they would acquaint themselves with the manners, relationships, and behaviours befitting their social class, the children of the working class quarters who lived on the streets as their natural *habitat*. Thus they compensate for the lack of popular educational institutions (schools, kindergartens, recreational centres, church youth centres) that, as is well known, will be opened starting from the middle of the nineteenth century (Pruneri, 2014, p. 277). These children were the leading lights of their neighbourhood. In their daily raids among squares, sidewalks and alleys, they fully explored and experienced changes, secrets, smells, noises, by coping with not always easy situations. The street – as Egle Becchi (1995) writes– is the world where you wander and flee, it is

the place of the squatter [...] the great kingdom of child inventiveness: here children can mingle with adults that the family does not admit, they share activities, ways of being, clothing, rhythms, values of others, in a kind of socialization that has a different trait, if not opposed, to that accepted and practices in standard social institutions and it uses particular devices: not just games – and the culture of child play is in part born and develops on the street – but also social learning, practiced rules whose effectiveness, know-how, dexterity are tested² (p. 190).

The experiences in close contact with the urban context, with its unpredictability and its inexhaustible availability of incentive for informal learning (Tramma, 2009), were essential elements of the dimension of childhood, as well as essential training and development opportunities. Despite all these dangers and criminal temptation, they loomed with growing severity, and the introduction of measures to reduce the problem was necessary. In a similar context, the government of Bologna decided to open the House of Corrections, well known as “Reclusorio pei discoli”, in 1822, following the example of the the main European cities during previous centuries. The conditions and ways in which a young boy called Domenico Belletti used to live pushed him inside such an institution:

In the last period I had no desire to behave well and began to live in a dissolute way. I realize I deserved this punishment because I gave heavy troubles to my mother, as I gave up my training job and hung around the square with any type of scolders, all things which I know well and I regret it³.

The “naughty children” have very specific connotations and traits: they were children who refused to work, they fled from home, and disappeared without giving news, they stayed outside all night long, as they decided to live, immerse themselves and blend in the urban context, causing concern to their parents, whilst in the meantime presenting a public problem.

Decades after decades, in our big cities great differences still persist between wealthy and less-affluent neighbourhoods, between middle-class youth's lifestyles and the lifestyle of deprived youth who live on the street, sometimes illegally. Nevertheless, following the drive of the globalization the urban landscape continues to undergo a drastic process of change, thus exacerbating those previous trends. As Tiziano Terzani states (2014), globalization is not only an economic phenomenon, but even more so a biological one because it imposes desires and components at a global level, which are inevitably destined to change the way we think.

The evolution of the cityscape is a clear demonstration of all this. It is now difficult to familiarize oneself with the peculiarities and the historical heritage of the different cities around the world, in as much as one will inevitably come across the same shops, such as those which sell cloths, any kind of products made by multinational companies, or fast food chains selling the same food. Though people have different somatic traits, they have the same habits and ways of consumption. In the suburbs we see very similar faceless apartment blocks and disdained green areas that are so characteristic of postmodern evolution of the quarters described by Victor Hugo and Émile Zola a few centuries ago.

Among the processes underway in our global cities, the phenomenon of the *non-places* requires special attention:

Airports, shopping centres, motorways and supermarkets are non-places: in fact their main vocation is not territorial; it is not to create individual identities, symbolic relationships and common heritages, but rather to facilitate the movement (and therefore the consumption) in a world of global dimensions⁴ (Augé, 2007, pp. VII-VIII).

Non-places are anonymous, overcrowded with indifference, loneliness and similes (Augé, 1993); they are designed for ordinary and impersonal users, rather than for a specific individual, recognizable as different from the other ones. Non-places no longer possess the identity, relational and historical characteristics that distinguished the places of community life of the past; they are “the space of the others without the presence of others, the space made like a show”⁵ (Augé, 2007, p. 58) where the consumption is king.

Parallel and cross-cultural like the phenomenon of *non-places*, the process of *gentrification* has contributed to impoverish more and more the authenticity and the original identity of some quarters, like Brooklyn in New York, Testaccio in Rome, Sal Salvario in Turin, Pigalle in Paris, Kreuzberg in Berlin. Once populated by low-income families, these quarters are now inhabited by upper social class families: thus it happens that old shops and small grocery stores will be replaced by more functional and well-equipped shopping centres, and new houses with modern designs take the place of more ancient buildings, creating a sense of functional and opulent anonymity.

City centres, slums, beautiful gentrified quarters. In these places, more and more similar is the encounter with increasing diversity accompanied by a relentless loosening of community ties, which thus generates a widespread feeling of fear and alarmism. Bauman describes it as follows:

Most of the time the “others” (the ones that are anonymous and faceless foreigners, which we meet every day crossing densely populated cities, or moving confusedly in the streets) are sources of a vague and diffused threat. Instead of giving us a sense of security and reassurance against the dangers. From them we do not expect solidarity, nor do they provoke it to us. We are afraid of them, even of

scratching the thin protective coating of the “civic inattention” mentioned by Erving Goffman. To keep your distance seems to be the only reasonable way to keep on going⁶ (Bauman, 2009, p. 87).

In the great melting pot in which origin, languages, generation, opportunities, social memberships mix and mingle, which educational and identity references can still talk to the young people? The *Marcovaldo* of Italo Calvino warns us: changing the city, its spaces, its rhythms, also changes the urban planning and the architecture. The social and anthropological transformation that we should expect are very radical; a sort of widespread estrangement is inevitable.

This Marcovaldo had an eye little suited to city life: road signs, traffic lights, shop windows, neon signs, posters, which were designed to strike attention; they could never stop his gaze that seemed to slide on the desert sands⁷ (Calvino, 1963, p. 1).

Over the years the condition of the children in the urban space has undergone a change: today the cities have become a huger and huger territorial habitat, forcing childhood under house and school “arrest”. The city has changed (Dolto, 2000), the childhood has changed (De Mause, 1983; Postman, 1984; Oliverio Ferraris, 2008; Becchi, 2010; Bakan, 2012; D’Amato, 2014; Contini & Demozzi, 2016) and even the games have been changing during the last decades (Cambi & Staccioli, 2007). On sidewalks and public spaces of the Western towns and cities it occurs less frequently to meet groups of children having fun together, without the watchful adults’ eyes or the reassuring boundaries of structured activities in sport and religious organizations. In every generation the age of free mobility rises higher and higher: it reduces the opportunity to take the bus, walk or ride the bike alone (Ward, 1979). Even games like hide and seek, cops and robbers, or building huts in pine woods and other leisure, that only a child’s creativity can generate, are nowadays less popular, and they are often replaced by virtual experiences on big and small screens, in closed and enclosed spaces, in guided, stereotyped “passive making” tours (Bartoli, 2008): thus the loneliness of a couch takes the place of the emotion to discover, to laugh and run around in the crevices of the quarters where the encounter with the unexpected is always lurking and it implies the need to develop behavioural strategies and promote markedly impregnated forms of intelligence in real life. The architect and urban planner Colin Ward in his main essay *The child and the city* (1979), by upholding the educational role of the street and the city, has highlighted how the outer space, the public space is disappearing and with this it dissolves any chance of aggregation, of spontaneous experience of building a social role.

To overcome the crisis of liberty among children, social and educational agencies of the territory engage more and more in projects that can make children protagonists, and active participants in the dynamics of the cities in which they live. Among the various experiences that have occurred and still are produced in the context of Italy (Capriotti & Zani, 2001) we can mention: the “municipal youth councils” (Consigli comunali dei ragazzi) in which boys and girls draw up proposals in order to improve the city in which they live. They can express their opinions, compare ideas and talk freely as far as the rules allow; or even the project “educational cities”, supported and disseminated by the International Association of Educational Cities (A.I.C.E.), joined by a number of cities in the world. It is a project that allows children and adolescents to participate in a wide array of social activities and guarantees everyone a healthy environment, as described in Jean Pierre Pourtois’ contribution. Projects of this kind are moving hand in hand with the evolution of a “smart” sense of the cities (Santangelo, Aru, & Pollio, 2013; Costa, 2014; Dall’Ò, 2014), characterized by investment in human capital, infrastructure and technologies aimed at contributing to sustainable economic development and a high quality of life for all, with full respect for the individuality and specificity of every citizen and to the peculiarities of the different cultures and generational memberships.

In the swirl of twists and turns in the relationship between the child and the city, these and many other questions urgently crop up. This special issue is part of the debate in order to provide contributions that, despite their specificity, demonstrate the complexity of theoretical approaches and the plots with which the issue can be investigated.

The first of the proposed essays, written by Riccardo Merlo, analyzes the relationship between the urban contexts of a city in the Middle Ages – in this case Bologna – and the spaces inhabited by children. The author points out that at that time there were not discernible rigid zoning divisions of spaces and functions, loyal to social hierarchies, especially between the centre and the suburbs that today reveal an anonymous and impersonal face in the monotony of the tracks in which each part is indistinguishable from the collection. During the Middle Ages childhood used to be in close contact with the adult world, and thus “ghettos” or “Indian reservations” were not planned, along with the type of modern playgrounds where we send children in order to save them from dangers”⁸. Furthermore – Merlo writes – in the old Medieval centres, “Rich and poor people live side by side because there were not any separate quarters for wealth [...]: class differences, even so sharp, did not prevent human relationships”⁹. People lived in the midst of shops and workshops, where children of all ages used to play together: thus they learnt to interact with a heterogeneous group and grew up by knowing through direct experience the adults’ and working world.

Within the “twenty-five”, the “quarters”, the “courtyards” and the “morelli” children experienced a sense of belonging to their territory: they moved safely, understanding and being able to perceive the boundary between their protected space and the outer dangers. Playing in the streets was held in strict contact with adults, because houses, shops, and workshops led to alleys and inner squares that are places of frequent social interactions. In this respect, as Riccardo Merlo shows, the ancient iconography is one of the crucial investigative tools to understand for example how large streets that lead from the centre to the city gates were not usually frequented by children: they appear there only occasionally and always accompanied by adults. “They were not places of everyday life, but rather a scene in which there were ceremonies, processions, and trade, with the accompanying heavy traffic of carts and carriages”¹⁰.

The ancient city “included” children alongside adults. It protected them with a kind of “supervision of institutionalized neighbourhood” and at the same time enabled them, in the context of street life, to explore their own independence, to know and experience the different aspects of everyday life, thanks to the possibility of perceiving the urban space in an intuitive way. The city was a place of great educational effectiveness.

Always referring to the Medieval period, Rosa Smurra sheds light, from a socio-historical point of view, to the presence of little boys and girls in some predominantly iconographic sources, with a particular focus on the wide collection of miniatures of *Tacuina sanitatis*, a collection of rules relating to the health and diet of adults and children, of which seven different codes exist. As the author highlights, by referring to the interpretation inaugurated by Pierre Riché and Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, “childhood’s images as expressed in the visual arts are not only artworks and as such studied by art historians [...], they are also a source for *l’histoire à part entière*”¹¹. Starting from this interpretative line, Rosa Smurra highlights the function that the representation of the children and adolescents world plays in the daily city and countryside life. She compares the information of various *Tacuinae* in relation to the economic, political and social conditions of boys and girls in the period when the miniatures were produced. In particular, the author emphasizes the agricultural occupations of boys and girls (collecting eggs, cheese production), as well as the interactions between children and adults, as we can see a small picture where a child disturbs his father’s rest or helps his mother in the purchase of salt; or when he is waiting with his basket at the counter of an eel seller or at the baker’s. To illustrate the element described in the text, the artists of the *Tacuina* did not miss the occasion to represent not only the families’ private life, but also the street life. The urban environment is the setting for a child and adolescent world which principally represents males, and where their different occupations follow a precise method of social stratification. The institution *Schola cantorum* was key within the urban context. It was a school that took in children living in orphanages and who were then introduced to the choir. Rosa Smurra notes, in the illustrated notebooks, that at the end of the fifteenth century children appear in a great number and that the attention for the representation of infants increases. In this way, *Tacuina* are valuable sources for the study of the history of childhood and adolescence in the Middle Ages.

Following the insights of the French school of *Annales*, and looking at the social aspects of history and micro narrations, Christopher Carlsmith focuses his essay and his attention on some salient examples of

educational institutions and charities active in Northern Italy in the early Modern Age. He deepens and considers critically the educational methods used, retracing their whole historical and institutional process: the Academy Caspi in Bergamo, founded in 1547 as a residential elementary school. Its regulatory mechanisms can be reconstructed on the basis of pedagogical texts such as the treaty published by Giovita Ravizza, in Venice, in the middle of the sixteenth century. This text provides recommendations about key educational aspects in the Modern Age, such as the school curriculum for students and other educational subjects. He then analyzes two schools for orphans: the Orphanage of S. Martino, in Bergamo, founded in 1532 by the Venetian patrician Girolamo Miani, whose aim was to provide housing, education, and training to the carer of orphaned children, and the Collegio Panolini, create in Bologna in 1585 by the wealthy silk merchant, Francesco Panolini.

In a society like the one of the sixteenth century in Italy, that saw crowds of unsupervised children spilling out onto the streets at the mercy of their perils, the birth of the first orphanages bears witness to the humanitarian character of a society which, though not so systematic, was tied to privileged initiatives of forward-thinking individuals, and prefigures a concern for childhood hitherto unknown and unseen.

Coming forward a few centuries and passing from the historical perspective to one of children's literature, the same issues relating to children wandering alone in the streets of the cities are recur with stronger nuances and characterizations. In his essay, Albertazzi, focuses on two great Anglo-Saxon novelists, Charles Dickens and Jonathan Lethem (the first one is meant as a master who inspired the second one), who lived in different centuries; both have put childhood at the centre of their widely autobiographic works, especially the significance of childhood in the city. The young protagonists of *David Copperfield* and *The Fortress of Solitude* are orphans: they live a life full of dangers, but also of opportunity. The city, for those who have no family or home, becomes the place of identity self-definition that cannot be found in the domestic dimension. London and Brooklyn, the two cities in which the characters move alone, unprotected, are not too dissimilar from the fairy-tale forest, because, in a symbolic sense, they represent the same dark and threatening environment that one must walk through without being devoured.

The children gaze, adopted by these authors which choose children as storytellers, sees the city figuratively, it anthropomorphises corners and objects in order to domesticate them, to make the environment in any way recognizable and familiar, and thus to exorcize fears. But these young protagonists of children's literature, as well as finding ways to meet the city, want to take possession of it, and they do it by leaving their traces, for example by writing on the wall. Writing or "rewriting" the city helps Dickens' and Lethem's protagonists to find their own place, their own role in a world deprived of parental figures, that is of those figures who are demanded to define who we are. And since the city in their experience replaces the mother, the time comes when you have to leave it in order to grow up. You will come back as an adult, and state how you have changed during your period of growth.

A broader overview of how children's literature addresses the relationship between the child and the urban context is outlined in Nicola Galli Laforest's contribution. Referring to a classic like *The Paul street boys* (1906), he highlights how the relationship between childhood and city has undergone a radical transformation in contemporary literature. Today the city is no longer understood as the fabric of physical and specifically "urban" spaces, as the streets, squares, buildings, botanical gardens, quarters, particular corners that filled Ferenc Molnár's novel, recognizably set in Budapest. The young protagonists of today's novels seem to have more opportunities to move freely and independently through the city, unlike their peers of the past who dominated the territory. Therefore, the city ends up being a great lacuna: a background you do not know, you cannot go along, and about which you cannot describe anything.

Nevertheless, the *topos* of the city has entered recent children's literature in a different form: neither as a concrete place, made of bricks and/or cement, nor as examples of architecture and specific spaces, but as ideas of a community, a group of people who must live together and forcibly adapt to customs, habits, rituals, as a network of strict and compelling relationships with which to contend, to conform or rebel, in short as a more abstract than material concept, that is often represented with the tone of dystopia. The city of contemporary literature for adolescents is shaped by the ideas of Plato's *Republic* and is influenced

by George Orwell's *1984*: it is a place not important in itself, but for hierarchies, social classes, different groups that inhabit and that often live in bad conditions. Thus the city becomes the image and manifestation of what, in human relations, always hurts: social injustices, unbalanced power relations, the exercise of systematic and legalized violence, and the distorted and terrible community organization. But it is most of all the conflict between generations that emerges – for those who work as educators – from the dystopian trend for young people, a trend that has and still registers a great sales success, even in years of economic crisis, with phenomena like the best-seller or even the mega-seller (just think of the sagas like *Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, etc.). We are dealing systematically with adults who want to succumb the younger, and with rebellious heroes who always have the typical traits of the “Puer”, the “divine child”, as well as it has been analyzed and explained by the studies of Jung (1977), Von Franz (1989), Hillman (1999), with its corollary of mysterious birth, of nature of predestinated young person, of bearer of hope in a world made unfair and wicked by the previous generations. Since this is a so insistently reiterated scheme and message in novels for teenagers in recent years, there is something to think about, in education and beyond.

The theme of the organization of urban spaces, with its connections between the tangible and the symbolic dimension, is taken and more specifically analyzed from the perspective of the history of education in Tiziana Pironi's contribution which highlights some significant educational experiences that occurred in twentieth-century-Italy. Beyond their heterogeneous character these experiences are exemplary models for ensuring that school architecture has pedagogical traits, conceived of in full integration with the landscape and the city context. Starting from the battle launched by Maria Montessori, who with the foundation of the *Case dei Bambini* (Children's Houses) at the beginning of the twentieth century experienced a new way to take care of the young in order to promote their independence and self-education. We find in the post-war turmoil, Margherita Zoebeli's experience in Rimini. Her Italian-Swiss Village (Villaggio italo-svizzero) became in a short time an important crossroad of movement and figures that marked Italian pedagogy in those years. The relationship between educational activities and the design of spaces and environments was the centre of a fruitful comparison of interdisciplinary competences since the founding of the first settlement of barracks, arranged and fitted with the intention that the pedagogical orientation of the Village be expressed right to the tiniest detail. The special attention given to the architectural design was inserted as well, with undoubted originality traits, as part of that change that lay ahead at the beginning of the twentieth century in relation to the design of new spaces as a function of a renewed education.

The relationship between pedagogy and architecture seems to be a criterion which we also find in the kindergartens promoted by Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia, which, as noted by Pironi, are designed to facilitate “the interconnections that go beyond the traditional barriers and hierarchies among adults and children, favouring a strong relational climate”. These proposals, beyond the different settings, converge in proposing a school community in close contact with the outside world, conceived as a lively centre for the promotion and development of the quarter and the whole city. Following this line of thought, Tiziana Pironi analyzes the debate that developed in Italy after the Second World War, involving architects, urban planners and pedagogists looking for solutions that would respond to such instances of renewal, which unfortunately remained mostly disregarded.

Since the current city is more and more complex, sometimes even confusing, the educational sciences with its respective theories, but especially through its application in didactic initiatives, can be an important compass. It is therefore necessary to offer an integrated educative project to children that allow the attendant of a great variety of spaces and the cooperation between different institutions. The here presented action research carried on by Jean-Pierre Pourtois and Huguette Desmet in the kindergarten of three Belgian cities (Cherleroi, Etterbeek e Péruwelz) is an example of this approach. Starting from the weak school achievements of poor families' children, reported by the Belgian Ministry during the period 2008-2012, the two researchers have developed and promoted a project on literacy learning, whilst monitoring the promotion of the children's wellbeing, or in a word, of their “emancipation”. They involved the school, the families, the whole community with all its educational agencies (playcentres, libraries, etc.)

The project is divided in several stages, which are sometimes apparently disparate from each other, except that they are held together by a coherent process and the character of a soft toy called “Polo the bunny”, a fantasy protagonist of raids in different places connected with the children’s daily life. This was done so that it was possible to give the child an active role, to promote all activities and to involve the parents in the learning process. From this active research, further projects have been designed and developed in libraries and recreational centres, in close relation to the activities initiated at school and proposed to the families; this creates a sort of educational network that underlies a shared child-centred covenant that values the resources and the life that environment can offer, meant as a complex system of heterogeneous intertwined entities¹².

Among the many projects in the teaching and educational field, Chiara Panciroli and Anita Macauda focus in their contribution on the laboratory approach and the atelier workshop. They argue that it is possible to set up, in a room the size of only a few square meters, or even on a computer screen, environments that are able to actively involve the child in testing, handling, reflexive, elaborating experiences, and in using elements and stimuli that characterize the urban landscape, making creative use of today’s many available art languages (photography, cinema, painting, videogames, and many others). Here the concept of space transcends the mere physical, tangible prerogative, to be experienced with all five senses at once, and it connotes as action field and of personal or collective achievement, as a result of the plot of physical, relational, symbolic, and recently also virtual, dimensions. Ultimately the space becomes first of all an essential element of knowledge which is at the same time both the *environment* in which you can learn and conceives the means to produce knowledge through the interaction of several languages. The atelier “The child and the city”, collected in the virtual platform MOdE (Museo Officina dell’Educazione), is a clear example of their characteristics, it describes and interprets in an original way the many visions on child-city relationship. This atelier enables some of the many possible reading of educational paths on the links between space and individual, in this case between a given space and the child who lives there, endowing it with meaning and putting value on it, in the double sense of represented space and practiced space.

The atelier rules as a context of research, observation and experimentation able to raise new questions and to provide as many solutions. It is an easily transformable environment and, for that reason, it evolves, changes, implements with further reading and interpretation paths. As a result of the interaction of different expressive forms, it is able to support and nurture many sensory perceptions, to develop and enhance the aesthetic and synesthetic perception. The display of images, organized in interconnected forms, enhance the value of communication, of participation and of non hierarchical relationship.

The virtual dimension s taken up by Heinz Hengst in his contribute on *Urban spaces in the culture of childhood*, considering it as one of the main factors of the growing *Verhäuslichung* (domestication) of children, which goes hand in hand with the institutionalization of the free time and the fragmentation of public spaces, that are often reached thanks to the parents’ help. The author continues Turkle’s reflection (2008), along which children and young people today grow up “inside and with many different worlds”, especially attributable to the physical daily routine of urban and natural landscapes and to the virtual traits of technology environments. Thus they are able to take advantage of it, if adequately trained how to use them, according to a model tending to a wide convergence of heterogeneous objects that come into play in social spaces and cultural practices, inevitably returning to the logic of marketing and consumerism that winks to children. On this basis, and drawing on empirical research conducted in several European countries, Hengst invites us to reconsider more critically some life environments of our children, starting from the bedroom, a home environment that today is more important than in the past, as a result of the widespread of TV sets, computers and videogames, and finally of the internet. According to the author, the modern bedrooms where infants are taught to “live” in virtuous ways, may constitute experiential spaces that compensate for the depletion of many life areas and proximity, along the roads, parks and neighbourhood of the cities. Among the other functions that a school assumes, this particular scholastic function is recognised. It is a real context not only for learning, but also for experimentation with forms of community, awareness and care of a shared space. Finally, we have the malls defined by Marc Augé (2010) as *non-places*, though considered by Hengst as real alternative to home and school, because they are

present, experienced and frequented since the early childhood, and therefore they are potentially reassuring, not conflictual. They are certainly not positive and idyllic, but at the same time they are not to be demonized, which is therefore necessary to analyze in all their complexity, in order to grasp ideas and valued elements.

As opposed to the institutionalization of children's free time and to the fragmentation of frequented places, Giampaolo Nuvolati's essay draws from classics of fiction and nonfiction on the city to approach the figure of the *flâneur* to a certain meaning of childhood. In this respect, the child and the *flâneur* are two figures that, albeit different characterizations, converge in reading and interpreting the urban experience through the child's ingenuity, spontaneity, and carefreeness, which they relate, albeit with sometimes different shades and manifestations, the search of emotions, improvisation, and the depth that are typical of the *flâneur*. In contrast to the *blasé*, bored, disillusioned attitude of the adults (Simmel, 1982), that allow objects of daily life to appear before us without feeling, and differentiate particular emotions, the child and the *flâneur* can suggest *naïf* approaches to the city, full of awe, wonder, curiosity, surrender to stimuli, or as Benjamin (2002), would say of "serendipic wandering" (p. 498).

The child-*flâneur*, synthesis of *puer* and *senex*, and the *flâneur*-child, explorer of neighbourhoods, are authentic and antithetical characters to a reality that instead seems more and more oriented to deny freedom and improvisation of movements in the name of a reassuring urgency. On this basis, moving from a literary level to a more prosaic level of the tangible reality, urban policies, as well as educational models, could play a key role in creating the infrastructure opportunities (roads and walking paths and resting areas) and in making children and adults aware of an even more erratic and emotional attendance of the city. In this sense Nuvolati cites active experiences, like *Pedibus*, the "Walking bus" project, active in many cities. This project allows children to walk in a group on their way home under the guidance of parents or volunteers active in local associations. The initiative is already widespread in many Italian and European cities; it aims to enable children to develop greater independence, specifically by promoting deeper and confidential contact with the different environments of their daily lives and an attitude to a more sustainable transport and thus more future oriented.

Similarly comes Roberto Farnè's contribution, focused on the concept and practice of outdoor education and *outdoor learning*, which are currently fairly present in both pedagogical debate, in reality and in some practical manifestations in different countries around the world. The *outdoor education* includes varied training proposals that intend to promote experiences in close contact with the external environment, taken in its strong educational value, whose origins can be traced back to a few centuries ago, particularly within the reflections and innovative experiences of Vittorino da Feltre, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Fröbel (D'Ascenzo, 2014; Bortolotti, 2014). Nowadays outdoor education is also expressed in activities based on the environmental consumption, health education in opposition to the trend of an excessive childhood's domestication, treated by Heinz Hengst in his essay. The outcomes of this domestication could be very closet o the *Nature deficit disorder* theorized by Richard Louv (2006), a deficit found in children whose life style is characterized by a lacking contact with the nature and shows a number of behavioural and cognitive dysfunction, like the reduction of the use of senses, attention difficulties, and an increase risk of physical and mental disorders.

To conclude, Fausta Sabatano's contribution, entitled *Living the Emergency: vulnerable children in a difficult city* aims to describe what it has been doing in the region Campania, with particular reference to the activities supported and directed by the Educational Centre Regina Pacis, in order to promote the inclusion of vulnerable children and young people. Her work is carried out through two main projects: the community "Casa Papa Francesco" which welcomes young people who have been in contact with juvenile criminal justice, but is open to all situations of distress and/or juvenile deviance; the Project Integra was started in 2005 and it is active in some highly problematic areas of Naples. Its main aim consists in limiting all forms of discomfort, delinquency and marginalisation through the construction of an educational community aimed to develop integrated educational actions.

Taking into account that the Project Integra acts in the disadvantaged quarters of Quarto, Rione Traiano and Licola, in which the daily probability of children coming into contact with crime and lack of family support is high, it is necessary to highlight that the relationship between young people and the city

is constantly influenced and subject to risks and the characteristics of urban areas of reference. In hugely difficult situations, constant measures of mediation by caregivers and institutions are particularly recommended, so as to ensure that children have the opportunity to enjoy the public spaces and build a relationship with the city, without being subject to fears and dangers.

As we can see in this first review of the contents and approaches of the present essays, we choose to treat the issue of the relationship between the child and the city by seeking primarily to preserve and not to trivialize its complexity.

First of all, the evolution of the concept of the city and the child has been investigated over a large time-span, ranging from the middle Ages to the present time. This choice has allowed us to outline a vision of the contemporary city that neither denies nor forgets its past legacies, but rather is able to read such traces in order to provide further insights, as well as the actualization and interpretation of such elements. At the same time, the recovery of childhood's characters and conceptions dating back to periods, contexts and social models so far removed from the actual ones, allows us to broaden our gaze on boys and girls, in order to grasp the recurring elements of the essence of their age, but above all the dynamics and outcomes arising from the interaction with adults, from social and economic situations, from cultural attitudes occurring over the centuries. The direction of the complexity here pursued is not possible without an interdisciplinary approach: the present volume collects contributions of scholars of history, history of pedagogy, architecture, children literature and didacticism.

For a study on the relationships between the child and the city, the contribution of historians turns out to be essential for adumbrating the contexts under which particular situations, relationships, and realities unfold; the same can be said for observing the evolution of events and ideas in the long run. In particular, we should not overlook the intertwining of macro-history and micro-history, and political and social history, since between the interconnections of these dimensions often arise, or lie dormant, innovations, obstacles, changes.

Starting from this frame-work, the aid of the history of pedagogy enables the recognition, analysis, and deepening the strong educational elements, also relating them to each other, seen in the many formal, informal and non-formal environments that work together in order to delineate the big picture of the city. Therefore urban contexts are stimuli for knowledge and portray themselves as objects to be known so that one can experience and live with a greater awareness.

If we consider the city in light of its double meaning as an environment with a strong educational importance and large holder of various institutions and organizations working in the field of education, it is appropriate to pay particular attention to its architectural aspects. The structural and aesthetic changes occur hand in hand with the evolution of the concepts of childhood and the role given to children. This, as well as the layout of certain areas, follows expressly educational values.

The different branches of the child's imaginative world and the suggestions of narrative metaphors allow to the children literature to explore in depth, along flexible routes that are open to the surprising aspects, the relationships between children and the city: it is a relationship that occurs, in tales and histories for younger readers, along pathways mingling urban adventures, explorations of roads and margins, conquests of territories and subtraction of areas. And thus in children's literature, the city is never a neutral and indifferent space, but instead offers itself as a place of friendship, education, development, and sometimes, even as a place of dramatic confrontation.

Pedagogy and teaching, both understood in their theoretical, metareflexive dimensions, and in their practical applications, constitute the aim towards which the present interdisciplinary process outlined here has been thought. The realities of teaching and education, described and analyzed in the various contributions therefore represent only a few examples from which to draw inspiration for a broader reflection that can embrace the dynamics at play, without denying the fluid and elusive components, seeing that they are the cities in which we live.

For this reason it appears necessary to address the ways of knowing, feeling, and thinking about the city system by the younger, considering not only the places "for children", but above all the spaces designed and offered "by children" pursuing an active gaze able to understand the relationship between education and citizenship, participation and membership of the different contexts of life.

Notes

¹ “Attraversarono uno dei quartieri più popolosi della città, poi tagliarono per una stradina più sudicia e squallida delle altre e si fermarono per cercare la casa della defunta. Quelle ai due lati della strada erano alte e imponenti ma cadevano in rovina ed erano abitate da povera gente. In giro si vedevano poche persone malvestite, curve ed emaciate, che gironzolavano senza meta. C'erano anche diverse botteghe, ma tutte sbarrate e in sfacelo, solo i piani superiori delle case erano abitati, ma le pareti esterne erano state puntellate con dei tronchi, mancavano le imposte, l'intonaco cadeva a pezzi. Nella cunetta della strada scorreva un rivolo d'acqua scura e maleodorante e qua e là si notavano carogne di topi scheletrici”. Translated by author.

² “il luogo dell'abusivo [...] il grande regno dell'inventiva infantile: qui i bambini si mescolano alle persone grandi che la famiglia non ammette, condividono attività modi di essere, abbigliamento ritmi, valori propri di soggetti altri, in una socializzazione che è di segno diverso se non opposto a quella accettata e praticata nelle istituzioni canoniche del sociale e si avvale di dispositivi peculiari: non solo giochi – e la cultura del gioco infantile in parte nasce e si sviluppa nella strada – ma anche apprendimenti sociali, regole praticate e verificate nella loro efficacia e saper fare, destrezza”. Translated by author.

³ “Era qualche tempo che non avevo più volontà di far bene, e mi ero dato ad una vita scapestrata, conosco che mi sono meritato questo castigo mentre non ho dato che dei forti disgusti a mia madre, non andando più a bottega, e né a casa, stando su la Piazza con ogni sorta di birichini, cose tutte che ben conosco, e che ne sono pentito” (Archivio Storico Provinciale di Bologna, Casa di correzione). Translated by author.

⁴ “aeroporti, centri commerciali, autostrade e supermercati sono dei non-luoghi: infatti, la loro vocazione principale non è territoriale, non è di creare identità individuali, relazioni simboliche e patrimoni comuni, ma piuttosto di facilitare la circolazione (e quindi il consumo) in un mondo di dimensioni planetarie”. Translated by author.

⁵ “lo spazio degli altri senza la presenza degli altri, lo spazio reso spettacolo”. Translated by author.

⁶ “Per la maggior parte del tempo gli “altri” (quegli altri, estranei anonimi e senza volto, che incontriamo ogni giorno attraversando città densamente popolate, o muovendoci confusamente per le vie) anziché darci un senso di sicurezza e rassicurazione contro i pericoli sono fonti di una vaga e diffusa minaccia. Da loro non ci aspettiamo, né essi ci suscitano, alcuna solidarietà: e verso di loro temiamo persino di scalfire la sottile vernice protettiva della “disattenzione civile” di cui parla Erving Goffman. Mantenere le distanze ci sembra il solo modo ragionevole di procedere”. Translated by author.

⁷ “Aveva questo Marcovaldo un occhio poco adatto alla vita di città: cartelli, semafori, vetrine, insegne luminose, manifesti, per studiati che fossero a colpire l'attenzione, mai fermavano il suo sguardo che pareva scorrere sulle sabbie del deserto”. Translated by author.

⁸ “non si progettavano “ghetti” o “riserve indiane” sul tipo dei moderni campi gioco, in cui relegare i bambini per proteggerli da eventuali pericoli”. Translated by author.

⁹ “Signori e plebei abitavano gomito a gomito perché non c'erano quartieri separati per censo [...]: le differenze di classe, benché nette, non impedivano relazioni umane”. Translated by author.

¹⁰ “Non erano luoghi del vivere quotidiano ma piuttosto la scena in cui si svolgevano le cerimonie, le processioni e il commercio, con il conseguente traffico pesante di carri e carrozze”. Translated by author.

¹¹ “le immagini dell'infanzia espresse nelle arti visive non sono solo delle opere d'arte e come tali studiate dagli storici dell'arte [...], bensì sono fonte per *l'histoire à part entière*”. Translated by author.

¹² Also in Italy the action research project RICE in the city of Treviso is placed in line with the socio-psycho-pedagogical aims of the International Network of Educational Cities, promoted by Jean Pierre Pourtois and Huguette Desmet, even bringing some innovative aspects related to the specific context, to reference policies, to the educational history and some particular local skills (Pileri, 2015).

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