Digital Archiving and 
School Cultural Heritage: 
The CoDISV Project 

Antonella Nuzzaci, Università dell’Aquila, Italy 
Luisa Revelli, Université de la Vallée d’Aoste, Italy 

ABSTRACT 

Cultural institutions such as libraries and archives play an important role in the preservation of, and access to, cultural heritage. The digitization of documents of an historical educational nature is essential to ensure the preservation of the collective memory of certain generations for schoolchildren, and its use for educational purposes allows a collective identity to be re-established, suitable for use on increasingly large subject groups. This article examines the benefits of digitizing a specific type of material related to school culture, exercise books, which have played a significant role in the history of the teaching and learning processes. It examines issues related to the conservation of these items and access to them, given their cultural heritage and their impact on the preservation and upkeep of the history of educational institutions. The main aspects and stages of the CoDISV project, which aims to build a digital library of cultural assets, and educational and historical ones in particular, will then be discussed.

Keywords: Cultural Competence, Cultural Heritage of School, Cultural Heritage Uses in Education, Digital Archives, Teaching

1. CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EDUCATIONAL ITEMS

The principal objective of this paper is to show how education about cultural heritage can strengthen the cultural values of the population, because those who are deprived of it can acquire important tools needed to understand reality, and access its symbolic repertoires. This means that those who are precluded from access to cultural heritage are ‘clown people,’ an expression derived from the well-known story by Italo Calvino (1993), unable to correctly interpret the knowledge that results and is rebuilt from signals, signs and symbols that are defined in the form of ideas, theories and objects.

Secondly, the paper aims to highlight how important it is that communities, and especially school communities, can enjoy historical educational items through new digital tools, such as the archive described in this paper, built by the CoDISV project at the University of the Aosta Valley.

Culture exists principally as an inheritance, which is transmitted, built and re-created. The essence of the cultural process is the commu-
communication that takes place between individuals and their era, as embodied in monuments, documents, objects, works, rituals, and so on. Therefore, the journey leading from the concept of \textit{I / other to others / community} is vital, and is established through the means and intermediaries provided by educational institutions. This relationship gives rise to a preferential way of accessing the internal contradictions of culture, torn between continuing tradition and the changing ways of representing reality. Without educational processes that can be tested for quality this tension could lead to muteness in the symbolic forms, so that they would lose their power of meaning. In fact, culture builds a common world of meanings that are shared and passed down, and which are based on the dialogue between what we are and the heritage we produce and that represents us. One can therefore imagine why the dynamism and the significance of cultural processes can only be supported through education, which has become the only means of disseminating and understanding facts and cultural events, to the extent that it organizes means of intervention and defines ways of social regulation.

Culture, in fact, like education, in its different forms of individual and social reception, both visible and invisible, is subject to continuous change by means of its ‘heritage,’ which, in its different meanings, is spread out in space and time. Cultural democratization also involves the conscious use of the tangible and intangible heritage of different identities on a local, national, international and transnational level. This causes a segmentation of the public and means that people of different ages, social status and cultural development have different levels of access to cultural heritage. Unfortunately, it happens that, because of the generalised mediation that comes from mass communication – what Morin calls ‘the popularization of the media’, which raises the old fundamental question of cognitive democracy (1999, p. 20) – this process does not necessarily lead to quality and consequent rise of the population’s cultural level, or in other words it does not allow heritage to form a real part of the learning process. For this to occur specific strategies must be identified in the approach to the training process, that act as logical connections, fuelling a long-lasting acquisition of knowledge.

‘Public’ access to cultural heritage is therefore seen as a constitutionally weak democratization of the mass spread of cultural objects, which consequently leads to an unproductive use of culture, or to the failure to recognize the value of its material and immaterial creations. In this way, within the same culture, the items lose their practical significance of mediation, becoming acculturated and shattering the all-inclusive sense of education. This is a poorly interpreted ‘cult of fairness’ that arises due to the modern elite, and that emerges as a critical examination of tradition and of the present day, informing and transforming the explanations about ‘modern man’ through quality practical experiences and practices.

Currently, the development of new cultural movements results in a greater diversity of social groups (education, lifestyles, etc.) and ways of producing and spreading culture (cultural industries), a proliferation of places where intellectual creation takes place, and finally, direct intervention by the State. And if today we consider heritage not as a single concept but as a group of concepts, we must clarify how it is transmitted from generation to generation, constantly recreated by different communities in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, giving individuals a sense of identity and continuity, and promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. Heritage has two meanings: ‘material’ heritage, a set of physical, visible forms of differerng value, which can be unique and irreproducible, and ‘immaterial’ heritage, which consists of ‘volatile’ categories of public or private property, or representations, practices and expressions like knowledge and skills that communities and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their culture.

It is essential to remember that societies have set phases marked by ideological conflicts and socio-political conditions that see the right to education as a fundamental human right,
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