

# **The Necessary Step**

*Cataloguing to Recognise and Enhance the Value  
of School Heritage*

Edited by

**Marta Brunelli and Francesca Davida Pizzigoni**

# The Necessary Step: Cataloguing to Recognise and Enhance the Value of School Heritage

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[www.seps.it](http://www.seps.it) - [seps@seps.it](mailto:seps@seps.it)

Translated by  
Antonella Di Pasquale

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# Preface: The Necessary Step and the Open Challenges for Safeguarding and Enhancing School Heritage

**Anna Ascenzi**

In recent years, there has been a real historiographical revolution, which has given life to new lines of research in the historical-educational field. In fact, as it is known, in 1995 the French historian Dominique Julia proposed to consider school culture as “the set of norms, which define the knowledge to be taught and the behaviours to be inculcated, as well as the educational practices, which allow their correct transmission and assimilation by the recipients of the educational action” (Julia 1995a). By introducing it as a historical object of investigation, Julia assigned a prominent role to the history of school subjects, as it was able to describe the dynamics that take place within the school classroom. In the wake of this reflection, a new approach to writing the history of education and schooling has emerged.

Over the past thirty years, scholars have paid particular attention to the material culture of schooling, and, at the same time, there has been a growing interest in the protection and safeguard of this rich historical-educational heritage not only by institutions linked to the academic field, but also by private individuals, schools, national and local bodies and administrations. As a result, museums, historical halls and collections of specific objects were created and study days and opportunities for discussion involving educational historians, but also the school world and other realities,

which were engaged in collecting, enhancing and studying historical-educational heritage, were organised<sup>1</sup>.

In 2004, the development of studies and research on the historical-educational heritage favoured the birth of Sociedad Española para el Estudio del Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo (SEPHE), which started engaging in the protection and conservation of historical-educational heritage, studying and searching for this heritage and the promotion, support and dissemination of actions linked to the above-mentioned purposes among its fundamental goals. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo was officially born.<sup>2</sup> Following the model of this society – and of other similar academic and scientific associations that have emerged in recent years in Portugal, France, Switzerland, and Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, etc.) – the Società Italiana per lo Studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo was officially established on 13 September 2017, on the initiative of research groups in the history of education active at twelve Italian universities (Roma Tre, Florence, Macerata, Molise,

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<sup>1</sup> As a demonstration of the strong attention paid to the historical-educational heritage not only by the academic scientific community, but also by private individuals, schools, national and local bodies and administrations, it is highlighted that “Società Italiana per lo Studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo” has also received a support coming from educational institutions and school educational museums since its creation. Furthermore, the second congress, which was organised by SIPSE – and held in Padua on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> October 2021 –, saw the participation of educational historians, but also school headmasters, teachers coming from schools of all levels, representatives of historical institutes and archivists. For further information, see the acts of the congress Ascenzi, Covato and Zago (2021).

<sup>2</sup> SIPSE was born as part of the III *International Conference on School Material Culture* «Production, Use and Circulation of School Furnishings and Teaching Aids between Europe and Latin America in XIX and XX Centuries», which was held at the University of Macerata on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017. About SIPSE creation see Brunelli (2017).

Bari, Foggia, Bologna, Basilicata, Calabria, Padua, Bolzano, and the Catholic University of Milan).

Since the beginning, the Italian Society has set itself to protect, preserve and enhance the historical-educational heritage at educational museums, documentation and research centres on historical-educational heritage, historical schools and, more generally, schools of all levels. Furthermore, it is committed to promoting local hubs for the survey, collection, and cataloguing of this heritage and to protect the national (librarian, archival, architectural or museum) historical-educational heritage, promoting initiatives, which are aimed at avoiding its dispersion and deterioration, also through an appropriate reporting to the competent authorities. In addition, SIPSE's activities also include the development of specific protocols for the conservation of school cultural heritage, defining its cataloguing criteria and preparing guidelines and complementary tools to be distributed in schools of all levels, the development of interest in school heritage by the school world and, more generally, civil society, highlighting its teaching and popular functions, the promotion of agreements among various participating institutions in order to facilitate exchanges of information, practices and experiences, as well as the development of common programs and shared regulations. Finally, it is important for society to create connections with similar foreign associations. In fact, since its creation, SIPSE has had an authentically international vocation, considering the discussion on every aspect, which is fundamental with the studies on historical-educational heritage carried out in various countries and with methodologies, sources, lines of investigation and historiographical approaches<sup>4</sup>. This is a very important aspect, as it allows the Society to broaden its research perspectives in fact, the Society intends to strengthen

cohesion, comparison and collaboration with the international network of scholars.

Among the most important goals of the Italian Scientific Society is the creation of a European network of academic societies engaged in the study of historical educational heritage, but also the valorisation of young scholars and the promotion of highly specialised studies and research through the series «Thesaurus Scholae. Sources and studies on school heritage», which is organised into two distinct sections, “Studies” and “Sources”. The “Studies” section is destined to have the acts of the conferences and the seminars, which are promoted by SIPSE, as well as monographic volumes by individual scholars and collective volumes containing Italian and foreign scholars’ contributions relating to studies and research on historical-educational heritage<sup>3</sup>. Instead, the “Sources” section includes the results of the censuses for school heritage and welfare and educational institutions for children and young people in our country, which were carried out at a local and regional level.

In May 2020, four thematic work committees for school and educational movable properties, which were composed of some members of the society, were precisely created to make SIPSE mission even more incisive and effective. Thus, there was the *work committee for School Archives*, which aims at examining the problems and the potential relating to school archives as sources for the history of education to be known, preserved and valorised as school heri-

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<sup>3</sup> The first SIPSE congress was held in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018, in conjunction with the celebration of the VIII Jornadas Científicas de la Sociedad Española para el Estudio del Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo (SEPHE), the homologous Spanish Scientific Society to which the Italian Society is linked by solid and profitable collaborative relationships at an international level. Please, see the acts of the Congress edited by Ascenzi, Covato and Meda (2020).



tage, the *work committee for School Libraries and School Book Heritage*, which is engaged in the recognition of what exists in Italy as the first medium-term goal, starting, first of all, from the individual realities where the components of the committee are acting, the *work committee for School Museums and School Scientific collections*, whose main goal is the census of school heritage in museums, and the *work committee for Cataloguing School Heritage*, which has the intrinsic goal of working towards the definition of criteria for cataloguing school heritage<sup>4</sup>. The committees created a census form for the historical-educational heritage and are keeping on working on the bibliographic recognition of studies and research, which are devoted to a specific topic, the recognition of any experiences on censuses and teaching activities, which have already started at a local level, and the definition of a kit of good practices.

Therefore, this volume is placed within the research activities by the SIPSE and the work of its thematic committees, specifically the *Committee for Cataloguing School Heritage*. This is a committee whose main goal is to arrive at the definition of criteria for cataloguing school heritage, which are currently without any uniformly recognised rules, directions, or cataloguing protocols. Therefore, the final goal will be to achieve the promotion of a cataloguing card for the historical-educational heritage to be submitted to Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione belonging to the Italian Ministry of Culture. This ambitious operation intrinsically contains a further essential goal: to achieve the official recognition of the “School heritage” category.

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<sup>4</sup> The mandate program was published in minutes no. 1 of the Governing Council meeting of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and can be consulted in the register of minutes: <[http://www.sipse.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2022/11/Consiglio-Direttivo\\_Registro-dei-verbali.pdf](http://www.sipse.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2022/11/Consiglio-Direttivo_Registro-dei-verbali.pdf)> (24.01.2023).

This is a considerable challenge precisely since “school heritage” has not enjoyed a specific legal recognition up to now. Consequently, this is a heritage category with loose and sometimes subjective boundaries and all the consequences, which this lack of definition brings with it. For this reason, the committee felt the need to work in a plural direction, which is able to identify and face some of these complexities, trying to offer a contribution not only to discussion on specific topics, but also to suggest possible solutions.

To achieve these two macro-goals, the Committee aims to start a comparative analysis of the existing cataloguing cards, which are recognized by ICCD today and referred to those kinds of heritage – such as, for example, technical-scientific collections – within which a part of school heritage can be traced back, drawing up a list of materials, which are part of the “School heritage” category to arrive at a single and unambiguously recognized definition of the assets belonging to this kind of heritage and identifying its possible categories and subcategories and studying the teaching implications of the cataloguing operations for school heritage as its first actions<sup>5</sup>.

*The necessary step: cataloguing to enhance school heritage* collects the results of these first reflections and is divided into essays, which are devoted to a single specific matter of the macro-topic “cataloguing”, considering it in the broadest possible sense.

The first chapter *A heritage in search of protection. Ideas and reflections for a potential category of “school heritage”* by Marta Brunelli together

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<sup>5</sup> See the website page of the Work committee for cataloguing school heritage: <http://www.sipse.eu/commissione-di-lavoro-sulla-catalogazione-dei-beni-culturali-della-scuola/> (11.03.2023).

with Carmen Vitale, resumes and updates the previous essay written ten years ago by Brunelli (2013) who had had the merit of being one of the first to draw attention to the lack of specific categorisation of school heritage. That essay offered a review of the Italian legislation relating to cultural assets from a legal point of view, paying attention to the fact that we were still faced with “a category to be defined” with respect to school-related assets. Furthermore, it underlined how this indeterminacy inevitably affected the possibility of creating a rigorous and scientific cataloguing of this heritage category. Now, ten years after that groundbreaking work, Brunelli and Vitale intend to offer an update of the reflection, identifying any regulatory steps forward and trying to specify useful elements to arrive at a more necessary definition of the heritage category on which the possibility of a correct conservation and valorisation of school heritage depends.

In their essay Mara Orlando and Valeria Viola *How to catalogue a school heritage? Reflections and first results* reflect on the national cataloguing system, which is regulated by ICCD. In the absence of a scientifically coherent and officially validated descriptive standard for historical school heritage—one approved by the national bodies responsible for coordinating cataloguing activities of cultural heritage at a national level, the two authors get through the different recognized cataloguing cards today by looking for possible “adaptations” of these cards to meet the specific needs of school heritage. The result is a significant comparative analysis of the catalogue templates currently in use at the ICCD for heritage types under which school assets might be classified. Then, the work goes as far as to suggest a solution, which is easily practicable, but very diriment for the issue, identifying the specific Area (the ATB one) in the cataloguing cards, which are currently

recognized and included in SIGECweb, as a “paragraph” where to include the belonging indication of an asset to “school heritage”, thus allowing to easily identify school materials, even if they are catalogued in cards relating to different kinds of assets.

The essay *Exercise books among research, teaching and third mission. Some reflections in view of a cataloguing card* by Francesca Borruso considers the specific school heritage represented by the school exercise book. It is analysed in its peculiar features, including its study in the context of the attention it has garnered within historical-educational research in recent years. Recognising the needs arising from different research perspectives, Borruso presents some proposals for cataloguing exercise books. These proposals suggest a possible cataloguing card that takes into account the inherent peculiarity of this cultural asset: an object, yet also a container of traces of school life.

The following two chapters delve beyond the strictly historiographical approach to explore the pedagogical applications of cataloguing activities in the classroom, examining their ability to directly engage students and unlock the fullest pedagogical potential of the school heritage.

In *Observing and describing objects. Cataloguing as a method for learning in schoolwork* Marta Brunelli offers a framework for the theoretical and methodological references of this approach. In fact, if scientific cataloguing can be considered as the final act of a whole series of study, understanding and classification actions for an asset, then these actions can be fully considered as essential phases of the process itself and can be investigated with respect to their didactic-educational potential. After identifying the historical-pedagogical roots of this approach, the essay highlights the skills on

which this kind of activity can have an impact: from observation to learning to the formulation of hypotheses, description, representation, classification. In other words, the essay intends to show how the cataloguing activity, when changed into a “heritage description” to be developed in the classroom, can be fully considered a teaching strategy.

In the final essay *Pedagogical cataloguing: proposing initial cataloguing activities to be linked to school activities*, jointly written by Marta Brunelli and Francesca Davida Pizzigoni, a review is offered of the first experiences developed in Italy that adopted this pedagogical vision of the cataloguing of school heritage. The valorisation of these experiences starts from the belief that a fundamental step is achieved through careful and dedicated study, manipulation, observation, and direct contact: from a student, who is a simple user of the heritage or a distracted observer, to an aware student, who becomes a protagonist of knowledge and interpretation of the heritage. This represents a clear change of position and role. The students take up the role of co-builders of knowledge and, consequently, of responsible future advocates. Therefore, the article reconstructs the experiences of *La Scuola è il Nostro Patrimonio*, the Turin school museum network, the practice of “Patrimonieri” and the NEMO project of the Neapolitan Historical Schools, highlighting their teaching approaches and making worksheets available.

In short, the volume represents the first systematic work entirely devoted to the topic of cataloguing historical-educational heritage. It has the ability to face the topic from various points of view, highlighting the aspect of the legal recognition of this heritage category, the needs for institutionally recognized cataloguing cards for these assets, the peculiarities of some assets within this category, without neglecting a more didactic-educational approach of cata-

loguing practice. Therefore, the merit is not only concentrating on the topic, such as the often-sloppy cataloguing of school heritage, but also combining different research perspectives that are able to take into account different needs, purposes and possibilities with respect to the macro-topic of “cataloguing”. The work does not limit itself to focusing on them, but seeks to offer solutions and strategies, opening up the field for future research developments.

Therefore, this volume undoubtedly represents an achievement as it is able to put together the work carried out by the members of the committee in recent years and to fill a significant gap on the topic of school heritage but, at the same time, this is a starting point to launch further interesting initiatives and relevant studies and research with the aim of spreading and strengthening that sensitivity towards the recovery, valorisation and study of school heritage. These actions represent not only a benefit for educational historians, but also for teachers and students, who will be able to undertake innovative paths on teaching history within schools using historical-educational heritage. Such initiatives offer valuable experiences of heritage education, particularly for younger generations. Through them, students can gain knowledge of the past and, in turn, contribute to the protection and promotion of the historical educational heritage—ensuring it is not forgotten or lost.

# Introduction: The Committee for Cataloguing School Heritage

**Francesca Davida Pizzigoni**

The activities of the Committee for Cataloguing School Heritage started in May 2020 as part of the Italian Society for Research on Historical-Educational Heritage (SIPSE) and, specifically, as the Society's desire to launch four thematic work committees<sup>6</sup>. The specific task of our committee<sup>7</sup> is already intrinsic in its name: deeply examining the possibilities of arriving at the definition of criteria for cataloguing historical-educational heritage. In fact, as it is known (Brunelli 2013), there have been no uniformly and institutionally recognized rules, directions or cataloguing protocols with respect to this category of heritage<sup>8</sup> in Italy up to now. Consequently, the priority goal towards which the Committee oriented has been to carry out an in-depth study since the beginning of its activities to fill this gap.

As regards the Italian context, the cataloguing of school heritage, in order to be recognised from a legal-administrative point of view, should be carried out through the SIGECweb, the General

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<sup>6</sup> These are the Work Committee for School Archives; the Work Committee for school museums and school science collections; the work committee for school libraries and schoolbook heritage; the Work Committee for cataloguing school heritage.

<sup>7</sup> The Committee, coordinated by me, is composed of Marta Brunelli (University of Macerata), Francesca Borruso (University of Roma Tre), Mara Orlando (University of Padua) and Valeria Viola ("Giustino Fortunato" University).

<sup>8</sup> About the categorization of school heritage and their conservation, please see also Meda (2010 and 2013).

Cataloguing Information System developed by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage. This tool obviously uses only the cataloguing cards issued by the Central Institute for the Catalogue and Documentation (ICCD) belonging to the Italian Ministry of Culture. Consequently, the final goal, which the Committee sets, is to promote a cataloguing card for the Historical Educational Heritage within this ICCD Institute. This ambitious operation holds a further essential goal: to achieve an official recognition of the “school heritage” category, which is not often uniquely identified today or, in any case, without certain boundaries. As we know well, failure to identify which assets are part of this heritage category leads to inevitable (and irreversible) consequences up to the loss of the heritage itself.

In other words, it's clear that unambiguously identifying any school asset as part of a heritage and cataloguing it through its own data is a fundamental step. This enables us to safeguard the asset, then locate, examine, and correlate it with other assets, delving into its deepest significance.

To achieve these two macro-objectives (i.e. to define which items belong to the category of historical-educational heritage and to have a specific cataloguing card that identifies them as part of this heritage category from a legal-administrative point of view), the Committee embarked on a step-by-step research process as its first medium-term action. This gradual process aimed to first analyze the ‘problem’ and consider its various aspects. Once these aspects had been identified, the aim was to initiate an assessment of the status quo for each of them, by collecting and analysing legislation, national and international experiences and the possibilities for intervention. This would then lead to the formulation of initial proposals for possible solutions, or at least long-term strategies.



Following this approach, as a result of the first action for a “problem study”, it was therefore established:

to start a comparative analysis of the existing cataloguing cards today, which are recognized by Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione and referred to those kinds of heritage (for example, technical-scientific collections) within which a part of school heritage can be traced back, consequently identifying which sub-categories of school heritage are excluded from the current ICCD cataloguing possibilities.

- to draw up a list of materials, which are part of the “School heritage” category, identifying their possible categories and subcategories.
- to study the teaching implications of the cataloguing operations for school heritage.

With respect to the second point, the need to reflect on the current regulatory framework within which this category of assets is included has emerged as a closely related consequence, thus updating a framework study on the process for the legal recognition of school heritage in Italy – exactly ten years after the above-mentioned essay by Brunelli, which was devoted to the topic and a point of reference for the whole study community.

Instead, with respect to the will to specifically deal with teaching strategies and curricular implications of this activity within the Committee, which is devoted to cataloguing school heritage, it arises from considerations, which belong to two different areas. The first one refers to the topic of the conservation and valorisation of historical-educational heritage: in the face of the fact that it is objectively impossible for the research community to directly

deal with every reality, it is appropriate to create a widespread community of people, who are sensitive to the topic of historical-educational heritage, since it is so widespread and preserved at each school. In particular, these are pupils, teachers, headmasters, school staff and school community in a broad sense (i.e., those who are in daily contact with these assets, which are at school very often) and the added value, which is potentially their ability to recognize and to consequently protect these assets. In our opinion, the possibilities of safeguarding a heritage at risk of dispersion are increased through a training action on the knowledge of these assets – which passes through teaching activities in the classroom.

Instead, the second reason refers to various skills for students, which teaching activities based on cataloguing school heritage have expressed in their ability to develop and, therefore, the opportunity for school to see its own heritage as an added value in terms of concrete and positive implications in the curricular course and the application of active and laboratory methodological strategies, offering solutions to school needs. Without considering that the more school heritage are perceived by school as a value and a response to its daily needs (and not, instead, as an “extra thing” to deal with), the more they will be objects of attention and care by the school community (Pizzigoni 2022c).

Returning to the working paths, which have been dealt with in this first phase of the Committee’s life, as the reflection has progressed, it was considered appropriate to devote to in-depth research studies on specific subcategories of school heritage and it was decided to start from the one represented by a multifaceted and complex asset, which is able to include information related to the artefact (manufacturer, series, format, etc.) as well as its content in it: the historical exercise books.

Now, this volume intends to collect the results of these first reflection goals, which the Committee had set.

In this preface – which is a narrative of how our Committee understood the mandate received and how it tried to develop it in this first period of activity –, it seems significant to share a coincidence, which questioned and struck us a lot: this reflection works on the topic of cataloguing school heritage (which brings the implications of safeguarding, protecting and valorising it, as it is mentioned) precisely developed in coincidence with the pandemic linked to COVID-19. As is well known, it had a severe and profound impact on every reality, including the school world, which is par excellence the place where a large quantity of historical pedagogical objects is kept, more or less consciously. The difficult moments of school firstly forced its closure and then the return to the classroom with distancing rules led to the need for schools to identify and to reuse different larger spaces where to have lessons. Beyond the priority aspects of safeguarding health and the right to education, our committee naturally found itself reflecting on the fact that this emergency phase and this need for new spaces could represent a moment of particular danger for school heritage. On the one hand, the objective priorities linked to emergency could lead to a natural and understandable less attention towards historical assets, which were preserved at school, and on the other hand, the haste with which school found itself acting in order to find new spaces could lead to a clearance of rooms, which were perhaps useful as a deposit for these assets with the inevitable dispersion of this heritage.

By recalling how SIPSE's sensitivity and its leadership prompted it to offer its own contribution in that emergency context through an open letter, aimed at supporting the school world in consider-

ing these aspects<sup>9</sup>, the coincidence between the pandemic and the start of our study activities on cataloguing school heritage made us reflect on the fragility of this heritage once again, in an even more poignant way. This led us to feel the *urgency* of having a framework for the recognition and protection of this category of heritage, even more clearly, if possible. Therefore, we intended to work considering the aspect of cataloguing these assets as an essential and “necessary” preliminary action – to use the term that SIPSE President Anna Ascenzi well identified when referring to this step. Therefore, we owned this adjective associated with the step, which is constituted by cataloguing, in the awareness that assets have no identity without cataloguing: they do not have a name, a location, or a date.

In other words, *they don't exist*. There are no legally valid lists (we don't even call them real inventories!), there are no univocal criteria, which make them immediately recognized as a heritage and, moreover, attributable to a specific category of heritage with its specific features. But they *don't* really *exist* in a broader sense, that is, they will always be “dispersible”.

The Committee's intended effort is to shed light on what we can identify as a real need, considering cataloguing as a crucial step towards achieving protection (through full recognition) and considering protection as a tool to enable the entire community not only to share this heritage in the present and future, but also to preserve the fundamental research object related to the field of investigation on school materiality for future years.

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<sup>9</sup> See the SIPSE open letter of July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (prot. n. 5.2/U/0023) entitled *Appello alla salvaguardia del patrimonio culturale delle scuole*.

Our committee's contributions are undoubtedly initial and partial solutions and proposals, which can be refined over time. However, we're eager to share them with the entire scientific community, precisely to foster new joint advances and reflections. These will enable us to collectively develop increasingly effective tools for safeguarding, protecting, and enhancing the school heritage.

## Chapter 1

# A Heritage in Search of Safeguarding: Reflections on the Scientific, Cultural and Legal Framing of a New Category of “School Heritage”<sup>1</sup>

**Marta Brunelli and Carmen Vitale**

### **Introduction: an emerging heritage in search of protection**

This publication illustrates the main issues that have arisen during the work of the SIPSE Committee for the Cataloguing of School heritage, concerning the definition of descriptive protocols for historical school materials, which are nowadays widely distributed throughout Italy. These materials, in fact, are preserved in different locations: firstly, in schools; secondly, in university research centres dealing with history of education or history of disciplinary teaching and, finally, in all those public or private conservation institutes (museums or museum collections)<sup>2</sup>, which collect and

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<sup>1</sup> This work is the result of the joint work of two authors; nevertheless, we would like to specify that Marta Brunelli is the author of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3; Carmen Vitale is the author of paragraphs 4 and 5. The authors have revised, updated and extended the essay by Brunelli (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The distinction between museum and museum collection is explained in international documents, such as the ICOM *Definition of museum* and the ICOM *Code of Ethics* (<<https://icom.museum/en/>>) or the ICOM publication by Desvallées & Mairesse (2010). The same distinction is found in national

show school objects and documents acquired in various ways and with different purposes.

To understand the wide distribution of the materials discussed here, it may be useful to make the following distinction:

- 1) Collections and museums whose institutional mission is to collect and preserve this type of objects. In this case, we are talking about real museums of historical-educational heritage, which represent a growing typology in Italy and abroad;
- 2) Collections and museums containing groups of school materials within collections of a completely different disciplinary nature. This is the case, for example, of ethnographic museums dedicated to the preservation of local traditions and popular culture, which almost always have a section on education or the local school (Pic. 1.1);
- 3) Collections and museums that preserve school materials used and/or produced by a single school, documenting not only the history of that school but also the evolution

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legislation: see the definition of museum in Legislative Decree no. 42 of January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004, art. 101 of the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape and the Ministerial Decree of May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001, *Atto di indirizzo sui criteri tecnico-scientifici e sugli standard di funzionamento e sviluppo dei musei* (<[https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1310746917330\\_DM10\\_5\\_01.pdf](https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1310746917330_DM10_5_01.pdf)> [15.08.2022]). In the latter, a clear distinction is made between museums that “with their own and/or allocated resources, carry out precise integrated functions: conservation of objects and collections, research on them, relevant communication”, and collections to which “the function of conservation is primarily assigned” (*ibid.*: Introduction, p. 14). The distinction lies in the accessibility and openness to the public, which is limited in the case of the collection. The same concept is found in various regional systems, which have incorporated the ministerial directive, such as the Decision of the Regional Council no. 809/2009 of the Marche Region.

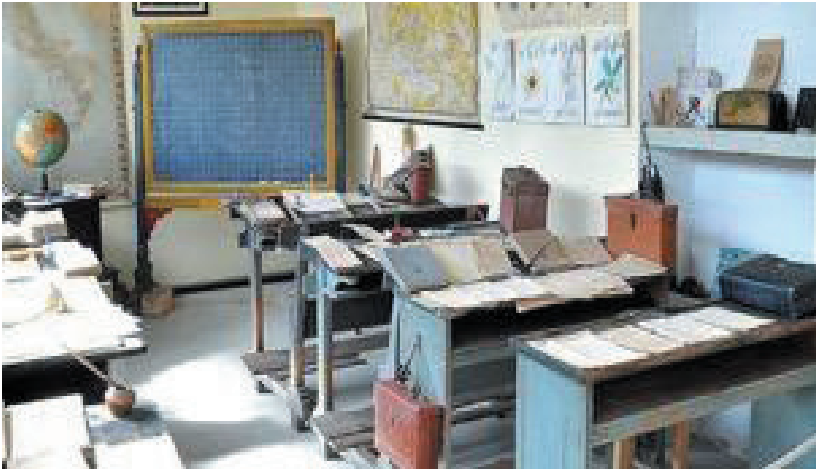
of teaching practices and the organisation of the Italian school system in relation to a specific school level. While various collections can be found in schools across Italy, true museums are a rarity, but they have been gaining momentum in recent years. A striking case is MITI, *Museo dell'Innovazione e della Tecnica Industriale* (Museum of Industrial Innovation and Technique), located in the historical workshops of the Montani Industrial Technical Institute in Fermo and inaugurated in 2012 (Pic. 1.2).

The need to properly preserve and describe these objects arises from the fact that, in recent years, these material testimonies have been the subject of increasing attention from many figures who, although motivated by different (and complementary) motives and purposes, are now working more and more closely with these historical materials. From their own perspectives, these people have helped to clarify the different levels of meaning and value that school materials embody.

Among those who have demonstrated a significant interest in school materials, we find, first and foremost, historians of education who, following the international evolution of historiographical paradigms, have embarked on new lines of research specifically linked to the material sources of school history. The history of education, particularly school history, can be studied from different perspectives. One is national, such as the evolution of the Italian school system. Another is comparative, examining the development of school systems in various countries. Finally, it can be approached from the perspective of «transnational history», a concept introduced by Diana Gonçalves Vidal (2020). This approach demonstrates how the international circulation of pedagogical ideas, educational practices, and school materials between



the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries should be reinterpreted not as the history of an assimilation process, but as a polycentric history of numerous cultural appropriation processes carried out by school systems in each national context.



**Pic. 1.1** *Reconstruction of a rural classroom inside the Museum of popular culture (in Ponzano di Fermo) a private collection (source: <<http://www.museoculturapopolare.it/>>, 11.12.2022)*



**Pic. 1.2.** *The MITI: Museo dell'innovazione e della tecnica industriale (Fermo), the engine room of a former foundry (source: <<https://www.museo-miti.it/>>, 11.12.2022)*

In addition to historians of education, there is also the growing interest that has emerged in recent years by curators and conservators working in museums specifically dedicated to school heritage. These include public museums managed by local authorities, cultural associations or foundations, such as the *Museum of the School/Schulmuseum* of the City of Bolzano, created in 1993 and opened to the public in 1995<sup>3</sup>; the *Museum of the School* of Pergine, created in 1997 by a group of teachers from “Don Milani” primary school<sup>4</sup>; or the *MUSLI – Museum of the School and Children’s Literature*, founded in 2002 in Turin and now an offshoot of the Tancredi di Barolo Foundation – only to mention the most pioneering and significant cases.

Another emerging reality is that of university-based museums, which are more open to the non-academic public. University museums currently operating in Italy are the *MUSED – “Mauro Laeng” Museum of School and Education* at the University of Roma Tre (founded in 1986 and heir to the tradition of the nineteenth-century Museum of Education in Rome), the *Museum of Education* at the University of Padua (established in 1993), the *MUDESC – “Paolo and Ornella Ricca” Museum of the School* at the University of Macerata (created in 2009 and opened to the public in 2012), the *Museum of School and Popular Education* at the University of Molise, was created in 2013, and, finally, the *Permanent Exhibition on the History of the South Tyrolean School*, created in 2007 at the Centre for Research and Documentation on the History of Education in the University of Bressanone, South Tyrol. However, the number and size of school collections is extremely large and only partially

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<sup>3</sup> See the institutional website at the URL: <[http://www.gemeinde.bozen.it/cultura\\_context.jsp?ID\\_LINK=751&area=48](http://www.gemeinde.bozen.it/cultura_context.jsp?ID_LINK=751&area=48)> (20.10.2022).

<sup>4</sup> See the Institutional website: <<http://www.museoscuolapergine.it/it/>> (20.10.2022).

known, which is why the research group operating at the University of Macerata has launched a specific census project<sup>5</sup>.

In all these contexts, there is a growing need to describe school objects using scientifically based, uniform and, above all, functional criteria for a careful historical recontextualisation. This will allow us to properly appreciate their value and significance as material sources of school history. These material sources are highly heterogeneous, ranging from exercise books to drawings, from teaching aids to writing utensils, from school furniture and furnishings to minor materials such as pupils' equipment, including school bags, stationery, school uniforms, badges, and many other objects. Such diversity raises critical questions. Some are general, concerning the macro-category of 'school materials'. Others are more specific, related to each subtype included within it (Pics. 1.3-5).

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<sup>5</sup> The Permanent Observatory of Educational Museums and Research Centres on Historical-Educational Heritage (OPeNMuSE) at the University of Macerata, funded in 2011 as a working group inside «Paolo e Ornella Ricca» Museum of the School History, has been officially working since 2014 to carry out a census of museums, research centres and associations active in the preservation, study and valorisation of historical-school heritage in Italy. The map of the Italian museums and the census forms collected so far are available on the web page: <<https://www.unimc.it/cescom/it/open-muse>> (21.12.2022).



**Pic. 1.3.** (on the left) Museo Industriale Scolastico. MUSLI in Turin (source: <<https://www.fondazionetancredidibarolo.com/>>, 12.09.2022); **Pic. 1.4.** (on the top right) School merit medal (n.d. but late 19<sup>th</sup> century), a private collection (photo by Marta Brunelli); **Pic. 1.5** (on the right) Fibre satchel with handle, angles and turn-lock closure. Ca. 1900-1930, MUDESC - Museo della Scuola «Paolo e Ornella Ricca» (photo by Marco Gasparri)

In addition to historians and museum professionals, teachers are also interested in the problems of conservation, management and accurate description of school materials. This is due to the fact that an increasing number of teachers are using their school's historical materials to develop innovative teaching projects with their pupils, as some of the experiences reported in this volume confirm. This pedagogical and cultural interest reflects international, European and national educational policies which, from the 1990s to the present day, have identified Heritage Education as an active and

interdisciplinary teaching method that is particularly flexible and functional for the educational needs of contemporary society<sup>6</sup>.

Last but not least, the interests of school administrators must be taken into account. As managers and custodians of these materials, they are in the unenviable position of having to decide whether to regard them as materials of historical interest and therefore worthy of protection and conservation, or as obsolete objects to be replaced. In this regard, the Decree of the Ministry of Education, University and Research no. 129 of 28 August 2018<sup>7</sup>, at the art. 34 (*Sale of end-of-life materials and no longer usable goods*) states that:

1. [...] end-of-life, obsolete and no longer usable assets are discarded by the schools by order of the school manager, after determining their value, which is calculated on the basis of the inventory value less depreciation, i.e. on the basis of the second-hand value of similar assets, as determined by a specific internal committee.

The problem of disposing of obsolete school materials became extremely urgent during the recent period of the Covid-19 health emergency, which brought a sudden and not always positive acceleration for schools. Suddenly forced to look for new spaces that would guarantee the necessary social distance and, at the same time, to purchase new, more functional furniture for this purpose, schools

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<sup>6</sup> Given the vast literature on this topic, I will limit myself to mentioning the Italian work by Bortolotti, Calidoni, Mascheroni, & Mattozzi (2008) and, for a summary vision, the collection of essays edited by Branchesi, Iacono, & Riggio (2019).

<sup>7</sup> See Decree no. 129 of 28 August 2018: *Regulation containing general instructions on the administrative and accounting management of educational institutions, pursuant to Article 1, paragraph 143, of Law no. 107 of 13 July 2015* (GU General Series no. 267 of 11-16-2018). The complete text is freely available online on the website of the Official Journal: <[https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/stampa/serie\\_generale/originario](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/stampa/serie_generale/originario)> (01.09.2022).

had to quickly discard materials and furniture (Pic. 4). Precisely in February 2021 the Ministry of Education took steps to organically regulate the procedures for eliminating assets from the inventory (inventory disposal) by issuing specific *Guidelines for the management of school heritage and inventories* that replaced the previous instructions (notes prot. no. 8910 of 2011 and no. 2233 of 2012)<sup>8</sup>. In the text, assets subject to elimination are classified and defined as follows:

- *End-of-life assets*: these include unusable, broken or damaged assets for which repair would be uneconomical;
- *Obsolete assets*: this category includes functioning assets that are outdated from a technological point of view and also in terms of the care of the public interest pursued;
- *Unusable assets*: these are assets which, although intact and capable of being reused, no longer meet the needs of the activity being carried out<sup>9</sup>.

For end-of-life assets, the following procedures are laid down: public sale or, in the event of an unsuccessful tender, transfer against payment through negotiation or, then, the free transfer “to non-economic public bodies or, alternatively, to non-profit bodies (NPOs, associations for the promotion of local culture and tourism, parishes, social promotion bodies etc.)” and, finally, in the

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<sup>8</sup> See also Ministerial note 23.02.2021, prot. no. 4083.

<sup>9</sup> The definitions are given in Par. 4.1.9. *Elimination of assets from the inventory* of the Ministerial note 23.02.2021, prot. no. 4083: *Guidelines for the management of assets and inventories of State educational and school establishments, pursuant to Article 29, par. 3, of Inter Ministerial Decree no. 129 of 28 August 2018: Regulation containing general instructions on the administrative and accounting management of educational institutions, pursuant to Article 1, paragraph 143, of Law no. 107 of 13 July 2015*, p. 28. For the sake of completeness, it should be recalled that the “assets subject to elimination” also include the “resulting materials”, i.e. the materials left over “after processing or waste materials”.