

Milano



SPAZI COLORE, A PROJECT FOR DIDACTIC INNOVATION

Cristiano Scevola - Assunta Sassone

Comune di Milano, Assessorato all'educazione e Istruzione
Area Servizi Scolastici ed Educativi

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«Municipalities and provinces are guarantor of the quality of school buildings. Municipalities and provincial institutions - as contractors – need to [...] be aware of the challenges of education, and to support the didactics and learning activities by guaranteeing the pedagogical quality of the school buildings.».

(Rete Spazio&Apprendimento, 2015, p.169)

The project



This presentation describes the project about the conceptual revisitation and the concrete transformation of some areas of the Civico Polo Scolastico "A. Manzoni" in via Deledda 11 in Milan, into "Spazi Colore" ("colour spaces").

The school moved to its current location from the school year 2011/2012 and harbors, along with other city services, 1036 students of the Liceo Linguistico "Manzoni", 250 students of the "Technical and Economic Institute (TEC)", and 402 students of the "Centre of Education for Adults and Teenagers" (data referred to s.y. 2017/2018). The building was designed in 1955 by the architect Arrigo Arrighetti and, along with relevant architectural qualities, it responds to traditional teaching mind frames.

The structure is characterized by an S-shaped plan, with long corridors overlooked by classrooms of such dimensions and planimetric configurations that do not stimulate active teaching. In essence, within that spatial and pedagogical context, the pupil is not conceived as an active builder of experiences, nor as an autonomous organizer of the structure of his knowledge, and the teacher is seen as the interpreter of a transmissive approach based on frontal lesson.

Relationship between design/educational reflection and realization of "Color Spaces"

Recipients

Students and teachers of the different schools hosted in the Civico Polo Scolastico "A. Manzoni", users of the spaces and main actors of their "redesigning" through daily usage.

Objectives

To create spaces designed to stimulate cooperative learning and a student centered teachers approach. Through the "Colour Spaces" the opportunity is offered for a dynamic use of the school environment where also the furnishings participate in the didactic activity. All the elements can be moved and reconfigured as needed. The furniture becomes the object of an intentional "doing" that facilitates and suggests group work and an educational experience with a strong "horizontal" component.

Timeline

The idea of developing an ILE experiment in Milan was born After a visit to the Ørestad Gymnasium in Copenhagen. During 2017 the spaces were set up, handed over to the school and presented to the city (8 November 2017). During the school year 2017/18 the first structured (and not) activities started; at the end of the year it was possible to start gathering the first observations, limited but meaningful, on the use of the spaces, both by teachers and students.

Pathway

The project "Colour Spaces" has been presented to the collegial bodies of the different schools hosted in the building. In particular processes have been defined that directly activate students, also through contests, to choose the first educational experiments and the methods of use. The co-design of the students in terms of innovative school proposals - together with sustainable and transferable didactic solutions - are considered key elements for the success of the experience.

The realization

Starting from:

- the generative potential within the new regulatory orientations on school buildings (with particular reference to the 2013 "Guidelines on School Buildings"), the school reform law 107/2015 "la Buona Scuola" and the comparison with "best practices";
- a reconsideration of the role of local government agencies in the direction of the conscious assumption of the role of "guarantor of the pedagogical quality of the school buildings»;
- an operative inquisitiveness about how to define ILEs able to dialogue with the didactic experimentations in progress at the Civico Polo "A. Manzoni", or in different schools moving from akin assumptions.

The process that led to the realization of the project was developed as follow:

- the first idea originated during an Erasmus+ stay in Denmark (with staff of the Educational Department - School and Educational Services area - and the Information Systems and Digital Agenda area of Milano Municipality).
- the General Services area, the Information Services and Digital Agenda area and, partially, the Schools Technical area cooperated in the concrete development of the work.
- political decision-makers, public managers, civil servants, civic school teachers and administrative staff have been involved.

Collaborations

The project, in its different phases, has benefited from several direct or indirect institutional collaborations. Among these:

- DG Education and Culture of the European Commission, supporting Erasmus+;
- Management and staff of the Ørestad Gymnasium;
- Milan Public Prosecutor's Office, Municipal Attorney's Office, SEA Unit for the "Graffiti Writers Project: compensation and repair activities in favour of the Municipality of Milan“;
- Directions and collegial bodies of the Civic School Centre "A. Manzoni“.



Project Execution

Executive choices:

Location: central to the school's planimetric distribution, in an easily accessible area, close to the ordinary educational spaces.

Size and capacity: three spaces - two rooms of about 40 square meters (green and blue) and one of just under 30 square meters (red). A total of more than 100 square metres, that can potentially accommodate the majority of students of the Civico Polo "A. Manzoni", on a weekly rotational basis.

Transparency: the spaces have a high degree of visual permeability (material paradigm of relational and managerial transparency). Doors have been eliminated and shutters have been removed from windows.

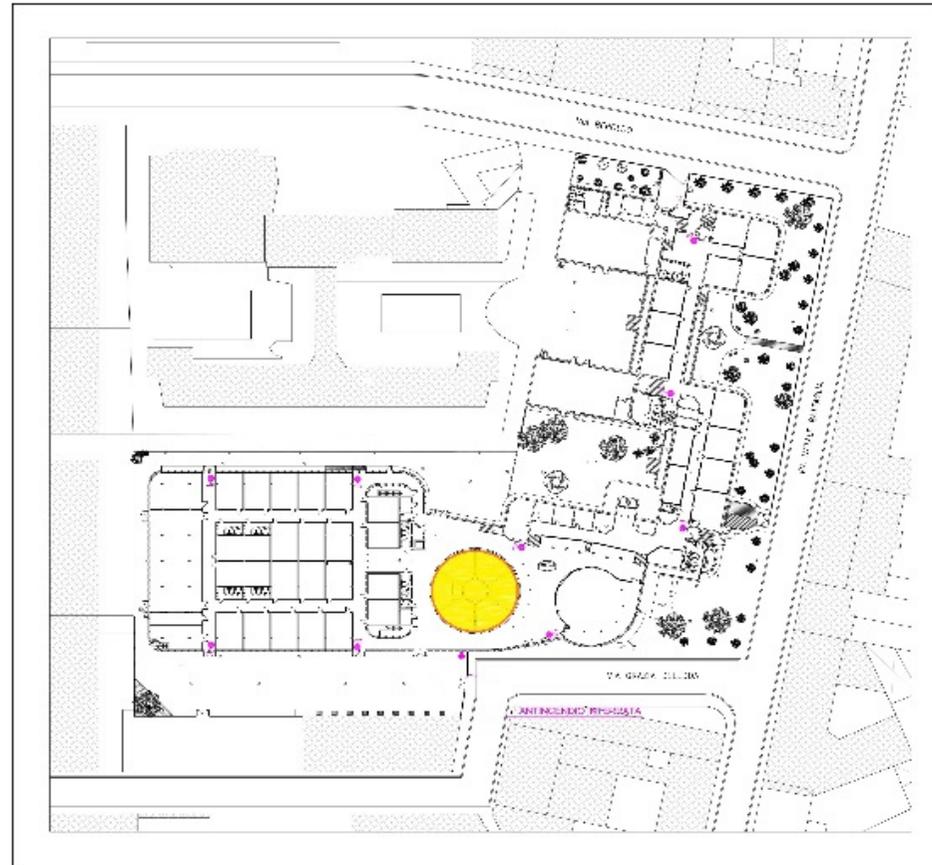
Furniture: furniture and elements that encourage shared work (e.g. fatboy cushions, round tables) have been placed in the spaces. The number and type of seats were also chosen to facilitate the decomposition and rearrangement of the work groups.

Colour: this is the key through which the identity of each space has been defined, and at the same time a common matrix - by difference - with respect to the rest of the building.

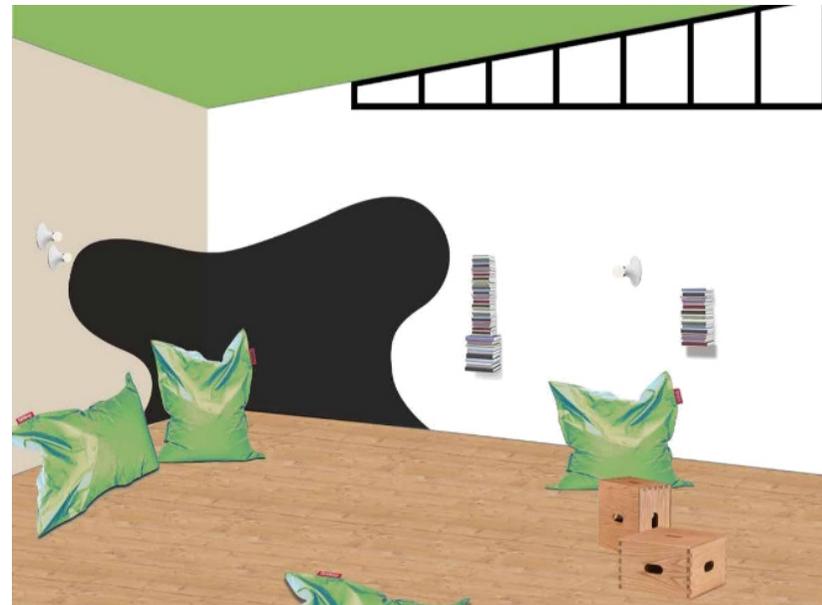
Lighting: each room is equipped with four different light sources, two natural and two artificial

Connectivity: strong wireless coverage within the most extensive network connection of the building, which is equipped with 95 WI FI Ubiquiti Network aerials capable of handling up to 100 simultaneous connections.

Epicentre



First project visualizations



Colour Spaces: the Blue



Colour Spaces: the Green



Colour Spaces: the Red



Project Execution

Costs: a grand total of €16,984 was spent for the full set up of the three "Colour Spaces" - with an average expense of €5,661 for each space. The specific cost of the WIFI connectivity - in relation to the total expenses for the building - can be estimated at about €1,200.

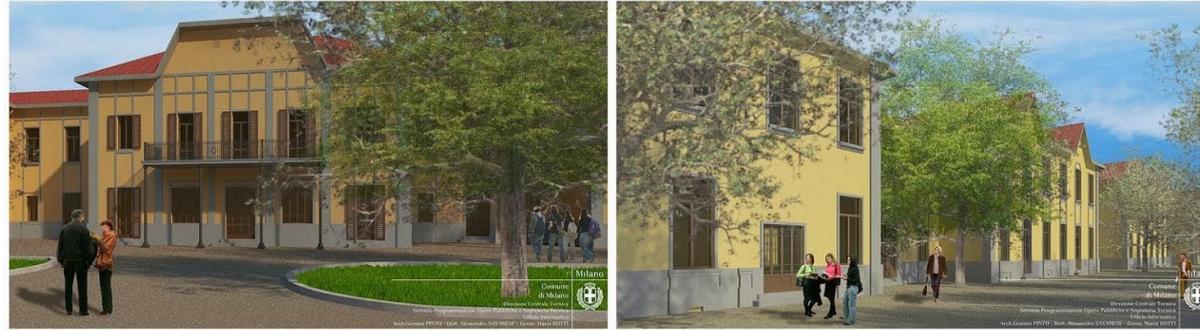
Equipping a traditional classroom (desks, chairs, wardrobes, coat racks, desk, blackboards), costs between €4,000 and €5,000, while setting up a discipline laboratory can easily exceed €15,000; all considered, the expenses incurred seem compatible and consistent with the objectives to be pursued.

(note: all costs at net value - VAT excluded)

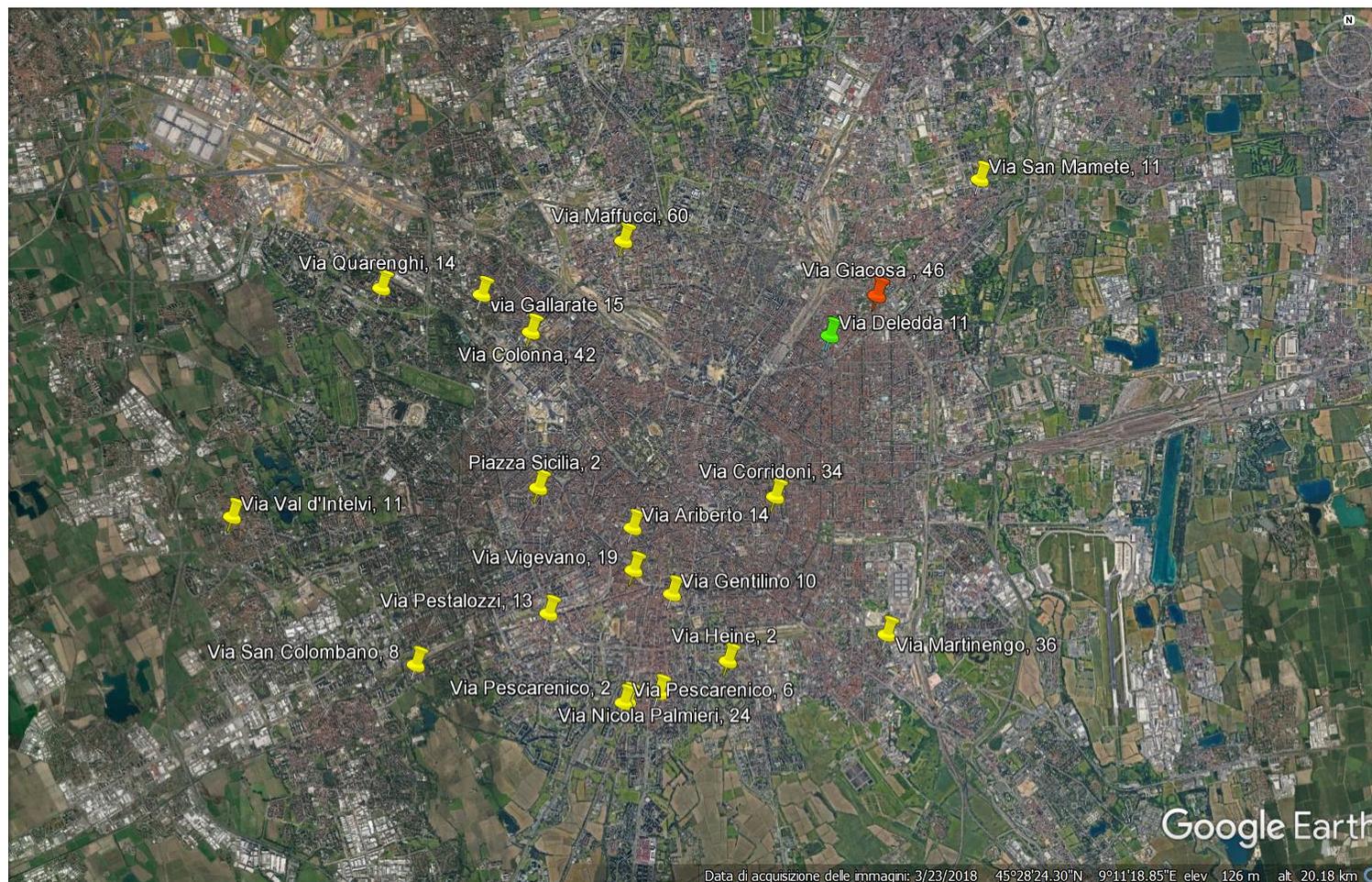
Criticality: there were difficulties in the coordination of the actions of the various subjects and areas of the Municipal Administration involved in the project.

There has also been a delay, due to the waiting of the giving back of some spaces previously intended for non-school functions, to school activities. The return was necessary to set in motion the shifting of spaces that made the "Colour Spaces" set up possible.

A large scale example



ILEs in Milan: the state of the art



General school proxies in Italy

In Italy, the education system is organized according to the principles of subsidiarity and autonomy of educational institutions.

- **The State** has the legislative competence for the "general rules on education".
- **The Regions** have concurrent legislative power in the field of education, and exclusive power in the field of vocational education and training.
- **The Municipalities** are responsible for the establishment, aggregation and suppression of schools, the drafting of plans for the organization of the school network and policies to support the right to study; they must also build and maintain school buildings, provide furniture and set up learning environments for schools in the first cycle.
- **Schools** have autonomy in teaching, organization and research, experimentation and development.

Endogenous aspects: the Civic School Pole "A. Manzoni"

In the school year 2012/13 the civic secondary school "A. Manzoni", hosted in the Civico Polo Manzoni, and previously called PACLE (Perito Aziendale e Corrispondente in Lingue Estere), was transformed in the "Istituto Tecnico Economico" (ITE), branch "Amministrazione, Finanza e Marketing - Relazioni Internazionali" (ITE).

The transition from PACLE to ITE has involved a major investment in the redesign of the teaching curriculum and teaching methods.



Monitoring

A first set of indicators has been defined to measure student and teacher satisfaction, and questionnaires were developed for feedback on this first phase; direct observations were also made at different times of the day and at different times of the school year.

Questionnaire*: A group* of students, called upon to express themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = minimum value; 5 = maximum value), on the usefulness of the spaces and the resulting well-being, indicated an evaluation of 4.38 in the first case and 4.05 in the second.

The teachers, through open-ended questions, highlighted the potential of working in small groups without concealing, at the same time, the difficulties due to a new way of engaging the "educational space".

Direct observation: The rooms are used quite intensively throughout the school day as a place of relaxation, individual study and for small groups. They also begin to be used by teachers for some structured activities. First of all, we evaluate that a significant part of their success depends on their position (central to the school's flow) and on the internal configuration of the rooms (perceived as welcoming).

In perspective, we believe it will be essential to appraise above all the possible effects on the educational success of the students (comparison, between homogeneous groups, of attendance, dropouts, promotions and outcomes of the state exam).

*The questionnaire was administered to a rather small group of students and teachers; a total of 44 units. The activity will continue in more extensive forms during – and after – a full school year of usage of the spaces.

Criticality

Not all teaching staff is available or has the methodological and empathic resources to meet this challenge. There have been some distrust, or "de facto" distancing from the project.

New mind frames in new spaces involve, at least in the start-up phase, a greater individual and collective effort than consolidated educational approaches.



VS



Replicability

We believe that the experience conducted is potentially extendable - in its main traits of method and merit - to other schools and other territorial contexts.

With the "Colour Spaces" we wanted to verify that the transformation of the environments in the daily practice of the school:

- is feasible and requires relatively modest resources;
- represents a significant pedagogical opportunity;
- has a strong relationship with the development of new educational experiences centred on responsibility, participation and well-being of the pupils.

In line with these assumptions, we already provided supply of furnishings similar to those of the "Colour Spaces" to some Milanese schools of the first cycle that expressed an active interest in educational experimentation linked to a rethinking of the places of learning, as for the previous slide.

The sharing, the monitoring and the expansions of this first project, are an expression of an objective of the Municipality of Milan, toward a shared awareness and operativity of the local government about the pedagogical qualities (and implications), of school buildings and furnishing.

Credits:

The photos of the colour spaces were taken by Fabio Preda.

The design representations on page 10 were created by Luca Sabatini and Marco Virgillito.

The english translation is by Sabina Uberti -Bona