

AISTHESIS

DISCOVERING ART WITH ALL THE SENSES

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Places – People

by Fabio Fornasari, Architect

Generally, architecture, art, culture have no meaning without the presence of the people who bring them to life. We also say that people make places, but it is equally true places make people. I am thinking of the Omero Museum and the grace it communicates; I experienced and tried to replicate it when I faced and still face designs with the museum, a museum full of people.

Perhaps, this attitude allowed the Liquid Lab Library - Sala Borsa Lab to receive the inclusion award dedicated to Maria Antonietta Abenante on the occasion of its third edition, in June 2023. This award was created by the Italian Libraries Association to remember the humanity, generosity, dedication and professionalism of Maria Antonietta Abenante, librarian of the city of Bari who made inclusion one of the constant commitments of her action.

The tender documentation required that the designs referred to innovative activities and services that had a collective dimension, aimed at enhancing the social and cultural role and the inclusive dimension.

Libraries, museums, and archives are three places that have the same purpose of conserving, protecting, allowing research within cultural heritage, about the documentation that represents us. Perhaps, archive is the least accessible for the needed skills, museum almost always requires a ticket price that already represents a barrier and, as we know, almost always does not allow full, complete interaction with the contents.

Among these places, the library is the only one where books can be taken home completely free of charge: reading has no-cost and is the basis of training. Furthermore today, many libraries have sections open to all forms of reading, on an equal footing, such as augmentative communication, Braille translations, audio books, writings in LIS (rewritings of tactile books with signing figures), prints with enlarged characters, easy reading characters, illustrated and tactile languages easy to read.

Culture and socialization

Therefore, perhaps, among all the cultural institutions (apart from exceptions such as the Omero Museum in Ancona and, in Italy, a few others inspired by it) libraries are certainly the areas where different forms of socialization are experimented around the diffusion of culture.

This awareness defines how to design the LIQUID LAB - SALABORSA LAB library. The design develops the concept of accessibility and inclusion in its broadest meanings. The project takes care of them starting from the competition notice up to the design of the spaces, from the sustainability of the design up to its realization, from the management of the spaces and the attention of the public who frequent it up to the care of the relationship with the neighborhood and the public who hasn't still attended it.

Designing means taking care of a process with competence and assumption of responsibility; it means being aware that any action to break down barriers can create other ones that we are unable to recognize. For this reason, we have to keep alive the relational dimension of the design, the constant relationship with associations, groups, individuals that inhabit and inhabited the contexts.

Therefore, we must take care of people, listen, pay attention and dedicate time to them. A design should always demonstrate this intention through its elements and should also be able to measure the effects on people, groups, cultural welfare policies.

Every single element conceived, designed, created, interpreted according to the usage must necessarily tend to create an opportunity for people to relate autonomously and safely with others aware of their own abilities, skills, emotions.

Practically, the design concerns the rearrangement of one of the libraries of the Municipality of Bologna planned by the Direzione dei Servizi delle Biblioteche as part of the PON METRO 14 -20 "Liquid Lab – azioni di supporto" project.

The purpose is to contribute to the fight against educational poverty and to the cultural growth of all segments of the population (with particular reference to fragile people and those usually excluded from the cultural offer), through the creation and strengthening of innovative services and activities starting from the circuit of libraries and reading.

Thus, Salaborsa Lab of Vicolo Bolognetti has become the territorial reference point of this vision in synergy with the network of neighborhood libraries, assuming the role of operational

center for the elaboration and offer of transversal, with high connectivity, flexible, scalable, accessible, inclusive, legible laboratories and paths.

Useful also with two legs!

The architectural solutions could not be the simple application of manuals. The purposes expressed by the competition notice suggested to have a different attention.

We decided to start from the comparison of the imaginaries that inhabited these spaces, bringing out the traces of the experience. We reread them in a modern way. The first witness of the process is the iconic entrance articulated in five cyclopean shapes, five colored doors with coordinated profiles, constitutively linked to the topics and the search for an atheistic, secular, contemporary spirituality that we can find in various, contemporary and youthful literatures, in manga, in AI, in robotics, in comics, etc. Today, the spirituality driven out by Napoleon returns through new imaginaries feeding our stories.

The iconic program moves on tables finding their shape within the collaborative principle (we support each other for supporting): three tables but only one has four legs. The other two lean to expand the total surface and to be supported: we can read and work only collaborating together like those tables. The lack of two legs does not mean to be useless!

Finally, there is the dome of the hall with a sound-absorbing function – it is made with waste - so that silence is not simply a rule among people but the "word in listening". The great reading wave, the unitary space between the top and the bottom of the room, takes on a hybrid form that can also be reached using wheelchairs and allows you to read as you wish with the body freed from the chairs.

Grazia Deledda in “Hexa-reading”.

A single equivalent language for loving Sardinia.

by Gabriella Papini

Perhaps, this is the way she would most appreciate to be remembered. Yes, more than 80 years since her demise, Grazia Deledda has been celebrated in many ways: with the usual conferences, recitals of excerpts from her works, meetings on her role as a writer, journalist and, above all, forerunner of the role of women in society and culture. She is the only Italian woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1926. At the beginning of June, the Grazia Deledda Project in “Hexa-Reading” stopped off at the Omero Museum in Ancona, it certainly appears to be one of the most focused. Six different formats to enjoy a text: printed in black on paper, Braille characters, e-book files, formats manageable by vocal synthesis, audio and video, LIS (Italian Sign Language). All in a sort of live enjoying composition and with almost total presence, at the same time, of all these “languages or readings”. The emotion is strong and brings you surprisingly close to the love, attention and beauty for the text. In 2016, this experience of total communication was launched by the UICI (Italian Regional Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired) of Nuoro as leader; now, it is represented through the public reading of two short tales from *Racconti Sardi* (Sardinian Tales): one tale read aloud by a sighted person from a normal printed text, the other one read aloud by a blind person from Braille; always accompanied by a sign language translation in LIS. So, we want to demonstrate that “anyone who masters a tool for learning culture is able to make reading in a perfectly equivalent way”. With a certain shyness (usually, not congenial to me), I witnessed and followed a fantastic and unexpected evening. After more than a month, I can't explain why I was moved by so much curiosity as well as, later, I was charmed and touched. For years, I have been learning the various ways for reading a text and my assiduous attendance at the Omero Museum allows me to be sure that a fundamental philosophy governs everything. And not from today. But, entering the Museum conference room, between those stone walls, throwing myself among a not huge but however large and, above all, very mindful audience, affected me deeply. I thought of her, the little big woman,

of her difficult and suffered life, her ability to pass on to us not only the love for her Sardinia, but the strength and energy of her literary production. After all, despite the Nobel prize and an old but qualitatively excellent television drama, not many Italians read Deledda's works. And this bringing her back to the fore with this "hexa-reading" seemed to me the best way to thank a woman who filled every gesture, written line, often tragic passage of her existence with meanings, values, authentic passions. Suddenly, listening to the two short tales, one read from normal text printed in black on paper by Filippina Farris and the other read from Braille text by Gianna Corria, both translated in sign language by Roberta Ascani, even the memory of her face was transformed, softening until changing the usual vaguely frowning expression into a sort of a complacency smile. Yes, we were listening to her, we were loving her, as we must love all people who gave us so much and, perhaps, we didn't restore enough. A Nobel prize is not enough for a person who taught women to stop putting limits on themselves. From an almost self-taught person to Nobel prize: a natural path for her! With the collaboration of the UICI of Ancona, the event obtained feedback and participation as well as the presence of the Presidents of the UICI of Nuoro and of the Sardinia Region, respectively Giovanni Marongiu and Pietro Manca, they underlined the reasons for the choice of this cultural initiative, the attention they have found in the various cities.

These positive results certainly lead us to continue promoting the diffusion of the various and specific readings because communication is a huge area still to be worked on. Marongiu, the President of the UICI of Nuoro, declares: "The 'hexa-reading' is a powerful tool for witnessing social inclusion through literature. With the beauty of her works, Grazia Deledda also becomes the vehicle to reiterate that Braille and LIS are indispensable tools for guaranteeing access and spread of culture".

Improperly defined as self-taught, Deledda was truly bilingual. Sardinian is a language and not an Italian dialect. For years, for her Italian was a foreign language to learn. Leaving aside anecdotes, and a large critical literature, even authoritative in this regard, it is evident all her production reveals the Sardinian matrix not only for themes and characters, but also for form, style, gait and rhythm. She did a linguistic anthropological operation: not a translation, but an Italian with strong and sudden passages, she traveled a courageous literary journey with effort and humility, until obtaining the Nobel prize, and it is important to remember the motivation: "For her power as a writer, sustained by a lofty ideal, which portrays the life on her native secluded island with plastic clarity picture and deals with general human problems with depth and sympathy".

from “Racconti sardi” (Sardinian Tales)

Macchiette (Caricatures), chapter V

Far away, the clouds rise from the mother-of-pearl sea subtly brushed on the far horizon, they rise slowly on the tinsel sky of the full moon, blue and diaphanous on the white background of infinity.

On the tops of the high rocky mountains, the snow draws an iridescent profile, marble phantasmagoria and gold miniatures worthy of Heine's verses, but the ancient oaks quiver in the North wind whispering gloomy legends and bloody tales whistling among the craggy gorges and the granite caves. The very hard path passes through huge cliffs and black boulders that take on the fantastic shapes of ruined Gothic towers and dolmens covered with grass and crystals, made more dangerous and picturesque by the light of the night. Under the wood, the rays of the moon rain down in beams, like sprays of diamonds, casting golden arabesques and oriental damascenes upon the blond ferns wavy by the wind through the brown oaks the moonlit sky looks so enchanted with its jeweled splendor that it calls to mind the impossible skies of fairy tales; and the cyclamen, the mullein, the usnea of the trunks impregnate the air with a sharp tropical forest scent.

Sitting under a cliff, insensitive to the wind whistling in the clear full moon sky, he watches the sheep grazing in the clear night, focused on their monotonous and melancholic tinkling vibrating among the grassy ravines and mossy stones, among the wild heather and the trunks uprooted by the storm.

The young shepherd is ugly, his face dark as the orbace of his ironsmith, but in his dark blue-white auburn eyes and the iris full of a profound languor, a thoughtful ray shines, it is a clear revelation: perhaps the young shepherd is already a poet and inside his mind, virgin and wild like the rocky mountains on which his lonely days flow, he enjoys, more than any cultured and refined artist, the ineffable poetry full of superhuman and spiritual voluptuousness; of the blue silence of the high full moon night.

Inclusion and innovation for accessibility to the visual arts: the In-VisiBLE project

by Micaela Antonucci, professor of History and Architecture, University of Bologna

In the last decades, the theme of accessibility has been the engine of a profound revolution that brought about a paradigm shift in society, particularly focusing on the rights of people with disabilities. Culture represents one of the many contexts in which accessibility is developed, but perhaps among all it is one of the most important, due to the centrality culture plays in the growth of the individual and of society. Nonetheless, the higher education level of people with disabilities continues to be significantly lower than that of the able-bodied people.

The “In-VisiBLE” (Inclusive and Innovative learning tool for Visually Impaired and Blind people) project, funded by the European Erasmus+ program (project code 2021-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000031139) and coordinated by the University of Bologna, proposes to respond to this need for inclusion, focusing on visual impairment: the purpose consists of providing support the visually impaired and blind people for accessing education and cultural enjoyment, particularly in the area that – by its definition - seems to exclude them without any remedy: the so-called “visual” arts.

A truly “inclusive” education should not be focused solely on teaching visually impaired students by means of dedicated teachers or special courses; on the contrary, education, especially higher education, should be the “school of all”, offering equal learning opportunities.

To achieve this goal, it is essential to create a link between the university world and civil society, establishing collaborations with museums and cultural institutions, organizations and public authorities for the blind, stakeholders and policy makers in the fields of education and inclusion.

For this reason, the project partnership consists of three universities (University of Bologna, Italy; Yeditepe University, Turkey; Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi, Poland), a research Institute (Information Technologies Institute of Center for Research and Technology Hellas , Greece), a public authority for assistance to the blind (Center for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind, Greece) and the Omero Museum of Ancona, which has brought the fundamental contribution of its thirty years of experience.

The In-VisiBLe project has also established numerous collaborations with Associated Partners, including the Unione Italiana Ciechi, the Cavazza Institute in Bologna, the MAXXI – National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome and many others.

How inclusiveness changes didactics

The project, began on 1 February 2022, is implementing inclusive teaching modules about the History of Architecture accessible to both able-bodied and visually impaired students, through a series of methods and tools (3D architectural models, tactile tables with architectural drawings, a system of artificial intelligence to recognize and describe architectural images) developed starting from available technologies but, for the first time, they are combined and used within "traditional" university courses. The project is also creating MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), accessible to the blind, in order to make the Modules usable even remotely and away from university courses.

The primary objective of the project consists of bringing inclusion and innovation to university didactics, but its ambition consists of widening its impact as much as possible, involving civil society, institutions and organizations supporting blind people. For this reason, in collaboration with all the other partners, the Omero Museum is preparing the In-VisiBLe Guidelines to make the educational and cultural activities related to architecture and the visual arts accessible to blind people.

Indeed, it is important to reach the largest number of potential users and make all the created tools freely accessible to all: for this reason, the project is creating a user-friendly and accessible to the blind web platform (In-VisiBLe Teaching & Learning Platform), where inclusive teaching modules and MOOCs will be available; a specific image captioning system capable of describing architectural images in a detailed and specific way (In-VisiBLe

Image Captioning Dataset and System): digital files of architectural models accessible to blind people, accompanied by guidelines that will allow you to follow the entire construction process and modify it according to the different needs and technological availability of the users.

Degrees related to the visual arts: the coveted Architecture becomes accessible too.

With the goals already achieved by the project that will end in July 2024, finally, is it possible to state that higher education courses, in particular degree courses related to the Visual Arts, will be accessible to all and therefore also to blind people? Let's ask Prof. Micaela Antonucci, coordinator of "In-VisiBLLe".

"Our ambition is to demonstrate this is possible," the professor replies, "and offering everyone tools and methodologies to build a truly inclusive education. We want to make a concrete contribution to cultural accessibility and give the word inclusion a tangible meaning".

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