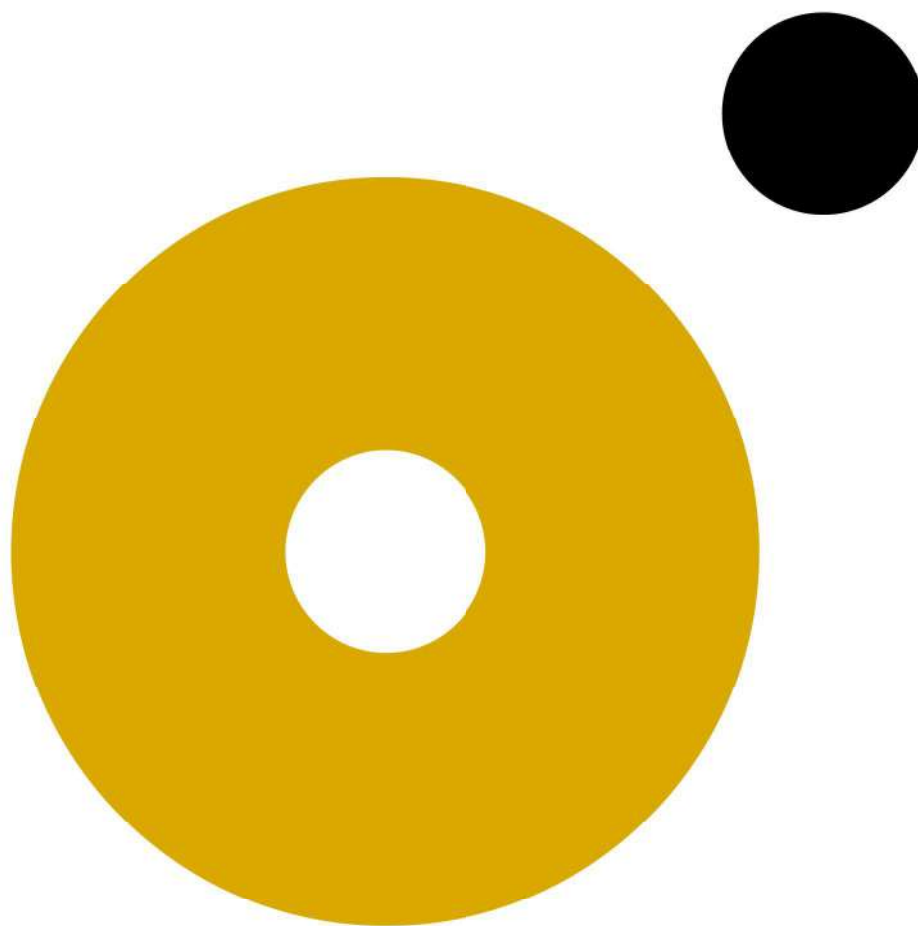


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The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani



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“Minor Educators”? Traces of the Public Memory of the School, between the Official History of Education and the Community’s History. The Case of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913)

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Introduction

The contribution is in the strand of studies known as the public memory of the school on which historical-educational research in recent years has opened innovative research lines. The main research question this study seeks to answer is: how did the public memory of educators, especially those whom official historiography has often considered “minor figures”, contribute to the construction of the identity of a school community and, more generally, of a local community? To this end, we will analyse how many and what forms the public celebration of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913) took within the community of Ripatransone (in the Marche Region), in which the educator was born and carried out his educational work. Before this question can be answered, the methodological framework and the working tools used in the research must be defined.

To this extent, it is appropriate to illustrate the concept of public memory of the school as elaborated in the three-year research project PRIN (Project of Relevant National Interest) entitled “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”¹. Guided by the University of Macerata and supported by other Italian universities (Florence, Bologna, Cagliari, Molise and Basilicata), this project led to the creation of three online databases intended for the census of the different traces and testimonies that convey the memory of the school². To achieve this objective, a series of interpretive categories, methodological tools and digital repositories have been identified, fine-tuned, and implemented during the mentioned project. The author of this paper, as

¹ R. Sani, J. Meda, “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation”. *An innovative and internationally oriented research project*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. 17, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26.

² See the web portal *Memoria Scolastica*: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche> (last access: 10.03.2023).

member of the research unit of Macerata University, has specifically contributed to the creation of the *Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola* (Database of the Public Memories of School). In this database have been gathered and catalogued objects – such as plaques, tombstones, statues, monuments, as well as postage stamps or coins etc. – which commemorate events, places, and figures of the history of Italian schools. It is therefore useful to recall the methodological framework and concepts underlying the very definition of school memory, specifically the subcategory addressed in this paper: the public memory of the school.

1. *The school memory: features and specificities of a new research field*

The research on school memories conveyed by oral sources, or expressed through ego-documents such as autobiographies, memoirs, diaries etc.³ is an area that historians and educational historians have explored extensively. On the contrary, the collective and public memory of the school have long remained considered a historiographical unimportant object. In recent years, this trend has been reversed and studies and research have multiplied. An important turning point was the international symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues” held in Seville on 22-23 September 2015. On that occasion, an in-depth debate was launched, and many scholars explored different aspects of the school memory as a concept⁴. From then on, it was possible to fine-tune the theoretical coordinates for investigating the school memory as a whole concept, that can be defined a set of modes and forms that commemoration of the school’s past can take. School memories are, in fact, the fruit of an experience that is commonly shared by people and through generations, especially in societies with widespread schooling⁵. Precisely because of this shared experience, an old schoolbag, a Bakelite inkwell, or a vintage school desk can be easily recognised as part of our past, or from the childhood memories that have been passed on to us by our parents, grandparents, friends etc. By virtue of this cultural sharing of a common past, already in a 2014 article I defined school objects as *powerful social objects*⁶ (a category I borrowed from the museological work and research

³ For a first classification see A. Viñao Frago, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell’Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

⁴ C. Yanes, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories: New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

⁵ A. Viñao Frago, *La historia material e inmaterial de la escuela: memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educação», vol. 35, n. 1, January-April 2012, pp. 7-17, <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=84823352002> (last access: 11.02.2013). See of the same autor *La historia material y Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42.

⁶ M. Brunelli, *Las fotografías escolares como objetos sociales: Primeras reflexiones sobre el uso educativo y social del patrimonio en el museo de la escuela*, in A.M. Badanelli Rubio, M. Poveda Sanz, C. Rodríguez Guerrero (edd.), *Pedagogía museística: prácticas, usos didácticos e investigación del patrimonio educativo. Actas de las VI Jornadas Científicas de la SEPHE*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid – Facultad de Educación, pp. 203-217.

carried out by Nina Simon)⁷, which just in the museum environment are able to exert their natural power to catalyse people's attention, to elicit personal reminiscences of the school past and to spontaneously bring individuals (even strangers) to share their past experiences. Although this is the most tangible and vivid expression of the memory of school experience, nevertheless many other collective and public expression exist, and equally capable of shaping an intangible school heritage which is shared and kept alive by entire communities.

2. *The three facets of the Memory of the School*

Based on these premises, the international community of educational historians has come to identify three possible dimensions – distinct but complementary and often interconnected – in which school memory can take shape. These three dimensions can be defined as follows.

The *Individual School Memory* is intended as the individual practice of self-representation of oneself and one's school past. This self-representation can be offered by alumni as well as former teachers or school administrators by means of oral or written testimonies. Ego-documents are a crucial source that can integrate or even explain information offered by other traditional sources. The *Collective memory of the school* is the collective practice of remembering and (re)building the educational past. This practice is carried out by the cultural industry – i.e. by literature, film⁸, music, etc. – which not infrequently builds a stereotypical image of the school based on the idealisation of the past, or stemming from the stratification of personal memories of entire generations, or finally arising from the (re)interpretation of the past produced by the cultural tools and codes available in that moment. As such, this representation may change over time and even alter our knowledge of the past, but it nonetheless contributes to forming our collective imagery. Finally, the *Public memory of the school* can be meant as a *public practice* of the school's memory, and constitutes the least explored and most recent field of historical-educational research. As such, it has been one of the most innovative focuses of the PRIN's activities. But what is the working definition of "public memory of the school" developed and used for the purpose of this research?

⁷ N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz-CA, Museum 2.0, 2010.

⁸ See the essays collected in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019.

3. *Toward a working definition of public memory of the school*

In 2019, the journal «History of Education & Children's Literature» published a monographic section in the first issue of the volume XIV (June 2019), which was entitled *Memories and public celebrations of education in contemporary times*. In the presentation of the section, we proposed a tentative definition of the public memory of the school intended as a:

multiplicity of forms which were elaborated, in the context of the official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national public institutions, on the basis of a precise «politics of memory» or «public use of the past» designed to harness consensus and reinforce feelings of belonging to a specific community⁹.

With the aim to correctly identify and study all the traces and sources linked to these representations, it was necessary to reflect contextually both on the forms that these manifestations can take and on the occasions and purposes that generated and nurtured them. Regarding the occasions on which the memory of the school was publicly celebrated and represented, and with what specific aims, it is possible to identify the following:

- ceremonies in honour of individual figures both from the world of education (pupils and educators, administrators, school managers as well as funders, patrons and benefactors of educational institutions) and from the world of pedagogy (pedagogists, ministers of education or great authors of children's literature, etc.), who deemed significant both for the educational community as well as for the wider community (from the local community to the national community). The occasions and purposes of such ceremonies mainly refer to public funeral ceremonies promoted by relatives, friends, colleagues or authorities¹⁰; celebration of birth or death anniversaries; naming of streets, squares and/or school buildings¹¹;
- public ceremonies and/or anniversaries for important events, awards or recurrences relating to public education, such as: ceremonies or anniversaries of the foundation of a specific educational institution; centenaries and anniversaries relating to the enactment of fundamental laws, institutions of orders and/or degrees of education, university jubilees; the awarding of honours and the awarding of medals and diplomas of merit and memory to individuals as well as to municipal, school or association institutions;

⁹ M. Brunelli, J. Meda, L. Pomante, *Memories and public celebrations of education in contemporary times. Presentation*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 11-21.

¹⁰ A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Between rhetorical celebration and social marginalisation. The teachers' and headmasters' memory and celebration through the obituaries published in the school and teachers' magazines in the first century after the unification (1861-1961)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XI, n. 1, 2016, pp. 97-117 and vol. XI, n. 2, 2016, pp. 121-150.

¹¹ On the study of toponymy, in particular, see M. D'Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as a resource in the history of education*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, 2017, pp. 633-657; Ead., *Creating places of public memory through the naming of school buildings. A case study of urban school spaces in Bologna in the 19th and 20th centuries*, «El Futuro del Pasado», n. 7, 2016, pp. 441-458.

– realisation of museums and/or musealization of symbolic places: other occasions and ways through which the public representation and/or celebration of the world of the school take place are the realisation of museums specifically dedicated to the representation of the history of the school, or to the celebration of figures linked to the world of the school. In particular, the musealisation of schools (recognised as the fulcrum of the community's history) and other symbolic places (as in the case of Montessori's birthplace in Chiaravalle)¹² is a crucial step that leads to a series of additional initiatives, events, and commemorative activities. These activities can help strengthen public memory, which over time takes on new forms and modalities.

Such a thorough elaboration of the concept and subcategories of school memory, and in particular of the public memory of the school, has made it possible to identify new material sources which – in addition to and alongside the traditional sources – today allow us to explore new perspectives on the school history, as we shall see later in the article.

4. *New sources: the forms of public memory of the school*

The work carried out during the PRIN project, which led to the identification, analysis and careful reflection on the occasions and purposes with which the school was publicly celebrated and represented, made it possible, in parallel, to identify the *forms* in which these public representations were in fact substantiated.

In fact, these representations took the form of a wide range of traces, which for us constitute to all intents and purposes historical sources of documentary, printed, iconographic, material, and finally, of monumental¹³ nature, that can be identified in the following typologies:

1. *commemorative plaques and plaques*: in honour of individual personalities from the school world or on the occasion of particular events (e.g. founding of schools, awarding of prizes) or specific anniversaries relating to the history of the school;
2. *statues, portraits, busts and half-busts*, or *commemorative monuments* (the latter characterised by the presence of architectural elements);
3. *coins and banknotes*, but also *postage stamps, medals* and numismatic series celebrating and commemorating individual personalities from the world of education and schooling or special anniversaries;

¹² For an in-depth study of the symbolic places of education see J. Meda, *I «luoghi della memoria scolastica» in Italia tra memoria e oblio: un primo approccio*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, Eum, 2020, pp. 293-314.

¹³ On the monumental heritage, I refer to the methodological and propaedeutic essay on the mentioned PRIN project by V. Minuto: *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255.

4. *printed obituaries, funeral orations, commemorative pamphlets* printed by committees for honouring deceased teachers, *epitaphs* (burial inscriptions) and *funerary monuments* in monumental cemeteries, or *cenotaphs* (funerary monuments but without the mortal remains) and other testimonies related to the funeral ceremony;

5. *honours, certificates of merit and award medals*¹⁴, *for merit or in memory* dedicated to individuals as well as to educational institutions.

These different practices of public celebration of the school history can each be used separately for every single figure, as is usually the case. But in the case of outstanding personalities, it can happen that these different forms are all used together to celebrate and commemorate (even at different historical moments, in the past or also in recent times) the same figure. This is what has happened in the case of Maria Montessori whose fame and cultural legacy continue to be celebrated to this day, in Italy and abroad, in many and different forms such as statues, plaques, portraits and busts, coins or medals or postage stamps¹⁵. Regardless of the wealth of forms that celebration and commemoration has taken it is nevertheless a fact that the most recurring testimonies to public school memory in the area are the stone heritage, mostly consisting of epigraphs (more or less enriched by decorative, architectural or figurative elements such as portraits, busts, etc.). This extensive and widespread heritage, however, refers not so much to nationally known figures but rather – as in most cases – to teachers and educators considered “minor” by official historiography, but who played a significant role in the history of places, territories and their school communities.

Thus we come back to the initial research question: how have these public memories of individual educators conditioned, or still condition today, the formation of a community's identity, and not only of the school community but also of the wider community of the local area? With this aim, we carried out an exploratory investigation that examined a local educator from the Marche region, the teacher Emidio Consorti (1841-1913).

5. *Emidio Consorti and official historiography*

Emidio Consorti is the typical figure of the teacher of a small center who, by virtue of his personal qualities, initiative, and intuition, manages to emerge from the province and rise to national and international prominence in his era¹⁶. The Marche educator was

¹⁴ A. Barausse, “Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...”. *Public memory and awards of honour of the Public Education in Italy from the Unification to the end of XIX Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, pp. 185-205.

¹⁵ In this regard, cf. the interesting research by M. Filippa, F. Bertolino, *Il collezionismo al servizio della ricerca. L'immagine ed il pensiero di Maria Montessori nei memorabilia popolari*, which was presented during the international conference “The School and its Many Pasts: School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation” (Macerata, 13-15 December 2022).

¹⁶ On the figure and work of Emidio Consorti see C. Cellini, *Emidio Consorti e la scuola di lavoro manuale a Ripatransone*, Rocca S. Casciano, L. Cappelli, 1894; G. Castelli, *L'istruzione nella provincia di Ascoli Piceno*

born, in fact, on 14 December 1841 in Ripatransone, a small center in the province of Ascoli Piceno, in the rural hinterland of the Marche region. After qualifying as a teacher, at the age of 23 Emidio Consorti was called in 1864 to teach in the Ripatransone primary school. In the years from 1874 to 1895, he served as didactic director for all the schools in the municipality, until he obtained the formal qualification of Director in 1898. In his double role, Emidio Consorti had the opportunity to experiment the «educational manual work» he conceived and fine-tuned in the decade 1878-1887. Thanks to his experiments, Consorti set up a *Museo scolastico-pedagogico* made up of all the artifacts produced by his pupils and the teachers involved during the training sessions in primary schools. Such a collection was already perfectly complete and well organised in 1884, when it was presented at the Italian General Exhibition in Turin together with the popular circulating library («Biblioteca popolare circolante») set up by Consorti himself¹⁷; but it was precisely that «valuable *Museo Pedagogico*» that won the admiration of contemporaries to the point of earning the Bronze Medal decreed by the Jury of the Turin exhibition¹⁸.

By virtue of his achievements, in 1887 Consorti was called to join the delegation of teachers sent by Education Minister Michele Coppino to the Nääs school¹⁹ founded in Sweden in 1872 by August Abrahamson and developed by his nephew Otto Salomon. Here Consorti attended the summer course for teachers, where he learned the basics and teaching techniques of *Slojd*. In his pedagogical lectures, however, Consorti makes it clear that the foundations of his own method (which differs from the Swedish method) had already been developed by him during his years as a primary school teacher. In this regard, Consorti claims that «At the school in Ripatransone, I had always applied the

dai tempi più antichi ai giorni nostri, Ascoli Piceno, L. Cardì, 1899; G. Napoletani, *Gli uomini rappresentativi delle Marche. Il prof. cav. Emidio Consorti*, «Rivista marchigiana illustrata», n. 2, 1907, p. 72; R. Mariani, *Fatti e figure nella storia della istruzione elementare in provincia di Ascoli Piceno*, Ascoli Piceno, Società tipolitografica, 1926; *Ripatransone in memoria di Emidio Consorti*, «I Diritti della scuola», vol. XXXII, n. 38, 23 August 1931, p. 599; *Onoranze centenarie a Emidio Consorti*, «Le Cronache Scolastiche. Rassegna quindicinale dell'istruzione media», vol. XXVII, n. 7, December 1941, p. 53; I. Picco, *Il lavoro nella scuola*, Roma, Faro, 1949; G. Galeazzi, *Emidio Consorti e il lavoro manuale educativo*, «Pedagogia e Vita», n. 6, 1981, pp. 611-622; *Emidio Consorti*, in *Enciclopedia pedagogica*, directed by M. Laeng, Brescia, La Scuola, 1989, Vol. 2: *Cabrini-Duss*, columns 3157-3158; M.C. Moro, *La figura pedagogica di Emidio Consorti e il lavoro manuale educativo*, Degree Thesis, University of Trieste, Academic Year 1994-1995; E. Diletti, *Notizie biografiche*, in E. Diletti, G. Galeazzi, W. Michelangeli (edd.), *Il lavoro manuale educativo. Il sistema pedagogico. Le conferenze*, Ripatransone, Amministrazione Comunale, 1997, pp. 53-62; *Consorti, Emidio*, in A. Giannetti, F. Regi, S. Virgili, *Personaggi Piceni*, Vol. II, Fermo, A. Livi, 2009 (*ad vocem*); M. Brunelli, *Consorti, Emidio*, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000 online*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, pp. 384-385.

¹⁷ See the *Catalogo Ufficiale delle Divisioni II e III. Didattica e produzioni scientifiche. Esposizione generale Italiana in Torino, 1884* (Torino, Unione Tip. Editrice Torinese, 1884), where the Consorti's museum is mentioned within the *Categoria 7 (Statuti, Regolamenti e notizie relative alle Istituzioni promotrici dell'istruzione, sorte per iniziativa di cittadini e di corpi morali)*, p. 65.

¹⁸ Reported in the magazine «La Scuola Elementare Marchigiana», vol. II, 1884, p. 344.

¹⁹ Cf. P. Villari, *Il lavoro manuale nelle scuole elementari*, Roma, Tipografia Sininberghi, 1888; G. Castelli, *Relazione a S.E. il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione sull'ordinamento del lavoro educativo nelle scuole elementari*, «Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica», Supplement of 26 January 1899, pp. 163-269; G. Gabrielli, *Notizie sulla spedizione di Nääs per il lavoro manuale*, «I Problemi della pedagogia», n. 4, 1957, pp. 390-398.

principle of plurality [*scil.*: the use of multiple forms of schoolwork: Froebelian work, drawing, clay, wire work, cardboard, and woodwork]. I had already sensed that principle by myself since 1878, and I then applied it in all its forms as far back as 1881»²⁰. A statement, the latter one, which is confirmed by the prize received in Turin in 1884. In view of the growing interest in his method, in 1889 Consorti opened in Ripatransone a teacher training course together with the first national congress on the method. Since then, the «autumn courses» experienced growing success to the point that in 1899 in Ripatransone as many as 329 elementary school teachers and preschool educators arrived from all over Italy. By virtue of Consorti's success, in 1894 the Ministry authorised the establishment in Ripatransone of the «Luigi Mercantini» Normal School, which was equipped with a special section devoted to the educational manual work. These courses ran continuously until 1914, after Consorti's death on 19 February 1913. Although at the time the Ripatransone teacher played a significant role on a national and international level, Emidio Consorti is today still considered a minor figure by official pedagogical and didactic historiography. And this is in contrast with the awards he received at the educational exhibitions of the time, the mentions in journals and monographs of the time, and the fact that – also after that many similar courses on educational manual work sprang up all over Italy – Ripatransone always remained the driving force behind this didactic methodology²¹. This is not the place to examine the impact of Consorti's work on the teaching and pedagogical reflection of the time, both at national and international level. Instead, we will analyse Consorti's legacy and representation in the public and collective memory of «his» community.

6. *Emidio Consorti in the public/collective memory of the Ripatransone community*

Thanks to the theoretical and methodological reflection developed during the PRIN project, we now have clear criteria of classification, as well as protocols of description of the traces of the public memory of the school. Such tools allow us to identify, classify and interpret the ways in which Consorti has been the object of public (or collective) celebration/commemoration, both in the past and in more recent times. An initial classification has allowed us to identify the following forms of public commemoration and celebration, most of which are currently included in the *Database of the Public Memory of the School*: 1) Public commemoration: a marble memorial plaque with bronze bust and bas-relief, was affixed by the city authorities in 1925 on the occasion of celebrations for the fallen soldiers of the Great War (Figure 1)²²; 2) Public commemoration through toponymy: a

²⁰ E. Consorti, *Conferenza «La mano: organo prodigioso dell'umana attività». Forme di lavoro manuale educativo: unità o varietà?*, in Diletti, Galeazzi, Michelangeli (edd.), *Emidio Consorti. Il lavoro manuale educativo. Il sistema pedagogico. Le conferenze*, cit., pp. 307-317, in part. p. 312.

²¹ For an in-depth analysis see M. Brunelli, *Alle origini del museo scolastico. Storia di un dispositivo didattico al servizio della scuola primaria e popolare tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 49-55.

²² M. Brunelli, *Lapide con busto in bronzo di Emidio Consorti a Ripatransone (1925)*, in R. Sani, J.

town street was named after Consorti around the years 1925-1927; 3) Public centenary celebration of birth: a commemorative plaque was placed on the teacher's birth house in 1942²³; 4) Public celebration by the school community: naming of the secondary school "Emidio Consorti" in Ripatransone.

To these forms of public celebration/commemoration we can add further initiatives, events, and ways in which the Ripatransone community has publicly honoured the figure of Consorti. In particular, in 1993 a study conference in honour of Emidio Consorti was held, followed by the publishing of Consorti's writings (his handbook for educators *Sistema pedagogico del lavoro manuale educativo*, and his lecture notes *Conferenze sul lavoro manuale educativo*) printed at the expense of the municipality in 1997²⁴; in 1999, the Emidio Consorti Prize was established, awarded to the most deserving secondary school pupils and teachers (section: Master of Italy Prize); in 2013, the centenary of Consorti's death was celebrated with cultural events, conferences and historical commemorations dedicated²⁵; in 2014 The *Museum of Peasant and Artisan Civilisation in Ripatransone* (established in 1990) was refurbished and equipped with a section specifically dedicated to the *School of educational manual work* set up in 1889 by Emidio Consorti²⁶.



Fig. 1. Marble memorial plaque with bronze bust of Emidio Consorti and bas-relief, in Ripatransone (1925). Photo-credits: Diana Cocco (Comuni-italiani.it). Source: www.memoria.scolastica.it

Meda (edd.), *Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola*, Vol. 2, Macerata, eum, 2022, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-con-busto-bronzo-di-emidio-consorti-ripatransone-1925> (last access: 13.03.2023).

²³ M. Brunelli, *Lapide a Emidio Consorti a Ripatransone (1942)*, in Sani, Meda (edd.), *Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola*, Vol. 2, cit., <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-emidio-consorti-ripatransone-1942> (last access: 13.03.2023).

²⁴ Cf. Diletti, Galeazzi, Michelangeli (edd.), *Emidio Consorti. Il lavoro manuale educativo. Il sistema pedagogico. Le conferenze*, cit.

²⁵ R. Spinozzi, *1913-2013: death centenary*, «Il Mascalzone.it», February 2013 https://www.ilmascalzone.it/archivio_storico/2013/02/il-belvedere-del-piceno-rende-omaggio-al-pedagogista-emidio-consorti/ (last access: 08.09.2022).

²⁶ The museum collections dates to 1990 and are the fruit of private donations. The first exhibition was arranged in the premises below the Ildebrando Malavolta school and was then moved in 2014 to its current location, the Ex Cantine Cardarelli, covering an area of 502 square metres. The demo-ethno-anthropological *Museum of Rural and Artisan Civilisation in Ripatransone* contains the section *School and Toys*, presenting the reconstruction of a multi-classroom dating back to the years 1940-1950s, and the section *The school of manual-*



Fig. 2. *A greeting from Ripatransone*. Travelled postcard, unreadable date but around. 1908; printed by Quirino Capriotti in Ripatransone (private collection of Marta Brunelli)

7. *Other forms of public and/or collective memory*

In addition to these traces, the application of the same classification criteria and interpretive tools developed and tested during the *School Memories* project has allowed me to identify further forms of public and collective commemoration of the Consorti figure that need additional investigation and, probably, should be included within the mentioned database of the Public Memory of the School. I refer to some celebratory postcards issued during the years when the Consorti's school was in operation. On the antiques market and in some private collections, in fact, I have come across some examples of postcards depicting different subjects but all celebrating the figure of Emidio Consorti and his work as an educator of national importance and, at the same time, as an honourable member of the community. In two *Greetings from Ripatransone* postcards, the educator's portrait stands out in the foreground and being flanked by the photographs of the most significant buildings of Ripatransone: in the first case, the façade of the Town hall (postcard printed in Rome, by A. Fiocchi Editore, Via Principe Umberto, 58; untravelled postcard, s.d. but ca. 1900-1913, private collection); in the second case, the postcard depicts the main entrance of the *Royal School of Educational Manual Work* being surmounted by the portrait of the «Direttore Prof. Cav. Uff. Emidio Consorti» surrounded by a laurel wreath symbolising wisdom and glory (Figure 2).

8. *The many and different traces of the public and collective memory of the school: the case of Emidio Consorti*

In the other two cases the postcards make direct reference to the autumn teacher training courses held by the Ripatransone School and to which teachers and educators came from all over Italy and even abroad, and precisely they refer to the 1909 course

educational work, exhibiting original artifacts from the Consorti's school such as models and geometric cut-out works, as well as cardboard, wire, plaster and wood artifacts.



Fig. 3. *A greeting from Ripatransone*. Postcard representing the facade of the Town hall with the portrait of Emidio Consorti. Untravelled postcard, without date but ca. 1900-1913 (private collection)

(Figure 4) and, even before, to the 1900 course. The latter ones is a souvenir-postcard celebrating the *12th Course of educational manual work in Ripatransone*, which took place in the months of July-September 1900: the illustration represent a female figure (in a typical Art Nouveau style) holding a quill pen in the right hand, and a scroll with the motto «Ars et Labor» in the left; the entire scene is framed by laurel branches and dominated by the coat of arms of the Municipality of Ripatransone (private collection).

The spread and distribution of these postcards need further investigation: some postcards lack significant typographical data whilst others refer, in one case, to a publisher in Rome (A. Fiocchi) and probably contracted by a local client from Ripatransone; and to the local printer Quirino Capriotti from Ripatransone, in the other case. By now we may assume that the probable promoters of such a production must have been the municipality of Ripatransone, or the Direction of the school, or even local printers and, finally, local photographers. In fact, we know that the group-image of the teachers of the 1909 reproduced in the postcard in Figure 4 comes from a photographic shot by photographer G. Domizi on the 21st annual course: in the centre stands out Prof. Emidio Consorti surrounded by professors and educators enrolled in the autumn course of that year²⁷.

²⁷ One copy of the original photograph is kept by the Historical Archive of Potenza Picena (see S. Ciasca, P. Onofri, *Nel 1913 moriva il prof. Emidio Consorti di Ripatransone, fondatore in Italia del lavoro manuale*



Fig. 4. Postcard dated 1909. The photograph depicts a group of student teachers from the autumn courses in Ripatransone portrayed on the steps of the municipal palace (private collection)

Regarding the reasons and purposes of these objects, both the public entities (the municipality or the school) and private individuals (local printers and photographers) had different but overlapping interests in creating and printing the mentioned postcards. The intent with which these souvenir postcards were produced is, in fact, not purely celebratory but above all commercial: according to the information of the time, the Consorti's school was a strong presence in the local and national collective imagination and as such attracted aspiring students from all over Italy. From this perspective, the annual courses represented an economic engine capable of driving an important induced activity created by the arrival and prolonged stay of so many people, elementary school teachers and preschool educators, both public and private, as well as pedagogues, trainers and observers who were staying in Ripatransone for some weeks. Coming not only from

educativo, legato alla città di Potenza Picena per il suo migliore allievo, il prof. Umberto Boccabianca, 8 aprile 2022, I santesi-Weblog, <https://isantesi.wordpress.com/2022/04/08/nel-1913-moriva-il-prof-emidio-consorti-di-ripatransone-fondatore-in-italia-del-lavoro-manuale-educativo-legato-alla-citta-di-potenza-picena-per-il-suo-migliore-allievo-il-prof-umberto-boccabianca/>, last access: 09.11.2022).

Italy but also from abroad (as known from the contemporary testimonies and confirmed by the presence of the term "postcard" translated into fourteen languages, from German to Russian), these guests – true pioneers of an *ante litteram* Educational Tourism – were patently the first customers interested in buying a postcard to send to their friends, loved ones or colleagues as well as to keep as a souvenir of their study-travel. At the same time, these postcards functioned as an excellent vehicle for commercial propaganda aimed at publicising the school and its innovative teaching methodologies: travelling within and beyond national borders, these images helped to further promote the role of the school founded by Consorti in Ripatransone, increase its fame and importance and, finally, attract more and more teachers and educators²⁸.

9. *New forms of collective memory: school memory 3.0*

I would like to conclude this review on the sources and forms of school's public and collective memory by referring to the panorama offered by the Web regarding the figure of Emidio Consorti and his educational and cultural legacy. Today the Ripan educator is, in fact, also present on the web where there are various channels and tools that contribute to celebrating his memory and commemorating his figure on recurring anniversaries. An initial survey of the web reveals some interesting online resources dedicated to Emidio Consorti. Firstly, the weblog "I Santesi"²⁹, named after the ancient name of the community of Potenza Picena, defines itself as a «Blog of news and historical characters from ancient Monte Santo to present-day Potenza Picena». In recent years the blog has dedicated and continues dedicating articles and posts on the figure of Emidio Consorti (Figure 5) as well as to one of Consorti's closest collaborators, Umberto Boccabianca who came from Potenza Picena. Secondly, the presence of videos on YouTube channels of local history lovers is particularly interesting for the aim of this research. A case in point is the video *Ripatransone in 1901. Beautiful period photos*: posted on 13 November 2020 by Vincenzo Travaglini on his YouTube channel, the video presents – between min. 2.45 and min. 3.17 – a series of historical photographs depicting the male and female students who attended lessons at Emidio Consorti's school in the early 20th century (Figure 7). Finally, I would like to mention two FB accounts: the first one is *The Habitual Tourist*, edited by

²⁸ On the celebratory, propagandistic, and advertising functions of postcards of educational/school subject, we refer to the volume edited by A. Viñao Frago, M.J. Martínez Ruiz-Funes, P.L. Moreno Martínez: *Tarjeta postal ilustrada y educación (España, siglos XIX-XX)*, Murcia, Editum, 2016. See also the virtual exhibition *Tarjeta postal ilustrada y educación (España, siglos XIX-XX)* that – promoted by the Centro de Estudios sobre la Memoria Educativa (CEME) and first set up at the Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Murcia (December 13-23, 2016), and then at the Centro cultural "Ramón Alonso Luzzy" in Cartagena (February 16-March 31, 2017) – is currently accessible through the Museo Virtual de Historia de la Educación (MUVHE) of the Universidad de Murcia, <https://www.um.es/muvhe/exposicion/tarjeta-postal-ilustrada-y-educacion/#panel-0> (last access: 11.03.2023).

²⁹ *The Santesi Weblog. Rinascita culturale ed impegno civile*, <https://isantesi.wordpress.com/> (last access: 11.03.2023).

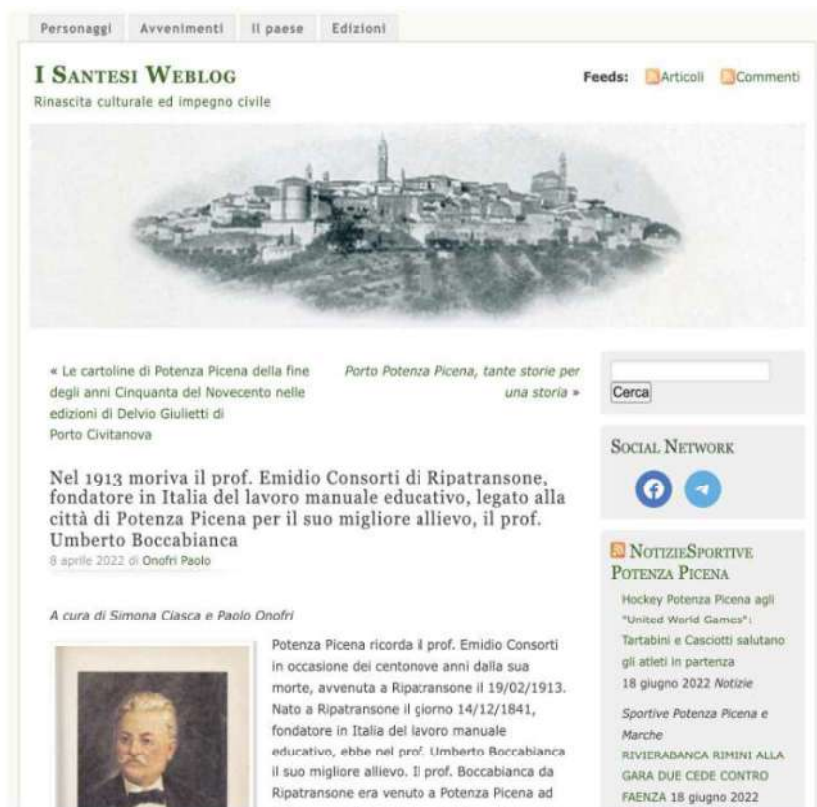


Fig. 5. Article commemorating the anniversary of Emidio Consorti's death. From the Weblog "I Santesi".

the cultural association of the same name (based in Castignano, AP)³⁰ and the second is *Visit Ripatransone* (and related website) edited by the Ripatransone Tourist Office (Figure 6)³¹. Both these accounts/websites are aimed at promoting tourism in the surrounding areas and both the promoters – a cultural association on the one hand, and the tourist office of a local administration on the other – deemed it necessary to dedicate one or more pages to the figure of the pedagogist from Ripatransone.

These few, early examples help to understand how the presence of Emidio Consorti constitutes an inseparable element of the history and identity of the communities of this area, which do not miss an opportunity to celebrate an anniversary or to remind tourists of the location of the pedagogist's birthplace or to point out the presence of Consorti's educational collections in the *Museum of Rural and Artisan Civilisation* in Ripatransone.

³⁰ *The Habitual Tourist*, <https://www.facebook.com/HabitualTourist/> e <http://www.habitualtourist.com/> (last access: 11.03.2023).

³¹ *Visit Ripatransone*, https://www.facebook.com/visitripatransone/?locale=it_IT (last access: 11.03.2023).

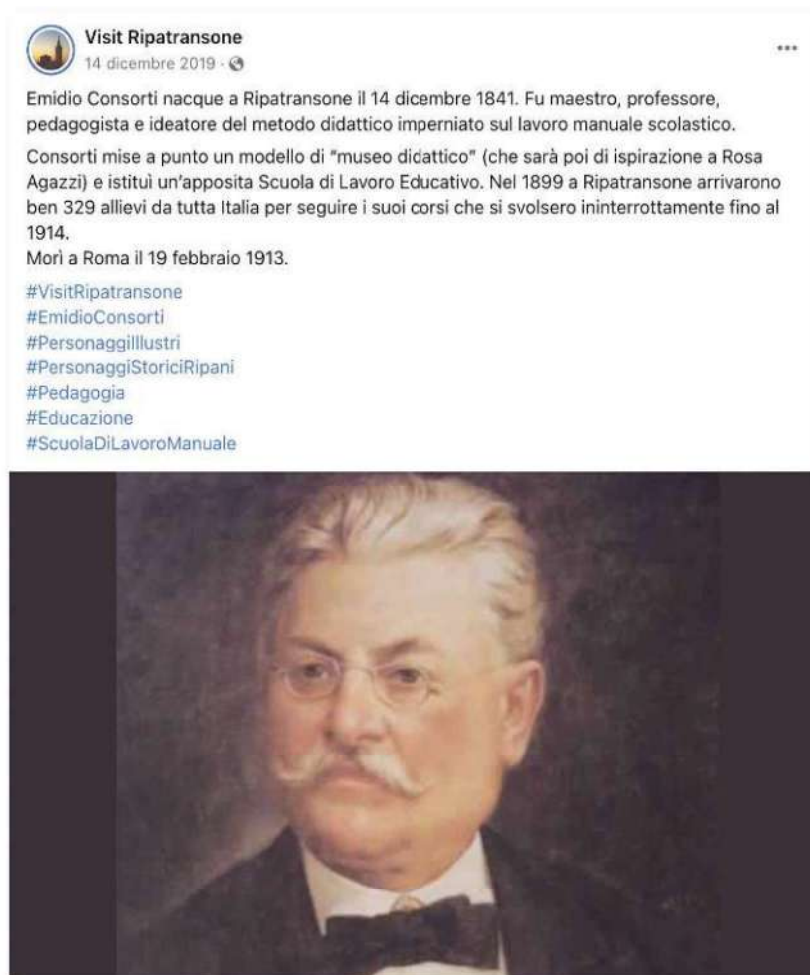


Fig. 6. Post on Emidio Consorti from the FB account "Visit Ripatransone".

The collective and public celebration of the figure of the Marches educator thus takes on new forms and languages, even in the context of Web 3.0.

Conclusions

The PRIN research has provided the first, fundamental tools needed to identify and interpret the traces of school, public and collective memory not only relating to the renowned figures of school history and pedagogy, but also and above all to many so-called



Fig. 7. *Ripatransone in 1901*. Video posted on Vincenzo Travaglini's YouTube Channel (13 November 2020). At min. 2.45 appear historical photographs of teachers attending the autumn courses of Emidio Consorti.

'minor' educators. The latter, in fact, find themselves in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, they are considered to be less relevant by the official historiography and, on the other hand, they are the real recipients of the majority of the monumental heritage on our territory.

The study of these traces – plaques, epigraphs, slabs, statues, busts, monuments, etc. – has given different outcomes and completely opposite results: some times, these sources are only a discoloured echo of figures whose memory has slowly but inevitably faded in the collective memory; other times, on the contrary, they have allowed us to come across personalities whose memory is still strong and rooted in the territories where they lived, worked and left a vivid legacy – as is the case with Emidio Consorti. But in all instances, researching, analysing, and describing these sources of the public and collective school memory have helped us to focus on and better understand the dynamics and ways in which communities have kept intact or totally severed the ties that bind them to the most significant figures of their own past. But it is above all the persistence of such threads, which testifies to how strong the sense of identity can be nurtured by the school past

in a community, whether it is a small community confined to a local sphere or a larger community, even extended to a national sphere.

Based on the findings, it is possible to state how important it is studying the evidence of the public memory of the school on two distinct levels: on a first, "horizontal" (or quantitative) level, i.e. by identifying how many and which school-related figures have been commemorated and celebrated locally and nationally; and on a second, "vertical" (or qualitative) level, aimed at carrying out an in-depth analysis of each individual educator in order to understand how many and which commemoration/celebration initiatives have been implemented, for what purpose and with what timing (only in the past, or also in the present).

Based on these initial research findings, the figure of Emidio Consorti has remained alive in Ripatransone and, although considered a minor educator in official educational historiography, the rootedness of this figure in the collective imagination of the home community is still able to testify how significant was the role he played between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Actually, the gap between official historiography and the actual role that so-called 'minor' educators have played in the history of the school (and local communities) seems to correspond to the same gap existing between the official school history and the public memory of the school. In the light of these considerations, it is hoped that the development and study of the database of the public memories of school can also open up a new perspective on these "minor" figures³², and allow to keep on exploring the value of the (plural) histories of the school as it was concretely lived, acted and developed by teachers and educators whose memory is still firm and alive in the territories and communities.

³² A. Barausse, C. Ghizzoni, J. Meda, «*Il campanile scolastico*». *Ripensando la dimensione locale nella ricerca storico-educativa*, «Rivista di storia dell'educazione», vol. V, n.1, 2018, pp. 7-14.

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The School and Its Many Pasts

History is not memory; both, however, affect the way we perceive the past. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on memory in order to critically analyze shared narratives of the past and their implications. Memory studies not only allow us to expand our knowledge about the past, but also help us to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense. These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed to better understand the school and its many pasts.

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