HERITAGE AND TOURISM EDUCATION IN FRAGILE LANDSCAPE
ENHANCING THE IMAGE OF SUBURBIA

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Tourism is changing significantly and many of the changes are also affecting the field of landscape enhancement and cultural heritage education. There is a growing interest in sustainable tourism and projects involving local communities in the promotion of the less-know locations. Contemporarily, the digital transformation is deeply involved in these processes, as it broadens the possibility of accessing information that may interest a particular public focused on cultural, sustainable and community-based tourism offers.

This paper refers to a research project aimed to involve schools in a participatory processes of interpretation and enhancement of the everyday landscape inside an area basically unknown by tourists in an evolving touristic city. The first part focuses on the current links between heritage education and tourism education in consideration of the European policies about the landscape. The second part concisely illustrates the research project, and present an overview of the use of ICTs in the participatory processes of interpretation and enhancement of a suburban landscape. The third part describes a specific activity performed during the project and it focuses on the adopted methodology and the touristic interactive applications created. In the last part, the paper discusses, in the light of the project, the relationship between landscape and heritage education, tourism education and some important transformations that are taking place in the field of tourism. Finally, the authors propose some considerations on the field experience described.

HERITAGE AND TOURISM EDUCATION IN EVERYDAY
LANDSCAPES

During the last decades, several contributions has deep-
ened, at the European level, the debate on cultural heritage,
and consequently on heritage education (Borgia et al., 2019;
Castiglioni, 2012; Bortolotti et al., 2008; Branchesi, 2007). The
Recommendation n. 5 of the Committee of Ministers to mem-
ber states concerning heritage education (Council of Europe,
1998) states that "cultural heritage includes any material or
non-material vestige of human endeavour and any trace of
human activities in the natural environment"; and further:
"heritage education means a teaching approach based on
cultural heritage, incorporating active educational methods,
cross-curricular approaches, a partnership between the fields
of education and culture and employing the widest variety of
modes of communication and expression". The publication of
the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2000 has then
strengthened this approach by fostering the development of
cultural heritage education actions in the everyday, and even
in the fragile and degraded landscapes such as urban periph-
eries (Council of Europe, 2000). The Convention states that
"landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose
character is the result of the action and interaction of natu-
ral and/or human factors" (Council of Europe, 2000, art. 1).
ELC has also extended the notion of landscape as it "applies
to the entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural,
urban and peri-urban areas" (Council of Europe, 2000, art.
1). Indeed, the document assigns a fundamental role to the
population's perception and interpretation of the landscape
values and in the last decades it has given a relevant contri-
bution to the collective acknowledgement of the cultural and
social value of the everyday landscape thus to be part of the
European policies.

The application of the Convention in educational contexts
and to everyday or degraded landscapes presents some pecu-
liarities. First, in such contexts more than elsewhere, it can be

difficult to create landscape knowledge and identify its cultural, historical, and social values; consequently, the collection of memories, interpretations and the inhabitants' subjective perceptions becomes paramount. Finally, the use of effective tools and methods of investigation and communication to involve stakeholders and local players become central.

A proper application of the ELC requires recognizing degraded or anonymous territories as landscapes, identifying their cultural and environmental values, and developing awareness on such values in citizens. This process implies the creation of new graphical, visual, and mental representations of the territory (Waterton & Watson, 2011). The ways in which peripheries are represented can indeed consolidate the existing patterns of the relationship between citizens and the town, but also change them. To improve this relationship, promoting a new perspective on fragile areas and stimulating the production of new representations then become a relevant activity, for young citizens in particular (Casonato et al., 2020). These new representations can influence and change the existing stereotyped image of suburbs by building richer and multifaceted vision of the everyday landscape. For these reasons, the application of the ELC encompasses involving non-experts in the landscape knowledge, embracing a participatory approach in enhancement, and pushing the active role of citizens (Council of Europe, 2008, 2012, 2017). In particular, schools can play a relevant role to improve among young citizens the perception of the everyday contexts, especially in suburban and/or degraded areas. This goal could be achieved with a heritage education focused on the everyday landscapes and aimed at transforming the young citizens into protagonists of the knowledge and enhancement of their places. The European debate has clarified that heritage and landscape education should not be considered as a further school subject but an educational approach *per se*. This implies not only education concerning heritage but also education 'through' heritage and 'for' heritage, which is, according to Copeland (Copeland, 2006), the base for the construction of the European citizen-

ship. The traditional cultural heritage study often celebrates national culture and history. Conversely, the importance of each 'individual past' can emerge by taking into account lesser-known landmarks, places, historical episodes and cultural facts (Copeland, 1998; Council of Europe, 1995).

Moreover, heritage/landscape education and tourism education, as we will see, can find interesting connections in didactic projects and help young citizens to build processes and products to promote their landscape, especially with the use of innovative technologies (Luigini, 2017). The advantages of these actions are potentially manifold: they build and spread knowledge about the landscape, they facilitate the interpretation processes and the collection of memories, they promote unknown or unusual tourist destinations, they provide schools with tools for technological updating useful for both heritage and tourism education, and finally they improve the periphery image.

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN UNUSUAL AREAS

A research project for heritage and tourism education
Scuola Attiva Risorse (*ScAR*), [School Activates Resources] is a Politecnico di Milano inter-disciplinary research project ended in 2021 (Bonfantini et al., 2019; Bertone et al., 2019; Casonato et al., 2021). Schools and cultural heritage were the centre of the project which were considered as propulsive engines for the enhancement of the territory and its cultural cohesion. The project operated on the peripheral areas of Milan and intended landscape as a system of values in constant evolution. The challenge was to engage students by assigning them a new role, from 'consumers' of the cultural heritage to protagonists of the local landscape discovery and promotion. The main goals of the project were:
- enhancing the local landscape as a source for the inter-generational and intercultural dialogue;

- boosting to young people citizenship, responsibility towards public spaces, and a higher sense of belonging to neighbourhoods;
- offering schools inclusive and innovative educational tools;
- promoting a conscious use of technologies in young students.

In order to strengthen the presence on the area and to improve the project, the research team involved several local partners from different fields. In particular *ScAR* gathered: artisans, private companies, associations, cultural institutions, an ecomuseum, the Municipality of Milan and two decentralization entities (Municipio 4 and 5), the regional education office, students of Politecnico di Milano, two technical laboratories and the internship program from the same institution, other national and international universities, and an international art foundation.

ScAR involved more than 750 students, from primary to high-schools, from seven Italian regions and with five Milanese schools developed pilot activities. In addition, more than 400 university students and interns participated in the project. School teachers and students were involved in more than 20 different activities aimed at knowing, interpreting and communicating the local landscape by using and combining traditional methods and innovative technologies. These activities were not limited to the class context but also to a real work environment with assignments and objectives to achieve. The assigned tasks pushed students to organize themselves, define the process workflow, cooperate, and share their skills.

An unusual landscapes for tourism. the Milan Southern Peripheries

The suburban area of Milan is a fragile context, with social and urban critical aspects especially concerning schools (Pacchi & Ranci, 2017). However, the territory is rich in natural and tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Especially in the last two hundred years, the surrounding territory had been the theatre of many relevant territorial, social, and economic

transformations that led the transition of Milan from the medieval walled town to a post-modern metropolis. In a few decades, these peripheral areas progressively lost their historical rural vocation, which shaped the cultural and physical landscape during centuries, in favor of the industrial push of the first years of the twentieth century. The historical hydrographic networks —irrigation canals and waterways for goods transportation— were adapted to the new industrial needs, and the rural system (i.e., the typical farmhouses networks of the Po Valley), disappeared or were incorporated inside the new urban fabrics. Later, the role of those industries and their facilities gradually decreased from the eighties and many productive sites were abandoned. Today, these peripheral areas are renewing the urban shape, and innovative districts are under construction or in planning.

Unlike the other suburbs in Milan, in the project area agriculture is still a relevant activity which coexists with historical and new popular neighborhoods. Furthermore, the former industrial blocks have been renovating in new smart districts by pushing partnerships between private companies and the local administrations. Fondazione Prada, an international art foundation and partner of the research project, was one of the first company that settled in this area its facilities and started in 2008 the renovation of the former industrial area along the southern border of the railway yard of Porta Romana.

The suburban cultural landscape is today a valuable and, at the same time, fragmented system. It is an interesting territory rich in historical landmarks, stories, and local communities that need to be properly enhanced and communicated (Rabbiosi, 2016).

Involving schools in the development of tourist products

During the project, participants (in this case from 12 to 19 years old) were invited to use and create a set of digital tools to document and develop interactive storytelling of their everyday landscape. In particular, *ScAR* accompanied schools in the development of four prototypes of interactive

tourist products devoted to share the local knowledge and to promote the area in an innovative way and as a touristic destination (Sylaiou et. al., 2017; Xu et al., 2013; Ippoliti, 2011; Ott & Pozzi, 2011).

The first was the geoblog *Atlante Digitale delle Memorie* [Digital Atlas of Memories] developed in collaboration with MUMI Ecomuseo Sud Milano (Bertone G. et al, 2019), the eco-museum of the Southern Milan suburban area. The second was a set of serious games to discover the local landscape, mobile geocaching games for families based on a free app for the dissemination and storytelling of cultural heritage (Carli, 2017) (Figure 1). These applications make a step forward from the traditional serious game development by involving users, students from middle schools (12-13 years old), in the creation of games.[1] The third was the prototype of an interactive virtual tour (VR) of one of the historical neighborhoods of the area.[2] This prototype was developed with a free online tool that allows entry-level users to create immersive storytelling. The contents collected and produced by students during the project were adapted for the VR experience to create interactive immersive scenes (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). The prototype finally aimed to test if the development of virtual and augmented reality tours could be included in the scholar programs, not only in tourism schools but also in other high-schools, to promote activities for cultural heritage education. The fourth digital product, a mobile interactive tourist guide, is the most interesting in this analysis context because it specifically links heritage and tourism education. For this reason, the didactic process that accompanied the application development is deepened in the next paragraph.

AN EDUCATIONAL PROJECT FOR HERITAGE TOURISM IN SUBURBS: FROM MENTAL MAPPING TO MOBILE GUIDES

The didactic project *Seguitemi, prego…* [Follow me, please…] was designed for a secondary school (from 16 to 19 years old

Fig. 1 Screenshots from the serious game developed by middle school students.
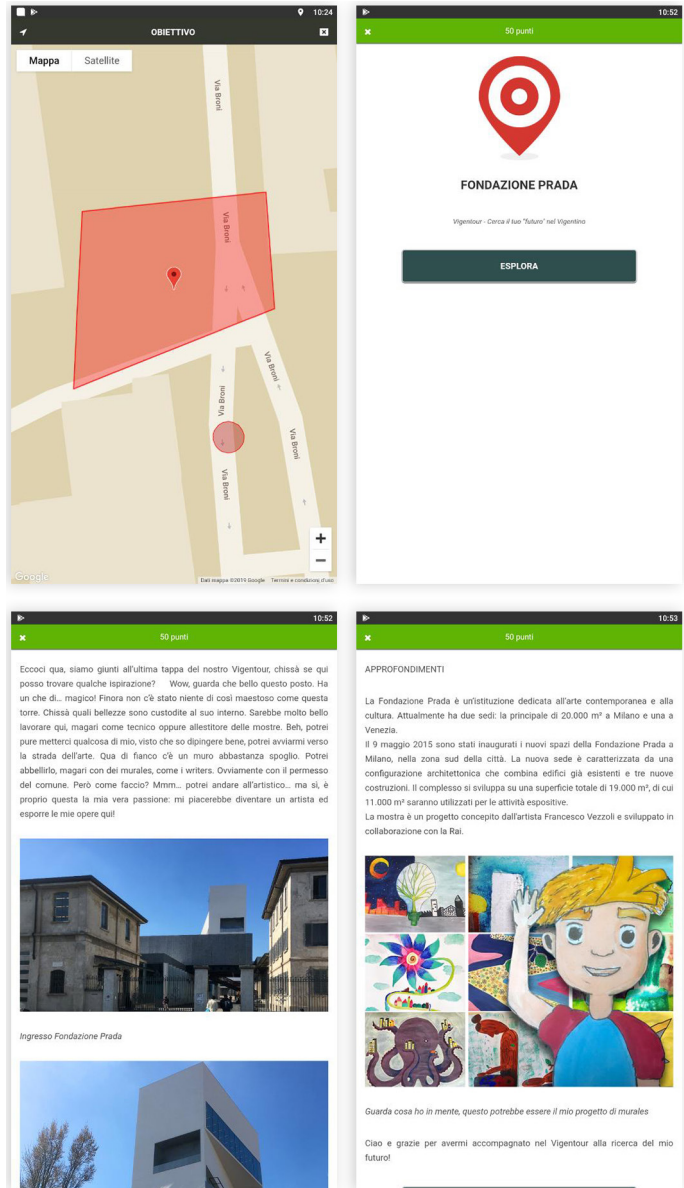
students) that provides two typologies of courses: one of a humanistic nature focused on the study of foreign languages [Liceo linguistico] and one of a technical nature, oriented to train the future tour operators [Istituto Tecnico per il Turismo].[3]

The activity was, in fact, intended to be part of the *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro* program, the national program to approach high-school students to the professional world and to the responsibilities of adulthood.

The didactic process that was developed in 4 months focused on discovering the surrounding area of the school headquarters. It was based on experiential didactics and involved several phases: a propaedeutic training course for teachers on tools and methodologies; the activities co-designing with teachers and local stakeholders; the work with the students; the organization of events to share the results with citizens and the scientific community.

In collaboration with tutors and experts, participants elaborated a communication project of the cultural landscape of their suburbs addressed to their peers but also to the school community, the local citizens, and finally to the potential visitors. The process was conducted through the construction of an articulated sequence of analog and digital graphic works and interactive mobile communication devices. The following lines describe the experience and illustrates the articulation of the activities to open a discussion on the methodology.

Designing, training, and co-designing

As a first step, *ScAR* proposed to teachers an advanced course on the analysis and interpretation of the national and European guidelines on heritage education. The course deepened the debate on the didactic processes for cultural heritage studying and appreciation with a focus on fragile areas and everyday landscapes. Additionally, the course delivered an overview on the involvement of advanced technologies in schools and on the use of the storytelling and mapping applications used in the project. The main aims of this step were sharing the principle and objective of the ELC and other guidelines, and giving to teachers the theoretical and technical skills to develop the digital applications. Beyond the training, this step gave the opportunity to engage teachers in the didactic process and stimulate their proactive participation in the co-designing of the activities.
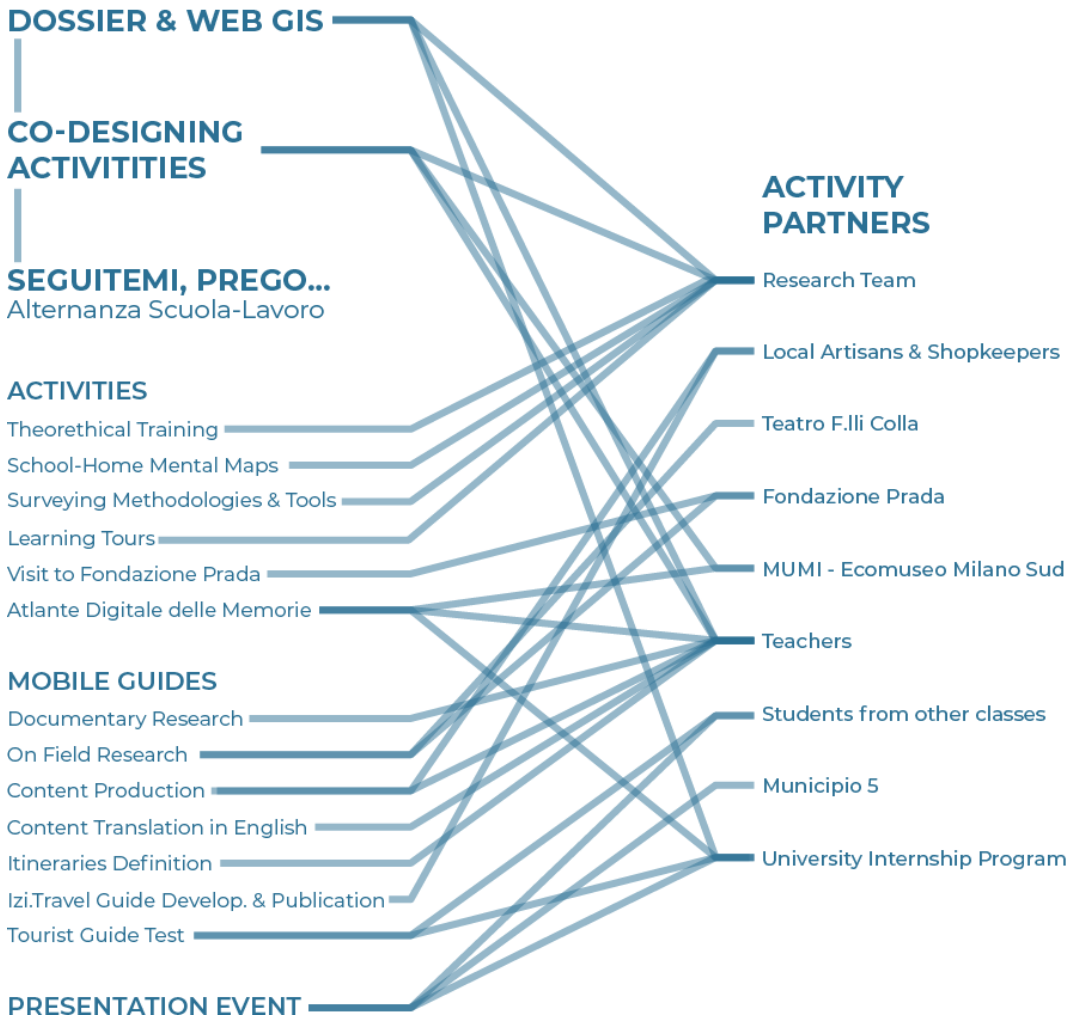
Digital tools and co-designing

To facilitate the activities co-design, the research team developed a set of documentation tools: a propaedeutic dossier that offered an overview on the local tangible and intangible heritage, a general database with historical images and documents, and a web Geographic Information System (GIS) to map contents. This documentation step was enriched thanks to the collaboration of the university interns, who were charged with mapping the cultural heritage, and thanks to teachers, who knew the area and helped define and design the learning tours. Finally, the dossier and the interactive map were published on the *ScAR* project web site in order to give the teachers a starting tool set for their didactic activities.

Building the working team

The working group, defined during the co-design meetings with the teachers, included: a project manager expert in participatory cultural landscape enhancement processes, an expert in the use of ICTs for cultural heritage, a group of teachers from different fields (geography, science, art history, etc.) coordinated by a teacher with experience in educational tourism projects, and 22 high-school students between 16 and 19 years old. In some specific phases of the project, *ScAR* involved also: interns from Politecnico di Milano, volunteers from local cultural associations, the experts from MUMI Ecomuseo Sud Milano, and other cultural heritage professionals (Figure 2).

Mind maps of the school-home route

The didactic activities started with lectures aimed at stimulating curiosity about the techniques and the processes for cultural heritage investigation, and to generate a reflection on landscape. Students were helped to build a clearer and deeper idea of some key concepts as cultural heritage, landscape, cultural tourism, map, topographic map, topological map, and participatory map (Figure 3). In addition, during the meetings experts presented some hardware and

DOSSIER & WEB GIS

CO-DESIGNING ACTIVITITIES

SEGUITEMI, PREGO...
Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro

ACTIVITIES
Theorethical Training
School-Home Mental Maps
Surveying Methodologies & Tools
Learning Tours
Visit to Fondazione Prada
Atlante Digitale delle Memorie

MOBILE GUIDES
Documentary Research
On Field Research
Content Production
Content Translation in English
Itineraries Definition
Izi.Travel Guide Develop. & Publication
Tourist Guide Test

PRESENTATION EVENT

ACTIVITY PARTNERS
Research Team
Local Artisans & Shopkeepers
Teatro F.lli Colla
Fondazione Prada
MUMI - Ecomuseo Milano Sud
Teachers
Students from other classes
Municipio 5
University Internship Program

Fig. 2 Map of *Seguitemi, prego...*
activity carried out by 22
high-school students.
The scheme summarizes
the designing process and
the different actors involved.

software tools to improve the processes of knowledge and interpretation of the landscape (i.e., spherical cameras, surveying drones, VR/AR goggles, and applications for participatory digital mapping and frame comparison).

Students were also asked to create an active debate on the school neighborhood merits and criticalities, and to exchange their impressions, opinions, and personal observations. The result of these meetings were several collective and personal landscape representations, such as sketches,

Fig. 3 Two home-school route
maps drawn by high-school
students during the lectures
on landscape and mapping.
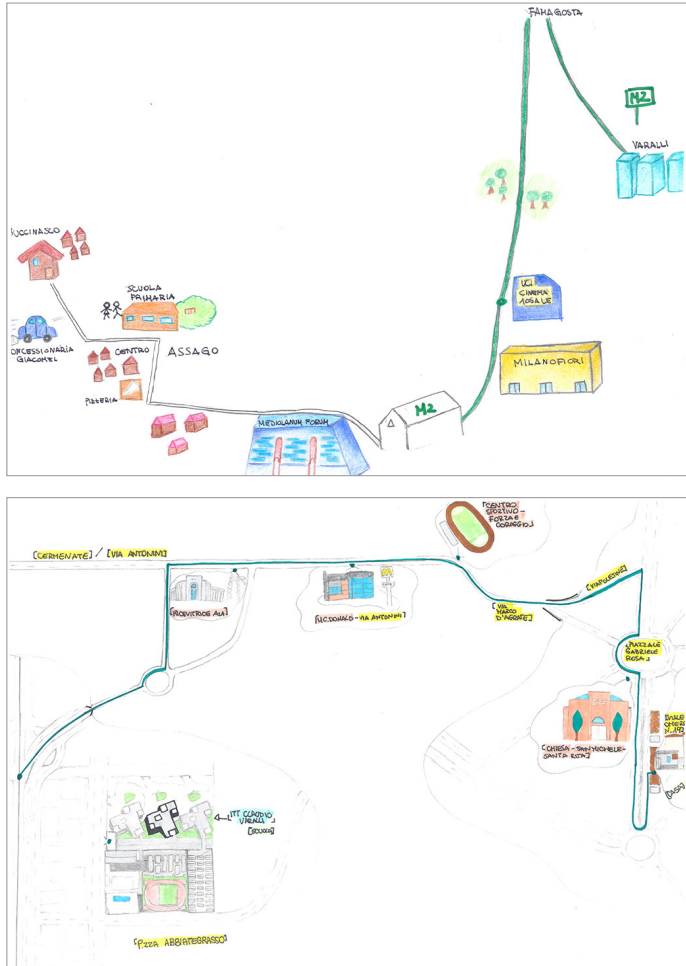
schemes, and mind maps of the home-to-school routes.
Thanks to development and discussion of these representa-
tions, the process promoted a critical and collaborative ob-
servation of the area enriched with the student perspective
on the landscape of their everyday life.

Discovering the area: interpretation and learning tours
In order to deepen the knowledge of the area and to
give a new perspective on the local landscape, the research
team developed two learning tours in collaboration with

Fig. 4 High-school students reading the map and identifying the buildings and the places touched by the learning tour.
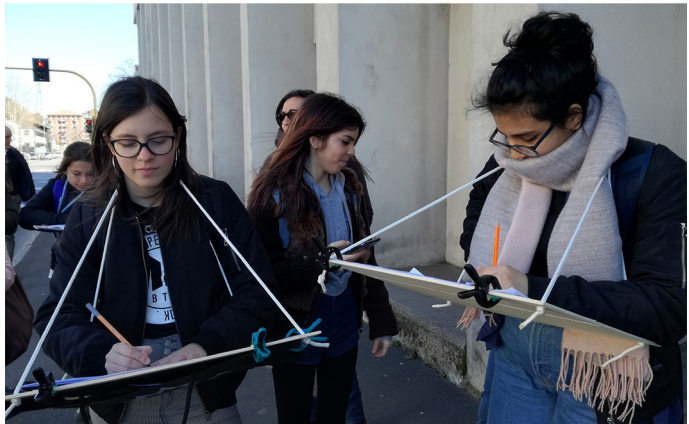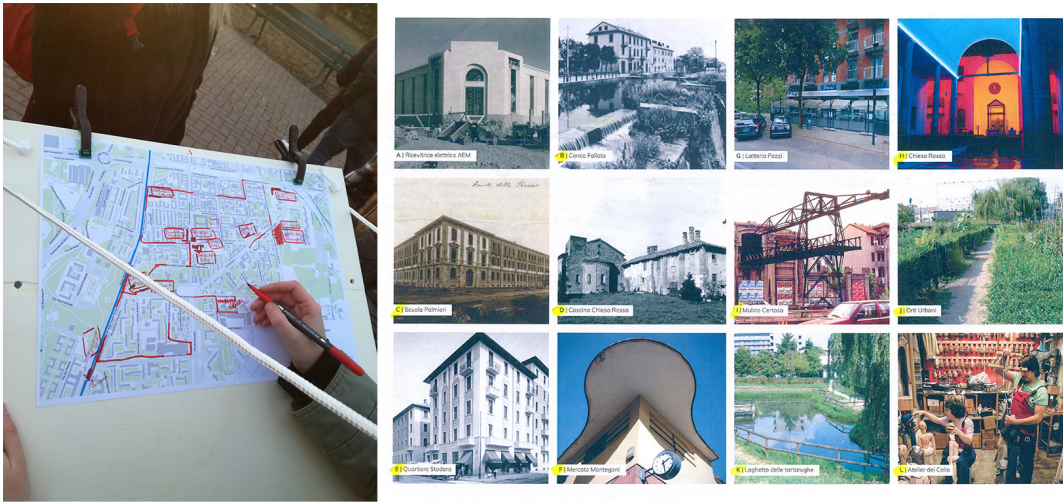
Fig. 5 The route drawn during the learning tour.

teachers. The itineraries drove students first to explore the immediate surroundings of the school and then gradually further afield until reaching an important urban landmark, the headquarters of Fondazione Prada, one of the project partners. Although located in a peripheral area, the Foundation's headquarters, designed by a famous architectural firm and hosting a permanent collection, temporary exhibitions and events, is a pole of attraction for the city's cultural life and international tourism. The itineraries traced a path through the neighborhoods that connects an ordinary suburban school building to a nerve of the city's tourist offer, and touches heterogeneous points of interest along the way. Some of these points are known at the urban scale or in specific cultural circuits, others touch places of cultural interest known only at the local level, others are instead places or buildings almost forgotten and often abandoned.

The research team accompanied students in these two routes and asked participants to trace the path on a map and place the point of interest visited and illustrated in a provided set of images (i.e., buildings, views, and public spaces) (Figures 4, 5). Finally, students were invited to report their impressions and reflections on the places touched by the tours (Figure 6). After this activity, students participat-

Fig. 6 The considerations a group of students reported during the learning tour.

ed in a workshop in which they worked in small groups to compare and share their notes.

During the tours an expert of the research team operated a 360° photographic survey of the entire route and recorded the environmental sounds. The use of this innovative tool stimulated the interest of participants who were involved in the use of the camera and in the surveying activities.

How cultural heritage 'works', visiting Fondazione Prada and the puppet theatre

The visit to the last stop of the itinerary, Fondazione Prada, offered to students the opportunity to know closely a cultural hub located in the same suburban area and included in the international tourist circuits and which, nevertheless, many students had barely heard of. The Foundation provided a guide who accompanied the students in the discovery of the collections and the buildings, bringing them closer to contemporary architecture and art (Figure 7). Moreover, the guide was an interesting interlocutor for students who asked questions about his own role and professional experience. A group of students also visited a historic puppet theater located in the neighborhood. Participants met the professionals who operate in a context of cultural offerings, the manager

and head of communication, the director, the operators who move the puppets, and other workers involved in the puppets' creation and maintenance (Figure 8).

Communicating and sharing in a professional way

After the learning tours, the research team proposed to participants the development of two professional touristic guides of the area. In order to collect the contents for the guides, students performed documentary research in physical and online libraries and archives. Moreover, some participants deepened the researches with a professional on field investigations with visits and interviews to experts.

In a following step, students adapted the collected documents and media for a tourist communication by following specific indications (concerning for example the length of the texts and the construction of the captions). Finally, they translated all the text into English.

Defining the itineraries

According to the contents, students defined two touristic itineraries through the project area to promote its heritage and cultural values. The aim was the identification of routes that gives potential visitors the opportunity to discover unusual destinations rich in historical and cultural point of interests.

The routes touch known and less-known landmarks such as: historical stores, significant places for the daily life of the neighborhoods, public spaces, relevant architectures, the waterways system, the rural buildings, and urban gardens. Following the itinerary, the visitor can discover, for example, a mill hidden in the urban fabric, a historical hydraulic underground infrastructure, a contemporary art installation in a church from the 30s, and an old typography. The result is two consecutive itineraries that invites visitors to be immersed into the peripheral areas and experience it from the locals' perspective. As a matter of fact, the routes are now a bridge that brings visitors to an underrated land-

Fig. 7 Students visiting Fondazione Prada. The guide is presenting the maquette of the foundation buildings.

Fig. 8 A group of students interviewing the artisans of a puppets' theatre.

scape. Moreover, the presence of Fondazione Prada as a starting point allows to attract visitors and increase the mediatic exposure of the itineraries.

Developing advanced digital tools with students: the mobile tourist guides

Following the defined routes, participants finally developed the two mobile guides, using Izi.travel, an online and free

Fig. 9 A Student working on the
Izi.travel backend to develop the
mobile guides.

Content Management System (CMS) dedicated to the creation
of professional interactive multimedia guides. The CMS offers
to the authors the opportunity to easily manage the touristic
routes and add any kind of content and media. After a propae-
deutic training delivered by an expert of the research team,
students designed the guide, traced the routes, and upload all
the contents previously produced (Figures 9, 10).[4]

Sharing the experience

The *ScAR* project bet on peer education and for this reason
often invited participants to share their results and opinions
among them. In this direction, students shared on the social
networks (Facebook and Instagram) their personal experi-
ences. Moreover, students from different working groups and
schools tested the different applications produced during
ScAR. For example, the participants of *Seguitemi, prego...* tested
the prototype of the virtual tour above mentioned, while uni-
versity interns tested the mobile guides before the publication
on the Izi.travel sharing platform and the communication cam-
paign in other schools. Furthermore, the multimedia contents
produced for the guides were shared with the university in-
terns who uploaded them on the *Atlante Digitale delle Memorie*.

Fig. 10 Screenshots from the mobile guides developed by high-school students.
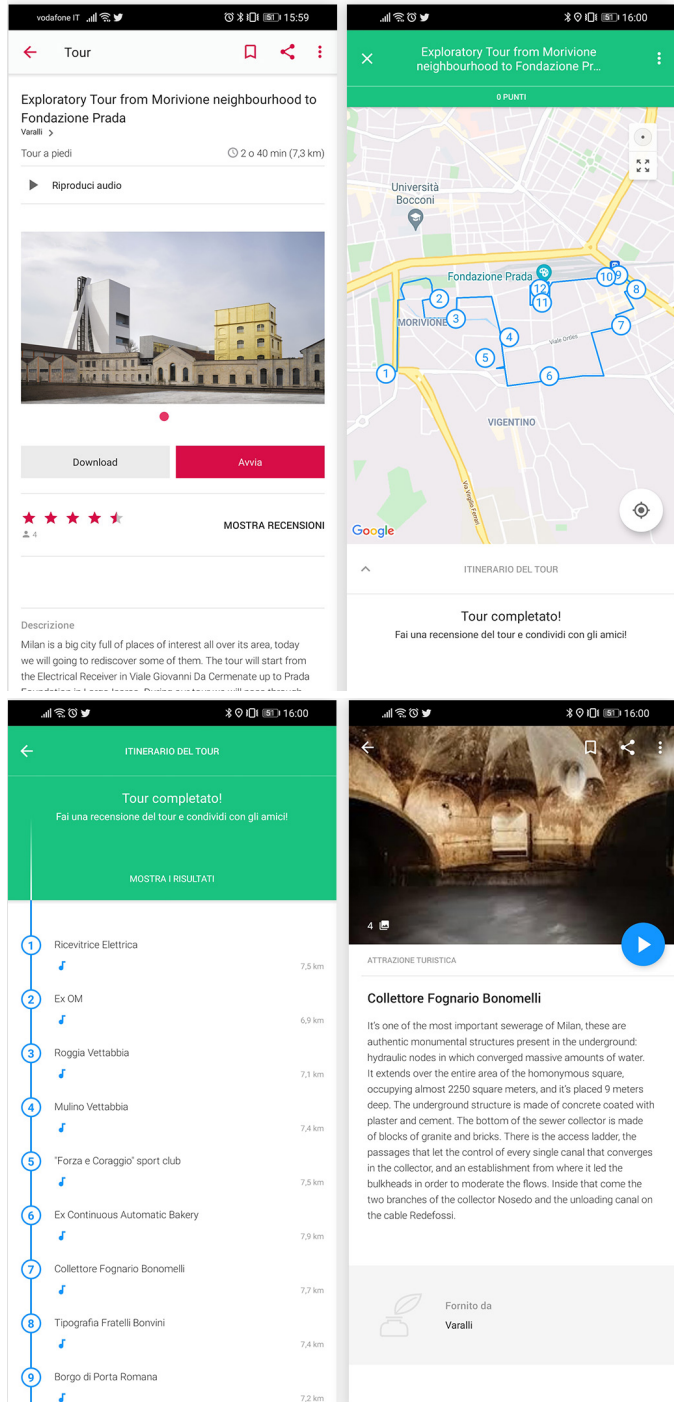
At the end of the didactic project, participants organized a conclusive event in their school to share the process, the results, and the products developed. The event gathered other students, families, teachers, the head of the school, representatives from Municipio 5, and scholars from Politecnico di Milano. Students presented the activities performed, shared with the audience their personal observation and highlighted how the experience changed their perception on the project area. The presentation ended with a public event of an on-field test of the mobile guide.

Thanks to the Izi.travel analytics, the research team could gather information on the performances of the mobile guides. Since the publication on the Izi.travel platform in May 2019 to October 2021 the routes have been entirely played 253 times and the different touristic attractions in the itineraries have been visited more than 2200 times from an international audience. These data show that the project had an impact outside the didactic context in the spirit of the authentic learning methodology.

LANDSCAPE EDUCATION AND TOURISM TRANSFORMATION

Although focused on heritage and landscape education, *ScAR* also related to tourism education and touched important aspects of the transformations that are taking place in the field of tourism (MiBACT, 2016; Katsoni, 2015), such as: the change in tourist destinations, the emerging role of local communities, the role of digital transformation, and the necessity of a re-tool and re-design of tourism practices.

In conclusion, the project could represent a case study for the debate on tourism education, especially in the following topics.

Fostering untouched and even unusual destinations. The project built knowledge on lesser-known places and creates applications to promote unknown routes in urban

areas. It also fostered the development of sustainable practices in a city where tourism is growing rapidly. In this sense, the *ScAR* project offered methodological tools to encourage the diversification of destinations by involving young citizens.

Involving local communities. The project enhanced the role of local communities who are taking today a more prominent role in the development of tourism. *ScAR* as a participatory project involved locals in its didactic processes: students and their families, local shopkeepers, artisans, and common citizens.

Bringing innovation in tourism education. Although tourism education is traditionally delivered in high-schools and universities, the project also involved younger students in order to promote a sense of belonging to places and the active citizenship.

Promoting digital transformation in tourism education. The project encountered the challenges of digital transformation by developing interactive tourism promotion products in collaboration with teachers and students, including the very young ones, with important repercussions on the technological updating of schools. In addition, the project offered an experimental approach in the construction of virtual tourism (experiences in virtual reality).

Developing digital products for a real public in the aim of authentic learning. The project activities recalled realistic tasks and many of the project products were authentic, available for a real public.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research ended with an impact evaluation that was mainly performed with teachers' reports, questionnaires and interviews (21 reports, 8 questionnaires, 7 interviews). The analysis of these documents highlighted some relevant aspects. First, the project encouraged the intercultural inclusion

in classes with a high percentage of first and second-generation immigrants, and strengthened the relationship between these new citizens and the neighborhood. Second, the use of ICTs and the development of applications stimulated the motivation and prompted a conscious use of technologies in young citizens. Third, students discovered that visiting their own city and neighborhoods as tourists could be exciting. In fact, during the first meetings students difficultly appreciated the presence of interesting places in the area but, after the didactic experience, they started to look at their landscape with watchful and critic eyes. Therefore, *ScAR* promoted a change in students' landscape representation of the peripheral landscape of their everyday lifes.

In general, the research project highlights the central role representation can play in educational processes as the experiences were accompanied by the intensive use of representation tools and methodologies. The activities promoted by *ScAR* could be intended as a complex process of imagery development and sharing which combined gathered knowledge, readings, and interpretations for the landscape enhancement.

In conclusion, *ScAR* showed that schools can become a cultural hub to connect citizens, and local stakeholders to promote the hidden tangible and intangible heritage of peripheries. Hence, the experience offers a possible strategy to rediscover fragile areas based on a conscious representation practice.

NOTES

1 The game was developed in collaboration with GaiaSmart, a free app that provides several georeferenced game-routes in steps with quizzes in historic Italian towns targeted to young people and families (Carli, 2017). The games are available for free on the GaiaSmart sharing platform (http://www.gaiasmart.com/).
2 The application, named 'Experience tour of Quartiere Stadera', was created with Google Tour Creator and shared on the platform Google Expeditions. The two platform are today closed as the owner (Google) decided to end the project in June 2021.

3 The mentioned school is the Istituto di Istruzione Superiore C. Varalli in Milan.
4 The two routes are available at https://izi.travel/en/f65d-exploratory-tour-from-morivione-neighbourhood-to-fondazione-prada/en and https://izi.travel/en/207f-exploratory-tour-from-chiesa-rossa-neighbourhood-to-morivione/en

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