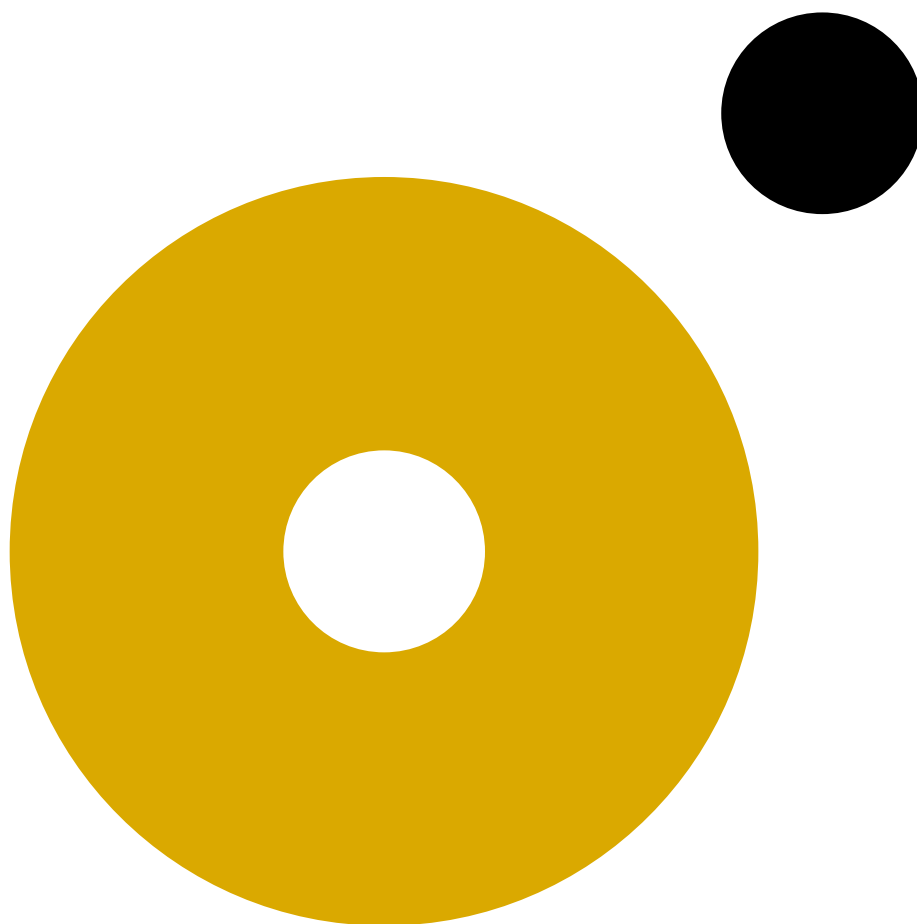


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The School and Its Many Pasts

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Representations of Disability in the Great Turin Exhibitions at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1884-1911)

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The article examines three exhibitions: the first held in 1884, the only date that does not coincide with a special event in Italian history; the second in 1898, fifty years after the coming into effect of the *Statuto Albertino*; and the third in 1911, which was staged in Rome as well as Turin, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy¹.

The multiple sources consulted include: the official documentation produced by the organizing committee (programmes and circulars, catalogues and lists of exhibitors, newsletters and periodic updates, records of prizewinners)²; press coverage and articles in specialized journals; material held at Turin institutes for the disabled that participated in one or more of the exhibitions.

This theme has not previously been investigated within history of education research. The aim of the paper is to address the resulting gap in the literature by offering a chronological and comparative account based on the analysis of a set of novel sources.

1. *A rich and diverse participation*

The catalogues of the three different editions of the Exhibition show that disability featured in these events as a richly composite theme, not only in terms of the different types of disabilities represented, but also in terms of the plurality of perspectives and angles brought to bear upon them: alongside educational institutes for deaf-mutes, the blind, rickety, and mentally retarded, the exhibitors included private individuals, inventors of methods and tools for the study of various disciplines, societies set up by the disabled themselves, and local associations and bodies that ran projects for persons with disabilities as part of a broader charitable-welfare programme. By way of example,

¹ On this topic, see U. Levra, R. Rocca (edd.), *Le Esposizioni torinesi 1805-1911 specchio del progresso e macchina del consenso*, Torino, Archivio storico della Città di Torino, 2003.

² Some of these documentary sources may be consulted online. Cf. <https://www.museotorino.it/site/media/books> (last access: 06.02.2023).

the machines for teaching Braille presented by a teacher, Antonietta, from the Casa di Bologna, which were awarded the silver medal for the education section in the 1884 Exhibition, fell under the heading of “disability exhibit”³; as did the Society for Mutual Aid among the Deaf-Mutes of Lombardy⁴, or the Ligurian Committee for the Education of the People and the Teaching League of Verona, which provided education to rickety children⁵. Disabled pupils also took part in fringe events organized around the exhibition: the international gymnastics competition for schools held in parallel with the 1911 Turin Exhibition is a representative example⁶.

Due to space constraints, and for the purposes of this essay, I restrict my analysis to the participation of institutions for the care and education of disabled persons. A look at the available data enables us to quantify the presence of such bodies at the exhibitions. In 1884, 20 institutes for the disabled took part in the event: an almost equal number of these were devoted to care of the deaf and the blind, respectively (10 versus 8), with a far smaller number dedicated to rickety children (just two). The absence of any reference to the mentally retarded is not surprising: institutions for this group only began to appear in Italy during the 1890s. The overall number of institutes for the disabled at the 1898 edition was slightly higher: 23, with the participation, for the first time, of the institute for phrasthenics directed by Gonelli Cioni, which we shall return to later, and a disproportionately high number of schools for the deaf and dumb (13 compared to six for the blind and three for the rickety). This preponderance is presumably explained by Italy’s longer tradition of education for the deaf.

Fewer institutes for the disabled took part in the 1911 exhibition compared to the two earlier editions: a mere 15 altogether, comprising five institutions for the deaf, six for the blind, three for rickety children, and only one for the mentally retarded⁷. This fall-off seems even more marked if we consider that six of the participating institutes were based in Turin itself. It was likely due to the international character of the 1911 event, which was logistically more extensive and with a far more diverse range of exhibitors than either the 1884 or 1898 fairs⁸, and thus less suited to promoting the work of Italian

³ L’Esposizione generale italiana in Torino nel 1884. *Catalogo ufficiale. Divisione II. Didattica*, Torino, UTET, 1884, p. 57 and *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria. Torino 1884*, Torino, Stamperia Reale, 1884, p. 46.

⁴ L’Esposizione generale italiana in Torino nel 1884. *Catalogo ufficiale. Divisione IV. Previdenza ed assistenza pubblica*, Torino, UTET, 1884, p. 133.

⁵ L’Esposizione generale italiana in Torino nel 1884. *Catalogo ufficiale. Divisione II. Didattica*, cit., pp. 67-68 and *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria. Torino 1884*, cit., p. 54.

⁶ This gymnastics competition, organized by the Italian Federation in conjunction with the Office in charge of coordinating all the European gymnastics federations, was held in Turin on 11-14 May 1911. Many educational institutions for persons with disabilities took part in the event, winning prizes and accolades. The weekly magazine «La domenica del sordomuto» reported on the participation of «Forza e Parola», a team representing the deafmutes of Bologna, who won gold and silver medals in several different events.

⁷ The fifteenth institution was a School for the Dumb and Deafmutes based in Paotinfou (Tchéli) in China. Cf. *Catalogo ufficiale dell’Esposizione internazionale di Torino 1911*, 3 Vols., Torino, Fratelli Pozzo, 1911, pp. 36, 761 and 1096.

⁸ Special issue F. Evangelisti, A. Pes (edd.), *Le Esposizioni: propaganda e costruzione identitaria*, «Diacronie», vol. 18, n. 2, 2014.

institutions for the disabled. The Turin institutes were the only ones to participate in all three exhibitions, largely because they were locally based: these were the Institute for the Blind, the Royal Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, and the Prinotti Institute, which was also for the deaf⁹. With regard to geographical location more generally, the participating institutes came predominantly from Northern Italy (64%) rather than from the centre (21%) or south (14%) of the country. This breakdown is in line with the distribution of such institutions, which were concentrated in northern areas where private benefactors and municipalities/provinces were more likely to have the resources to finance them by sponsoring free places¹⁰.

The material exhibited was extremely varied: from documentary outlines of the origins, history, and administrative and educational systems of individual institutes (statutes, regulations, budgets, statistics, monographs, photographs, curricula) to displays of the students' handwriting and drawing. There was no shortage of handicraft produced by the pupils themselves: while in the case of deaf students, the products on display were typically the output of their shoemaking, dressmaking, and woodwork activities, in the case of blind students they were more likely to take the form of rush weaving and wickerwork. Sometimes demonstrations were held so that some of the disabled could show off their manual skills to visitors. The institutions also made a significant contribution to the festivities organized as part of the exhibitions: for example, the Milan Institute for the Blind offered a series of concerts at the 1884 edition¹¹.

2. *The civil society perspective*

The circulars sent by the organizing committee to the political and schools authorities, as well as the descriptions of the various sections of the exhibitions to be found in the catalogues, reflect a tendency to situate the contribution of educational institutes for the disabled in one of two domains: education and private or public welfare. In relation to the 1884 and 1898 editions, the documentary sources contain explicit references to educational works for the blind, deaf and dumb, and rickety in terms of school buildings and furnishings on the one hand, but on the other hand, also in terms of methods and textbooks, including in Braille, for reading, writing, geography, music and vocational learning. While the materials from the 1911 exhibition no longer explicitly describe

⁹ The Royal Institute for Deafmutes had been set up in 1838, thanks to funding from the monarchy among other sources, while the Royal Institute for the Blind, whose founding was driven by the Turin city councillor with responsibility for public education, Ernesto Riccardi di Netro, had been inaugurated in 1879. The work of the priest, don Lorenzo Prinotti, encompassed a series of projects for the deaf (from an educational institute for poor women deafmutes, to a parish-based spiritual and recreational centre, a kindergarten, and a free service assisting the deaf and dumb with finding employment and handling workplace issues).

¹⁰ R. Sani, *L'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia prima e dopo l'Unità. Itinerari, esperienze, discussioni*, in Id., *L'educazione dei sordomuti nell'Italia dell'800. Istituzioni, metodi, proposte formative*, Torino, SEI, 2008, p. 25.

¹¹ On the concerts that took place on 18-19 May 1884, cf. «Gazzetta Piemontese», vol. XVIII, n. 135, (15 May) 1884, p. 2 and n. 138, (18 May) 1884, p. 1.

institutions for the disabled in these terms, the criteria for assigning awards and honours make it clear that they continued to be included under multiple categories of vocational training. Thus, the Prinotti Institute for poor deaf-mutes in Turin received a prize for both the “industrial education” category and the “special and advanced training schools” category, while the Vittorio Emanuele Institute for blind children in Florence won a gold medal in the category «works furthering industrial, commercial and agricultural education by the government, provinces, city and town councils, companies and other public and charitable bodies»¹².

This difference between editions may be explained, at least in part, by evolving perspectives on the presence and significance of the schools-education sector at this kind of event. Tellingly, the title of the education section went from *Mostra Didattica* (Education Exhibition) in 1884 to «Vocational education and teaching. Schools-advanced training workshops and laboratories» in 1911, with an explicit shift to focusing on schools whose goal was to «prepare the youth among the common people for economic struggles and success in the workplace and to provide industry with an educated and expert workforce with the capacity for self-improvement and for improving its work tools and methods»¹³.

Institutions for the disabled could also apply to exhibit in the social security and public welfare section¹⁴, which was first introduced at the 1884 Exhibition in response to a positivist climate that held science to be an instrument of progress, including in terms of improving society. Further evidence for this outlook is provided by a questionnaire that was distributed to the exhibitors with a view to systematically collecting data on the state of welfare in Italy, in keeping with a new approach which, as the expression of a secular philanthropy, was destined to replace the charitable works of Catholic organizations. This approach is expressed by Daneo in his report on the exhibition:

A dispassionate examination [...] of Italy's charitable works and institutions might prompt changes, even radical changes, to many of them, and likely a logical and coordinated general reorganization of all of them, and – eradicating the humiliating almsgiving approach that still prevails in very many them – might find, among the rich resources of public welfare, immense scope for salvation from the miseries that still afflict a considerable proportion of Italian communities and areas. Spontaneous, slow, and gradual transformation is already actively underway. The display panels of the exhibiting institutes [...] and the many recent amendments to their statutes and regulations proved the extent and dynamic nature of the – previous and ongoing – accomplishments of the winds of revolution in this field, which once seemed so conservative¹⁵.

¹² Esposizione internazionale delle industrie e del lavoro, *Elenco generale ufficiale delle premiazioni. Torino 1911*, Torino, Momo, 1912, pp. 2-3.

¹³ Esposizione internazionale dell'industria e del lavoro, *Relazione della Giuria. Torino 1911*, Torino, Officine grafiche STEN, 1915, Vol. I, p. 301.

¹⁴ At some of the exhibitions, the students' productions were put on display in the regional pavilions. For example, at the 1898 exhibition, the work of pupils at schools for the disabled in Cagliari – the main city in Sardinia – were showcased in the Sardinian pavilion. On the participation of the Cagliari Institute for Deafmutes at the 1898 event, cf. A.I. Argiolas, *I sordomuti di Cagliari all'Esposizione di Torino. Relazione sull'Istituto pei Sordomuti della Città di Cagliari presentata al Comitato provinciale per l'Esposizione di Torino*, Cagliari, Tip. Muscas, 1898.

¹⁵ E. Daneo, *Esposizione italiana in Torino 1884. Relazione generale*, Torino, Stamperia Reale G.B. Paravia

In the pavilion devoted to societal problems, institutions for the deaf and dumb, blind, rickety, and mentally retarded were included among the other educational and care institutions for children and youth.

Although institutions for the disabled were given the opportunity to choose between two different sections of the exhibition, it is equally the case that – as they were conceptualized and perceived by the organizers – their «natural venue, in light of their charitable character and aims»¹⁶, was thought to be the welfare pavilion.

This interpretation was in line with the view of the contemporary Italian political class, whose members tended to see institutes for the disabled as solely charitable works and, therefore, as falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior. Not surprisingly therefore, proposals to extend compulsory education to deaf and blind children, which had been brought repeatedly before Parliament since the 1870s, had never been acted upon¹⁷. Furthermore, some of the main promoters of the Turin Exhibitions were also authoritative national leaders: first and foremost, Tommaso Villa (1832-1915), a parliamentarian with the Historic Left who served as President of the Chamber of Deputies and several times as government minister¹⁸.

In any case, the participation of educational institutions for the disabled in the exhibitions was highly valued by the committees with responsibility for organizing the exhibitions. In both 1884 and 1898, almost all the institutes listed in the official catalogue received an award of some kind, whether a certificate of honour, a medal (gold, silver, or bronze), or honourable mention. In 1911, the proportion of institutions to receive prizes decreased but remained significant, at around 50%. Numerous institutes even received multiple awards at the same edition: for example, in 1898, the Genoa Institute for Deaf-mutes won three silver medals in three separate categories (education, graphic arts and related industries, and public welfare)¹⁹.

The reasons given for awarding these prizes provide us with insight into the meaning and value attributed to institutions for the disabled and to their role in providing for socio-economic needs in their local areas. Many and various were the merits highlighted by the juries called to assess their work. First, the adjudicators emphasized the ground-breaking nature of some of the institutes, which were to be emulated both in Italy and beyond. The adjudication sheet in support of an award given to the director of the Institute for Phrenasthenics in Vercurago, a town in the province of Lecco, conveyed this sentiment as follows:

e C., 1886, Vol. I, p. 118.

¹⁶ *Assistenza Pubblica. Circolare d'invito ad esporre*, «Bollettino ufficiale. Esposizione generale italiana. Torino 1898», n. 13, (25 July) 1897, p. 3.

¹⁷ On the evolving legislation on education for the deaf and dumb, cf. Sani, *L'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia prima e dopo l'Unità*, cit., pp. 30-37.

¹⁸ Cf. S. Montaldo, *Patria e affari. Tommaso Villa e la costruzione del consenso tra unità e grande guerra*, Torino, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1999.

¹⁹ Cf. *Esposizione d'arte sacra antica e moderna, Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della giuria. Torino 1898*, Torino, Fratelli Pozzo, 1898, pp. 36, 92 and 187.

Cav. [Sir] Gonelli Cioni has won a battle: he has managed to secure acceptance for the setting up of schools for phrenasthenics and to prove that these are necessary.

In Italy, there were already institutes for the blind, for the deaf and dumb, for petty delinquents or youths in need of reform, and even for the insane; there was absolutely no form of asylum for idiots, for the feeble-minded.

He has filled this gap, he has offered practical evidence of how phrenasthenics may be educated, and of what improvement may be expected of them; he has rescued many unhappy people from being ridiculed on the streets. His merit is special and most great²⁰.

The adjudication sheets also focused on the excellent/good/fair outcomes attained in the teaching of school subjects and of manual skills, which were attested to by the depth, quality, and variety of the students' work, and which reflected the deployment of the most recent teaching practices (for example, the use of the oral method in the education of deaf-mutes). This explains the awards to organizations that made a particular contribution to the dissemination of new methodologies via the publication of specialized journals: from «L'educazione dei sordomuti» (The education of deaf-mutes) brought out by the Pendola Institute of Siena (gold medal winner) to «Rassegna di pedagogia e d'igiene per l'educazione dei sordomuti e la profilassi dei sordomutismi» (Review of pedagogy and hygiene for the education of deaf-mutes and the prevention of hearing and speech impairments), published by Prof. Ernesto Scuri, director of the Institute of Naples (silver medal recipient)²¹.

Much was made of the social contribution of projects that, in addition to filling gaps in the charity system and enabling the inclusion of disabled individuals in the employment sector, also offered welfare services to the community: just as the Prinotti Institute in Turin housed poor deaf women «who due to a lack of education and old age are in need of a place of refuge»²² and set them up with jobs through its employment service, so the Genoa Institute for the blind took in older men who had lost their sight on the battlefield, and Turin's Institute for the Rickety offered free medical examinations and advice to the community at large.

Praise was also lavished on the skilful administration of the institutes as well as on the considerable energy and resources invested by private individuals in setting up and maintaining them, in accordance with the policy agenda of the liberal state which – due to cultural factors, political considerations, and budgetary constraints – typically delegated to civil society the task of providing support for disadvantaged groups²³.

Some of the language used reveals a “do-gooder”, pitying kind of attitude: from

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²¹ For a more in-depth treatment of these two journals, cf. L. Gobbi, *Tommaso Pendola e la rivista «Dell'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia» (1872-1884)*, Tesi di Laurea, Facoltà di Magistero, Milano, Università Cattolica del S. Cuore, a.a. 1994-1995; R. Sani, *Rassegna di pedagogia e igiene per l'educazione dei sordomuti e la profilassi dei sordomutismi*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *La stampa pedagogica e scolastica in Italia (1820-1943)*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1997, p. 531.

²² *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria. Torino 1884*, cit., p. 197.

²³ On the policies of the liberal state in the welfare sector, cf. F. Della Peruta, *Le opere pie dall'Unità alla legge Crispi*, in *Problemi istituzionali e riforme nell'età crispina*, Roma, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1992, pp. 195-250.

“unhappy” rickety children to “poor” deaf-mutes to “unfortunate” blind people before whom “the soul is naturally moved”. Similar feelings are described in the article *La mostra didattica* (The education exhibition), which appeared in one of the official publications on the 1884 exhibition. The anonymous author tells of the compassion that he experienced, while visiting the «sorrowful work-themed gallery», at the sight of blind people reading rapidly in Braille from a slate, writing and counting “with special tools”, weaving mats, doing crochet, and knitting; he asks himself whether it is right to «almost make their infirmity into a spectacle» for an increasingly large audience²⁴. This sentiment, mixed with wonder and amazement, tugs at the heartstrings:

Who – the writer asks – could walk by these objects, which have been produced by such diverse groups of the underprivileged and derelict, without feeling moved? [...] It seems virtually impossible that some of these works were produced by those whose minds are not assisted by their eyes²⁵.

A similar reaction may be observed on the part of the general public, as for example, in commentaries published in the newspaper «Gazzetta Piemontese» on the two earlier-mentioned concerts given by the students of the Milan Institute for the Blind at the 1884 Exhibition. An article by the Turin music critic, Giuseppe Ippolito Franchi-Verney di Valletta, is particularly emblematic. Franchi-Verney masterfully describes the quick succession of inner emotions experienced by the audience, from their arrival in the concert hall to the performance of the various pieces on the concert programme:

Among those who entered the concert hall on Sunday, how many truly expected an artistic result from this experiment with the blind? Only a tiny few, I am ready to wager – says the critic – and it may well be that none of the listeners could swear in conscience that they had not been prompted to attend by a sentiment of commiseration. [...] All those who had come with the sincere but modest intention of acting on their feelings of charity towards the unfortunate found themselves, by mid-concert, confronted with a truly artistic event: the tearful, melancholic mood shifted to a joyful, I would almost say glorious one, and a thousand palms clapped enthusiastically for a group of poor unhappy outcasts, who were now leading them to experience new, most sweet emotions²⁶.

The critic himself cannot conceal his excitement and wonder at the skill and level of excellence attained by the blind performers: from the orchestra that proved its ability to play music of all kinds, to the choir, which he defines as «absolutely the most perfect» he had heard in the course of his career. A performance that was all the more astonishing in light of the singers’ physical imperfections, such as the «weakening of the vocal cords» and «weakness of the chest» that are caused by blindness.

²⁴ Naturally, Turin’s own Institute for the Blind was present at the Exhibition, offering a demonstration of the art of Braille printing. Cf. *I ciechi all’Esposizione*, «Gazzetta Piemontese», vol. XVIII, n. 166, (17 June) 1884, p. 2.

²⁵ A.A., *La mostra didattica*, «Torino e l’Esposizione italiana del 1884. Cronaca illustrata», n. 30, 1884, p. 235.

²⁶ G.I. Franchi-Verney della Valletta, *Concerti dei ciechi milanesi*, «Gazzetta Piemontese», vol. XVIII, n. 141, e (21 May) 1884, p. 2.

3. *Self-representation*

All the exhibitors at the great fairs, including educational institutions for persons with disabilities, were required to mark on the application form the sector of the exhibition in which they intended to take part. This was a meaningful choice that reflected how exhibitors perceived their own identity and role, including in relation to the specific context of the event. Scrutiny of the official catalogues of the three editions suggests that the educational institutes for the disabled were more inclined to position themselves in the field of welfare: there were 27 applications for this sector compared to 20 for the education sector. In the absence of further information, we may assume that each institute opted for the category that best matched its own aims and characteristics or the type of material that it planned to exhibit. The display of large numbers of artifacts produced in the vocational workshops suggests a keenness to point up the institute's positive impact, in terms of fostering the social integration of their students by helping them to learn a trade. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the main overall purpose of the exhibitions was to showcase the degree of well-being and economic development achieved by the Italian nation, including – by 1911 – in comparison with other European countries.

The pattern of self-categorization just outlined was likely further influenced by the aforementioned tendency of the political leadership to view educational institutions for the disabled as purely charitable organizations, again, in keeping with the sentimental, “do-gooder” approach that typically characterized attitudes towards persons in this category. Finally, it should be emphasized that registering for the event as charitable institutes meant paying lower participation fees.

The data prompt still further observations relating to the different types of disability. For example, only among the institutions for the deaf do we find cases of dual participation (both education and welfare sections). This is not surprising considering that in relation to deafness in particular, from the 1870s onwards, specialized journals and conference motions had been at the forefront of a systematic and sustained campaign for recognition of deaf persons' right to education and of the educational value of interventions for the hearing-impaired. Nor is it surprising that almost all the institutions for rickety children applied to exhibit in the welfare section: these organizations were clearly more healthcare-oriented than the others. Even the Turin institute, which had been founded in 1872 with a view to offering an effective combination of education and medical treatment, subsequently underwent a process of progressive medicalization during the 1880s²⁷.

Also worthy of note is the – minimal – impact of the great exhibitions in specialist journals with a focus on education for the disabled. Only in their respective, variously titled, news columns, where they habitually reported on key current events with implications for the disabled, did they briefly touch upon the participation and awarding

²⁷ On the background to, and history of, this project, cf. M.C. Morandini, *Tra educazione e assistenza: la scuola speciale per ragazzi rachitici di Torino*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 7, n. 2, 2012, pp. 241-257.

of the institutes at the various editions of the Turin fair. The reasons for this were made clear by Giovanni Battista Anfossi in an article published in 1884 in «Dell'educazione dei sordomuti» (On the education of the deaf and dumb):

I will not neglect – he says – to let the teachers of the deaf and dumb know what our great Turin Exhibition has gained from the various institutes. And I will gladly fulfil this task, both to serve these institutes the praise that they deserve and also to better publicize the rich life that underpins the flourishing of our Italian institutes²⁸.

In several cases, the details provided to the journals' readers had been drawn from local press coverage, as though to emphasize the positive consequences for local communities of the awards received by the institutes at national/international events. Emblematic of these news stories was the write-up in «La Nazione» of Florence on the conferring, in 1898, of a gold medal upon the Tommaso Pendola Institute of Siena and of silver medals upon Vittorio Banchi and Giulio Ferreri, who were head and deputy head of this institute, respectively:

The honours won at the Turin Exhibition are of special importance because they reveal the scientific merit of the director and teachers at our Institute, given that the R. Istituto Pendola did not send work produced by its students [...], choosing instead to exhibit key educational and scientific publications by its heads and teachers [...], and the monthly journal «L'educazione dei sordomuti» (The education of deaf-mutes). It is the great merit of this periodical [...] to have demonstrated the superiority of spoken language over signing²⁹.

This kind of self-referential logic was less evident in popular magazines whose readers were benefactors, the disabled, and their families: indeed, the illustrated periodical «Giulio Tarra», as well as «La Domenica del Sordomuto», offered more general information about the exhibitions, concerning, for example, the total number of visitors and the prize-giving ceremonies³⁰.

The Turin institutes of education for the disabled have conserved “traces” of their participation in the 1888, 1894, and 1911 Exhibitions. It is evident from the documentary sources that part of the original material has been lost. A prime example is the missing status of gilded bronze facsimiles of the 1898 medals commissioned by the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb for affixation to the diplomas issued by the Exhibition jury³¹. Nevertheless, this institute is the only one which, currently still in operation in the local area albeit under a different name and organized differently to the past, holds a substantial

²⁸ G.B. Anfossi, *L'Esposizione nazionale italiana*, «Dell'educazione dei sordomuti», vol. XIII, n. 4, 1884, p. 80.

²⁹ *Il R. Istituto Pendola pei Sordo-muti in Siena premiato all'Esposizione di Torino*, «La Nazione», vol. XL, n. 282, (9 October) 1898, p. 1.

³⁰ In 1911, the weekly magazine «La Domenica del Sordomuto» covered the king's visits to the Exhibition in a couple of short articles. Cf. n. 38 (17 September), p. 303 and n. 42 (15 October), p. 334.

³¹ Cf. Minutes of the meeting of 11 March 1899 (n. 669), in Archivio dell'Istituto dei sordi di Torino (Archives of the Turin Institute for the Deaf, henceforth ARIST), series «Verbali delle adunanze», m. 22, f. 1, pp. 2-3. The material concerning the Exhibitions includes posters featuring rubber labels and pictures of various kinds of medals.

archive that includes the collected minutes of the institute's board meetings as well as a set of files catalogued under the heading *Conferences, Lotteries, Exhibitions, Competitions*. On the one hand, the archived minutes, letters, and forms offer detailed information on the complexities involved in registering for the exhibitions³²; on the other hand, they provide us with insight into the image that the institute set out to present to visitors. A first key emphasis was on retracing and showing off the historic memory of the institution, via the preparation of a monograph³³ and the production of pictures of the building.

A large advertisement placed in the official 1911 catalogue, which cost the institute 35 lire (indeed, four lines of text per exhibitor were free of charge, after which each line cost one lira), allows us to deduce the type of information that was intended to constitute the institute's "calling card" and to illustrate the effectiveness and quality of the education it provided to its students: from a description of the workshops offered (tailoring, shoemaking, and carpentry in the male section; sewing and embroidery in the female section) to a long list of medals and awards received³⁴. The will to persuade visitors of the positive outcomes attained on both the educational and medical fronts is also reflected in the reports of the board of directors of the Turin institute for rickety children. The 1898 report, which contains a list of the documents and artefacts presented at that year's exhibition, not only cites statistics and examples of the students' work, but also refers to clay casts modelling both the deformed limbs of pupils selected for treatment and their straightened and healed limbs following intervention³⁵.

I have not set out, in this brief presentation, to offer an exhaustive account of the topic in hand, but rather to offer a starting point for a new and promising line of inquiry aimed at reconstructing the strategies and initiatives deployed to spark communication, dialogue, and exchange between the sphere of disability on the one hand and political leaders and civil society on the other.

³² For further details, cf. *Concorso Esposizione Torino 1898*, in ARIST, *Conferenze, lotterie, Esposizioni, concorsi*, m. 24, f. 4/2.

³³ This was the same monograph that had already been presented at the Milan Exhibition of 1881 with the addition of a letter outlining the main changes that had taken place in the intervening period in the moral, intellectual and financial running of the Institute.

³⁴ *R. Istituto Sordomuti*, in *Catalogo ufficiale dell'Esposizione internazionale di Torino 1911*, cit., p. 702, n. 2426. Cf. *Esposizione Internazionale di Torino pel 1911*, in ARIST, *Conferenze, lotterie, Esposizioni, concorsi*, m. 24, f. 4/3.

³⁵ *Relazione morale* (8 June 1899) in Istituto per rachitici Regina Maria Adelaide in Torino, *Verbale, Relazioni. Revisione dello Statuto organico. Cariche sociali. Elenco dei soci onorari*, Torino, Tip. Eredi Botta, 1899, p. 10.

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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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