

The *Carta di Milano delle biblioteche* to draw the change

The protagonist of this contribution is the *Carta di Milano delle biblioteche*, presented during the first General States of the Italian libraries that were held in Milan on 25th and 26th October 2022¹. This was a very important moment of encounter and discussion of our community, in which we concretely looked to the future according to an approach that we could associate with the Theory of change (TOC)², animated by a stimulus so synthesized: if this activity will be implemented, then this result will be realized.

However, I will talk about the *Carta di Milano* only at the end, after having tried to exercise a form of connective intelligence, useful also to relaunch the stimulus just proposed.

In 2021, 7.4% of the population aged 3 and over said they have attended a library at least once during the year. Women more than men (8.2% against 6.5%), with more marked gender differences among young people between 11 and 24 years. From a territorial point of view, citizens living in Northern Italy attend libraries more frequently (10.6%) than those in the Centre (6.2%) and in the South (3.8%). Obviously, the presence of libraries in the territories is a key discriminating factor. Thanks to Istat libraries census³, we know that as many as 2,869 Italian municipalities do not have a library and that most of them are located in the South and in the North West (40.3% and 37.2% respectively). 7.5 million people, or 12.6% of the Italian population, are in fact excluded from the opportunities that libraries offer, leading to an imbalance that is strongly concentrated in certain areas of the country. As many as 60.5% of citizens who do not have a library in their municipality live in the South⁴.

Compared to 2020, the share of library users decreased by about 5 percentage points (from 12.2% to 7.4%), which add to the 3 points of decline recorded between 2019 and 2020. In total, therefore, library users have substantially halved in comparison with the pre-pandemic period. As we know, the decrease between 2019 and 2021 mainly affected young and very young people between the ages of 6 and 24, those whom Istat has always considered to be the most frequent library users. Those who, through other data, we know they are deeply difficult (for example with respect

1 *Carta di Milano delle biblioteche*, <<https://milano.biblioteche.it/sites/milano/assets/HomePage/StatiGenerali/CartaDiMilanoDelleBiblioteche.pdf>>.

2 It is not easy to identify the exact moment of the birth of the term 'Theory of change', it certainly spread in the 1990s from the work of the Aspen Institute, in particular thanks to Carol Weiss' studies on Theory Based Evaluation.

3 For the Istat library census see <<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/255738>>. At the time of writing, the results of the third year are about to be published.

4 See Fabrizio Maria Arosio; Alessandra Federici, *Il profilo delle biblioteche attraverso i dati: piattaforme d'informazione e socialità*. In: *Le biblioteche nel sistema del benessere: uno sguardo nuovo*, a cura di Chiara Faggiolani. Milano: Editrice bibliografica, 2022, p. 51-74.

to subjective well-being, social relations etc.) and not by chance we begin to call them ‘interrupted generation’⁵.

However, these are the data published by Istat during the last year on library use in 2021 from the *Aspects of daily life* survey; this data determine the same name indicator within the *Report on equitable and sustainable well-being*⁶.

They are also taken up in the report entitled *Books production and reading in Italy report - year 2021*, published on 7th December 2022⁷.

In 2021, 40.8% of the population aged 6 and over had read at least one book for reasons not strictly educational or professional, an almost stable value compared to 2020 (41.4%). Always the very young people – says Istat – continue to be the most assiduous readers, although they have declined sharply over the last ten years. The reading habit has some rather important contextual determinants. Statistically, net of personal motivations⁸, the likelihood of a person taking up reading depends on the reading habits of parents, the presence of books at home, the presence of libraries and bookshops in the area. For example, with regard to the family, the Istat report shows that among children under 18, the share of readers is 73.5% if both mum and dad read, and drops to 34.4% if both parents are not readers⁹.

Obviously, reading behaviours, family habits in this respect, the presence of libraries in the area and their attendance are connected.

These connections are obvious, much less is unfortunately – often even in the eyes of library professionals – how much this triangulation affects something that goes far beyond the comfort zone in which we are accustomed to move: health, as defined by the WHO, i.e. a state of complete physical, mental and social ‘well-being’ and not merely the absence of disease¹⁰. Scientific literature and the WHO have long recognized that the health status is determined by a combination of organic, psychological and social factors, which are interconnected. The ‘social determinants of health’ are those factors that influence the health status of an individual, a community or a population: working conditions, access to services not only health, general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions, etc. That is, the conditions in which people are born, grow up and age.

5 I refer to my reflection: Chiara Faggiolani, *Ripensare biblioteche e servizi culturali per il benessere dei giovani*, «cheFare», 27 aprile 2022, <<https://www.che-fare.com/almanacco/cultura/biblioteche-servizi-culturali-benessere-giovani/>>.

6 The indicator measures the percentage of people aged 3 and over who went to the library at least once in the 12 months preceding the interview. For further information, I refer to Chiara Faggiolani, *Un indicatore dedicato alle biblioteche nel Rapporto Bes dell’ Istat: una grande conquista per il nostro settore*, «AIB studi», 61 (2021), n. 1, p. 7-10, DOI: 10.2426/aibstudi-13248.

7 Istituto nazionale di statistica, *Produzione e lettura di libri in Italia – anno 2021*, 7 dicembre 2022, <<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/278581>>.

8 I refer to the works of Beatrice Eleuteri, for example see *Ars lectorica: perché gli adolescenti leggono*. Roma: Associazione italiana biblioteche, 2021.

9 Istituto nazionale di statistica, *Produzione e lettura di libri in Italia – anno 2021* cit.

10 For more information see *Le biblioteche nel sistema del benessere* cit., in particular the chapter *Biblioteche e welfare culturale* by Annalisa Cicerchia, Catterina Seia, and Vittoria Azzarita, with the collaboration of Caterina Federico.

EDITORIALE

There are many documents that emphasize these connections, in addition to the *Istat Bes Report*, I am thinking of *Il Sole 24 Ore's Report on the quality of life*¹¹, the *Caritas Report*¹², and *Save the Children's Atlas of (at-risk) childhood*. The latest edition of the latter entitled *How are you? The health of girls, boys and adolescents*¹³ presents truly alarming data on this:

Ad oggi la speranza di vita in buona salute è in media di 61 anni, ma andando a vedere cosa significa la lotteria della nascita, si va dai bambini più “fortunati” che in provincia di Bolzano vedranno questa soglia alzarsi a 66,6 anni, a quelli che nascono in Calabria, per i quali questo traguardo si ferma a 55 anni. Oltre 11 anni di buona salute in media, a fare la differenza¹⁴.

The *Atlas* explores how and how much the social determinants of health affect these terrible inequalities. For what I said about connections – that is why I was talking about connective intelligence – it is clear that we are inside a ‘system’ and a system «non è solo una qualsiasi classica collezione di cose. Un sistema è un complesso di elementi interconnessi tra loro, organizzato con coerenza al fine di perseguire qualcosa. Se vi soffermate un attimo a esaminare questa definizione, capirete che un sistema deve essere composto da tre tipi di cose: elementi, interconnessioni e una funzione o obiettivo»¹⁵.

If we consider human development as the function/objective of the system, libraries clearly appear as nodes that contribute to the successful maintenance and achievement of the objective together with others (schools, health facilities, sports facilities, services, etc.) through a series of relationships.

If we think of libraries as nodes, i.e. as the cultural equipment we need in the cultural welfare paradigm just mentioned, we understand how important it is to adhere to the *Carta di Milano delle biblioteche* mentioned at the beginning.

It is an important document that appears like a manifesto and opens like this:

La biblioteca pubblica è una componente essenziale della società della conoscenza, perché rende effettivo il diritto di tutti i membri della comunità locale di fruire di un servizio pubblico di informazione e documentazione qualificato ed efficiente, condizione essenziale per il libero accesso al pensiero, alla cultura e all'informazione, per l'esercizio pieno e consapevole dei diritti individuali e per la libertà, la prosperità e il progresso della società.

11 The survey was born in 1990, with Belluno first city in Italy for quality of life and last Cagliari. 30 years have passed and the indicators have changed a lot as the lifestyle of Italians has changed radically. See <<https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/qualita-della-vita/#>>.

12 <<https://www.caritas.it/presentazione-del-rapporto-2022-su-poverta-ed-esclusione-sociale-in-italia/>>.

13 <<https://atlante.savethechildren.it/>>.

14 «Today, life expectancy in good health averages 61 years, but looking at the birth lottery, it ranges from the ‘luckiest’ children, who in the province of Bolzano will see this threshold rise to 66.6 years, to those born in Calabria, for whom this milestone stops at 55 years. Over 11 years of good health on average, making the difference».

15 «It is not just any classical collection of things. A system is a complex of interconnected elements, coherently organized in order to pursue something. If you take a moment to examine this definition, you will realize that a system must be composed of three types of things: elements, interconnections and a function or objective». – See Donella H. Meadows, *Pensare per sistemi: interpretare il presente, orientare il futuro verso uno sviluppo sostenibile*. Milano: Guerini next, 2019.

In piena sintonia con i principi espressi dal Manifesto IFLA/UNESCO della biblioteca pubblica 2022

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dichiara la fiducia nella biblioteca pubblica come forza viva per la democrazia, la cultura, l'educazione, l'informazione, e in quanto servizio che assolve, in vario grado e con differenti forme, alle seguenti missioni chiave [...] ¹⁶.

The subtitle of the document is: *For a fair, sustainable, inclusive library service*. The charter is ready to be signed and asks administrators who decide to join to declare their trust in the public library as a living force for democracy, culture, education, and information as a service that fulfils the following key missions: contribute to the development of an inclusive and fair community, improve the quality of life, inform all members of the community, consolidate and develop skills, promote cultural participation. Almost two months have passed since the General States of libraries and, at the time of writing, too few administrations have joined. Others are approaching but we need a massive commitment, a total adherence to the theory of change that is emerging: if this activity is implemented, then this will happen. I do not know if the administrators are clear about the connection between the urgencies of our contemporary times, the very serious inequalities of our country that I have tried to recall – made explicit by the *Save the Children Atlas*, the *Caritas Report*, etc. – and the fact that public libraries as nodes of territorial service networks for culture and leisure are, together with schools, universities, etc., an active agent in the social determinants of health from the perspective of cultural welfare. It is very important that library professionals are aware of this. Certainly the *Carta di Milano delle biblioteche* is an opportunity not to be missed to participate in the design of the future that awaits us.

Chiara Faggiolani

Ai fini della citazione, utilizzare esclusivamente il testo in lingua italiana, che presenta il DOI, la paginazione, l'abstract e gli altri dati ufficiali.

When citing, please always refer to the Italian translation only, complete with DOI, page numbers, abstract and other data.

[Chiara Faggiolani, *La Carta di Milano delle biblioteche per disegnare il cambiamento*. AIB studi, vol. 62 n. 3 (settembre/dicembre 2022), p. 483-486. DOI 10.2426/aibstudi-13804]

16 «The public library is an essential component of the knowledge society, because it makes effective the right of all members of the local community to enjoy a qualified and efficient public information and documentation service, an essential condition for free access to thought, culture and information, for the full and conscious exercise of individual rights and for the freedom, prosperity and progress of society. In full agreement with the principles expressed in the IFLA/UNESCO *Public Library Manifesto 2022*, the municipal administration declares its confidence in the public library as a living force for democracy, culture, education, information, and as a service that fulfils, to varying degrees and in different forms, the following key missions». – The Italian translation of the *Manifesto* was published in this journal. See International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Manifesto IFLA-UNESCO delle biblioteche pubbliche 2022*, «AIB studi», 62 (2022), n. 2, p. 431-434, DOI: 10.2426/aibstudi-10097.