

“Pandemia en la Escuela” una exposición para preservar la memoria de un momento difícil en la Historia de la Educación

“Pandemic at School” – an exhibition to preserve the memory of an awkward time in the History of Education

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Resumen

El Museo de la Escuela está situado en el barrio de Marrazes, cerca de Leiria, una antigua ciudad del centro de Portugal. Allí se pueden apreciar objetos y documentos escolares que retratan la Historia de la Educación en Portugal. Con el fin de preservar para el futuro la memoria de este periodo único y nunca antes vivido en la Educación que fue la pandemia del Covid-19, el Museo de la Escuela se ha esforzado en recoger información sobre cómo las escuelas, los profesores y los alumnos se adaptaron a las normas exigidas por la Direção-Geral da Saúde -el Servicio Nacional de Salud portugués- para detener la propagación del virus del SARS-COV2. Como resultado, se desarrolló la exposición fotográfica "Pandemia en la Escuela", que refleja todo el trabajo y esfuerzo en las escuelas para responder a esta nueva realidad en 26 municipios del centro de Portugal. También muestra escuelas vacías debido a los diversos confinamientos en los que la enseñanza a distancia tuvo que sustituir a la presencial. Es un retrato no sólo de una parte de nuestro país, sino de lo que se sintió en todo el mundo, que quedó en la memoria de todos y produjo tantos sentimientos diferentes. Este artículo se centra en estos duros recuerdos escolares, en el Museo de la Escuela como espacio donde se preserva el legado escolar y en esta exposición.

Palabras clave: Historia de la Educación, Memorias, Patrimonio Educativo

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Abstract

The School Museum is located in Marrazes neighbourhood, near Leiria, an ancient town in the centre of Portugal. There you can appreciate school objects and documents that portray the History of Education in Portugal. In order to preserve for the future, the memory of this unique period never experienced before in Education that was the Covid-19 pandemic, the School Museum has endeavoured to collect information on how schools, teachers and students adapted to the rules required by the Direção-Geral da Saúde – the Portuguese National Health Service – in order to stop the spread of the SARS-COV2 virus. As a result, the photography exhibition "Pandemic at School" was developed, which reflects all the work and effort in schools to respond to this new reality in 26 municipalities in the centre of Portugal. It also shows empty schools because of the several confinements in which distance learning had to replace face-to-face teaching. It is a portrait not only of a part of our country, but of what was felt all over the world, that remained in everyone's memory and produced so many different feelings. This article focuses on these hard school memories, on the School Museum as a space where school legacy is preserved and on this exhibition.

Key-words: History of Education, Memories, Educational Heritage

School: Concepts, Practices and Memories

School plays a fundamental role in the construction of society, not only because it is the place where education is acquired, but also because it is one of those responsible for the changes that occur in each of the pupils who attend it.

School is, as the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire says, "a place for work, for teaching and for learning"³, where people can continuously overcome themselves. It is also a "privileged space to think"⁴ where teachers and students share the same space, relate to each other and "exchange" knowledge.

Being school a privileged place for education, according to underlying policies and practices, can we consider it a right or also a duty? What memories are engraved in students during their time at school?

Memory, as a scientific subject, was introduced in the 19th century by Freud, in the field of psychology, mainly at the level of pathologies related to memory and memory loss. However, in the last decades, the History of Education international professional community has started to focus on the subject aiming at a new perspective on this area of the Educational Science. In order to

³ Carvalho, M. e Schram, S. (2007). "O Pensar Educação em Paulo Freire. Para uma pedagogia de mudança". O Professor PDE e os desafios da escola pública paranaense. Volume II. Panamá: Edição da secretaria da Educação Magazine. Page. 3. Available in: http://www.diaadiaeducacao.pr.gov.br/portals/cader-nospde/pdebusca/producoes_pde/2007_unioeste_ped_md_sandra_cristina_schram.pdf

⁴ *Ibidem*

detect the internal life in schools and educational institutions, an attempt was made, through memory, to collect sources able to record the aspects of school life and to make a reconstruction of the school past as faithful and complete as possible.

To open this "Pandora's box", with all that it may bring, from the most negative to the most positive, it is necessary to understand school inner core, that can be described as "a set of norms that define knowledge to be taught and conducts to be inculcated, and a set of practices that allow the transmission of this knowledge and the incorporation of these behaviours"⁵.

To comprehend these norms, we should know the professionals who used them, the context in which they were inserted, not only within the school community but also in the out-of-school space, as well as society's way of thinking and acting. It is also important to understand the aspects related to children's way of living, concerning, for example, playtime and the students' family relationships.

Such an approach allows us to outline a more reliable analysis of the school history and consequently to understand the school memories.

To achieve this goal, historians had to explore concepts, such as the concept of culture which is characterized by enclosing the whole set of practices, values and meanings belonging to the social groups. Due to its comprehensiveness, this concept is an ally in the study and collection of school memories, because it gives us a deep insight into the way of life of a people or nation, since group and individual experiences are different according to the culture of the group concerned. Bearing in mind that each person has an "individual background", culture reveals to us that the degree of complexity of each individual is different, which associated to school experiences may show us aspects never known before. It is in this sense that historians of education want to frame school memory. On the one hand, it is understood as an individual reflection of one's own school experience, without invoking the importance in its personal construction and, on the other hand, it is seen as an evocation and recreation of the individual, collective or group school, with a common past. Likewise, information about the educational practices developed in the school context, such as activities, school functioning, disciplinary measures applied by teachers or stories about incidents of school and family life are important.

In the early 20th century Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist of the Durkheim school, implemented the concept of "collective memory" as a collective phenomenon referring to religious groups, families and social classes.

⁵ Dominique, J. (2001). "A Cultura Escolar como objeto histórico". Revista Brasileira de História da Educação. N.º 1. Campinas – São Paulo: Editora Autores Associados. Page 10. Available in: http://moodle.fct.unl.pt/plugin-file.php/122509/mod_resource/content/0/Leituras/Dominique_Julia.pdf

Halbwachs⁶, quoted by Elsa Peralta, believed that the main purpose of memory, as sharing something from the past, was "to promote a bond of membership between the elements of a group on the basis of their collective past, giving it an illusion of immutability, while crystallising the predominant values and meanings of the group to which the memories refer"⁷. In the sociologist's perspective, collective memories were only related to a social group. Once he considered society as the only creator of memories, all memories were therefore related to it. Due to the focus on social memory, the scientific community has been awakened and started to problematize this approach, as memory is considered fundamental for the construction of the present. Several studies from various scientific branches have confirmed the use of memory by different political regimes, by religion, by the educational system and by museums themselves to focus on memories "strategically invented and manipulated by dominant sectors of society to serve their own needs in the present"⁸. This assumption raises a certain number of questions: about the content of social memory: its origin, the purpose of researching particular memories, and the purpose for which they are intended. An example of this "construction of memory" is to be found in museums, school books, historical documentaries and evidences of the past, which provide us with a version, which is the basis of theoretical approaches. The manipulation of social memory by dominant groups supports the theory that references to the past cannot be exclusively based on individual memories, thus raising questions about the truthfulness of facts and habits. Memory is, therefore, an important means of updating meanings that build culture itself. By establishing a relationship between past and present events, the past becomes always present, not being fixed or unfixable. In fact, the underlying forces of this assignment of meanings recreate cultural memories, keeping social identity though, which provides the past with the power to be changed: it is no longer possible to go back in time and "change what really happened; [but the past becomes] changeable because it adapts what really happened according to our present concerns"⁹. Through this assumption, memory manages to bring the past into the present by two means: action and recollection. In the first instance, through repetition and habit, with the reproduction of certain procedures; in the second, through the choice of moments, smells, tastes, in a selective and consistent way, with the intention of projecting the past into the present.

At present the way we relate with time and space determines the way we attribute significance to the historical, political, social, economic and cultural contexts as memory is concerned.

To strengthen this relationship with the past, objects became essential to prevent being forgotten, and museums have been the ideal places to display them. This need to keep the memory of the past alive has led to the emergence of numerous museums, both public and private, in Portugal in

⁶ Halbwachs, M. (1968). *La Mémoire Collective*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

⁷ Peralta, E. (2008). *A memória do Mar. Património, Tradição e (Re)imaginação Identitária na Contemporaneidade*. Lisboa: Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas. Page 56

⁸ *Ibidem*. Page 59

⁹ *Ibidem*. Page 69

recent years.¹⁰ This fast increase in number of museums justifies the growing need for "a direct and reliable link with the past, providing a version of history made natural for political purposes and free of any tensions"¹¹. An example of this are the numerous museums and museum spaces, developed by municipalities, to draw attention to the local cultural heritage, which is directly related to economic, social, political and cultural development. Therefore, the connection between objects and memories is recognised and that testifies the population's features and emphasises its unique identity.

In order to collect these distinctive memories of 'everyday practices' one can draw on individual, collective and social memories.

Individual memories, as a means of improving the heritage, can be studied individually or compared with other sources, providing an important social reconstruction of the past, through the use of one's personal living and personal experiences and also referring to the memory of social groups in which one was integrated, as the social being that he/she is, belonging to a specific society.

On the other hand, collective and social memories report the events shared by a group, that can be social, political, religious, familiar or communal, whose identity is part of that community, and for that reason, it is very pertinent for the re-creation of traditions and in safeguarding the material and immaterial heritage.

When the school environment is concerned, there are some conditions, since individual memories report, orally or in writing, the school experiences in the classroom activities, in the educational practices and in the discipline of the classroom, and, as a complement to the evidence, objects and images that confirm those experiences may be introduced.

Collective memories, on the other hand, reflect the school experiences lived by teachers and students, as part of a collective involvement, through the use of oral stories, autobiographical memories, classroom objects, school photographs, in short, all the supports that are able to evoke a memory from the past. These memories allow us to reflect on a representation of what school was like, which can be found in literature, cinema, documentaries and school museums, and they can arouse sensory experiences in the present, about moments lived at school in the past.

The Museu Escolar de Marrazes (School Museum in Marrazes) in Leiria (Portugal) is an example of a school museum focussed on individual and collective school memories.

¹⁰ In Portugal, according to data from the INE (National Statistics Institute), the number of museums in 2001 was 247, rising to 377 in 2011, which reflects an increase of over 100 institutions in 10 years. In 2020 there were 414, what shows a slowdown in the emergence of new museological institutions.

¹¹ Peralta, E. (2008). *A memória do Mar. Património, Tradição e (Re)imaginação Identitária na Contemporaneidade*. Lisboa: Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas. Page 97

The School Museum of Marrazes

The School Museum is a musicological place located in the district of Marrazes, in Leiria, an old town in the centre of Portugal. It started as a project work created in 1992/93 by a group of primary teachers working in Marrazes Primary School under the title "*The School through the times*".

The project involved not only the school community, but also the parents, the grandparents and the local population. Throughout the year, materials were gathered and, to explore this theme further, former pupils from Marrazes were interviewed to collect information about their school experiences, the school atmosphere and the materials that were used there.

The teachers also conducted some research on the materials and assembled many documents that reported on the early History of Education in Portugal, to better understand the context of the educational materials.

The high point of the project was reached at the end of the 1992/1993 school year when they could inaugurate an exhibition of the materials gathered in a 12m² school classroom made available for this purpose. The exhibition consisted of items found in the school itself, such as books, documents, teaching materials, furniture and objects offered by the local population, when they became aware of the project.



Fig. 1 – A detail of the exhibition

The project went on growing over the following years thanks to the work and enthusiasm of two of the teachers who had begun it at school and who were now retired and held this project in their hands. But in 1995, the Administration refused to go on allowing the use of that classroom they had lent to keep the school materials that were being gathered day after day. Then the Parish Council of Marrazes signed a protocol with the School Board where they committed themselves to the management, maintenance and preservation of the collection. They also assured they would find a place to keep the collection and to perpetuate the collective memory of school life and experiences.

The official inauguration of the School Museum took place on 16 May 1997, where it is still located now.

The School Museum was one of the first museums to join the Portuguese Museum Network (RPM) in 2001. It also became a member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), of the Portuguese Museology Association (APOM) and of the Federation of Friends of Museums of Portugal (FAMP).

Due to its innovative nature at a time when preserving materials connected to the Primary Education wasn't yet relevant, the interest of the media, both local and national, was growing and growing and that encouraged numerous other donations. At present the collection includes thousands of books, documents, school furniture and educational material.

The permanent exhibition of the School Museum consists of eight small rooms, which present materials from the 19th century, but it is mainly focused on the period of the dictatorship - Estado Novo¹². It is possible to visualise historical objects but also to understand the way of life of teachers and pupils at a time when corporal and psychological punishment were entrenched in the Portuguese culture. We emphasize the replica of the classroom of the Estado Novo (the dictatorship time), with the appropriate desks, the black stone blackboard, the photographs of the Chiefs of State, the slates, the nib pens and even the 'donkey ears' – a representation of long donkey ears that the worse pupils had to put on their heads and go to the school window in order to be seen by everyone who passed by) and the dreadful rulers with which the teacher stabbed the worse pupils' hands. The exhibition also includes a room dedicated to traditional toys, an area about the Portuguese Youth (Mocidade Portuguesa) and a reference to different teaching methods and Primary Schooling since the time of the monarchy.

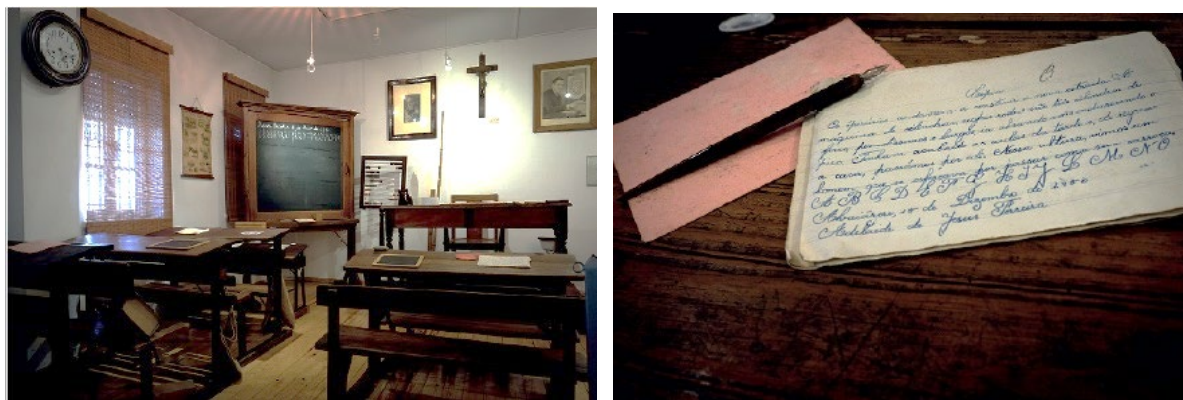


Fig. 2 – General view of the Classroom and some objects

¹² The national dictatorship began in Portugal in 1926, with the military takeover, but it was only in 1933, when a new Constitution was drawn up, that António de Oliveira Salazar had the whole system set up and the 'Estado Novo' emerged. The dictatorship continued until April 1974.

As the collection is so impressive and vast, the School Museum is sought after by Master's and PhD researchers, from both Portuguese and foreign universities, who find in this museum relevant material for their research.

Although the building where the museum is located is insufficient to lodge its collection and to receive its visitors in a more dignified way, the School Museum continues to develop an annual programme of activities offering arrangements for schools, institutions and for the public in general. This wouldn't be possible to achieve without the significant support of the Museum's guardianship, the União das Freguesias de Marrazes e Barosa (the Parish Council) and the supporting partnerships with the Town Hall of Leiria and other important cultural institutions.

These partnerships have allowed throughout its 25 years of existence a continuous activity, divulgation and development of the School Museum, making it a national and international reference, regarding the History of Education in Portugal.

The exhibition «Pandemic at School»

It is important to encourage not only school communities but also public and private entities to recover and preserve school heritage, through pedagogical or other type of projects that bring together the collection of schools and help trace a history experienced by a generation, at a certain time and space.

The main purpose of the existence of the School Museum of Marrazes is not only to collect, gather and preserve materials referring to the School of the past, but also to record the marks of the present, by documenting them in order to preserve the memory for later display and study.

Bearing this in mind, as we were living the Covid-19 pandemic, we asked the neighbouring schools to answer a questionnaire on the experiences of the different people involved: headmasters, teachers, caretakers, students and parents. However, the feedback was not as significant as we had hoped. Schools were being flooded with many instructions from the Government, from the Ministry of Education and the from the National Health Service, so they didn't have enough time to answer questionnaires and to perform other initiatives. However, we didn't give up gathering information on all the changes in teaching that we believe that shall be studied in the future. Not only work methodologies had to be changed or adapted, but also personal and close relationships were affected, by constantly fearing to become ill and/or spreading the disease. The Corona Virus forced families, social groups and countries to close in on themselves almost overnight, completely affecting one of the pillars of education, human interaction, which allows a more comprehensive learning process.

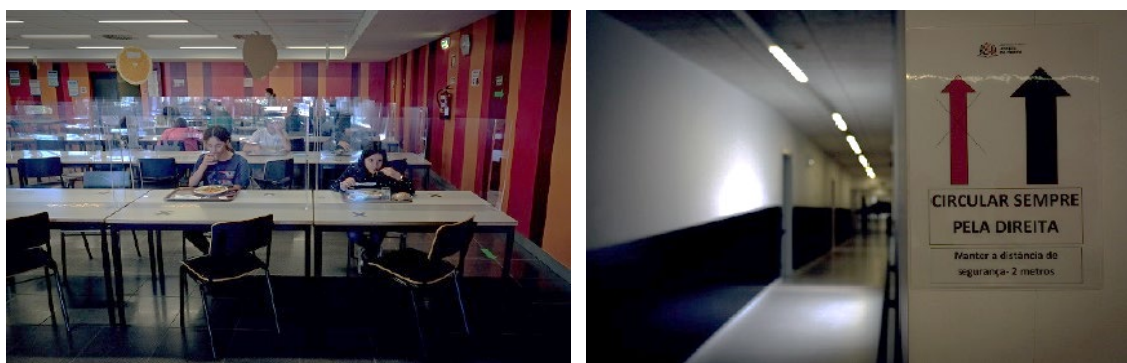
In order to document the current moment and with the (re)opening of the ProMuseus Programme of the Portuguese Network of Museums, which allows the funding for relevant projects to Portuguese museological activity to the museums that integrate that organisation, we applied for a project consisting of the photographic record of the changes imposed on schools regarding rules, procedures, cleanness and sign-posting during the pandemic caused by Covid-19.

We asked the collaboration of the photojournalist Nuno André Ferreira, awarded by the World Press Photo in 2021, and a huge number of photographs were taken in the 26 municipalities belonging to the Rede Cultura 2027, a network of candidate cities for the European Capital of Culture, in the central part of Portugal. In each of the 26 municipalities, one school was selected covering children from nursery school age to higher education students. The photographs reflect the practices adopted in the different schools regarding cleanliness, disinfecting students' hands, disinfecting tables and chairs, using face masks and handling food in the school canteens.

The introduction of signs at the school entrances, in the corridors and in the classrooms with circulation rules were also deep changes in the daily school life that marked the behaviour and the relationship among students, among teacher and among caretakers. The interpersonal relationships were deeply affected as a result of the recommended social distancing. Contacts and communication were the least possible, not giving place to friendliness and the usual fun.

But one of the biggest changes was felt in the way of teaching and in the relationship between students and teachers. During the periods when there were compulsory confinements and schools were empty of classes, students and life, distance learning was the tool found to try to give a kind of regularity to the teaching/learning process. A heroic task, not always successful due to lack of material and technological resources which Telescola's¹³ broadcasts helped to reduce.

The photographs record these moments and aspects of daily life in schools, but the memories that awakened from a period that devastated the world and "turned it upside down", go beyond the images taken.



¹³ Broadcasting of the "Study at home" programme on Portuguese television began on 20 April 2020.

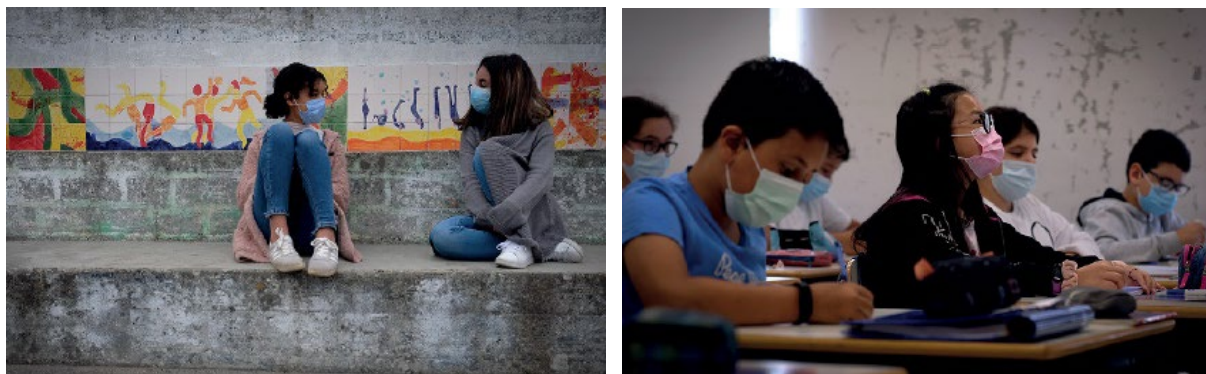


Fig. 3 – Images of some photographs of the exhibition «Pandemic at School»

This photographic register has become an itinerant exhibition consisting of 16 panels/modules, 2.00 meters highx1.20m wide, front and back, that correspond to the graphic subjects collected in the 26 municipalities, and three more panels about the School Museum and the exhibition itself.

This was a way of publicising our Museum, but also to contextualise the public awareness of the purpose of this photographic record so important for the School Museum collection.

Designed by the architect Humberto Dias, the exhibition was conceived in a way that each module can be installed in several ways, defining variable geometries according to the requests and space conditions. The modules present characteristics of lightness to facilitate transportation and mechanical resistance to bear the installation and dismantling in the different locations planned.



Fig. 4 - Drawing of the exhibition device

It is intended that the exhibition will continue to move not only through the 26 municipalities where the photographs were taken, but also in other cities in Portugal, and who knows, maybe even in Europe, as it raises relevant and current questions about two completely uncharacteristic school years.

The exhibition is now on tour, being exhibited in public squares but also in school buildings.

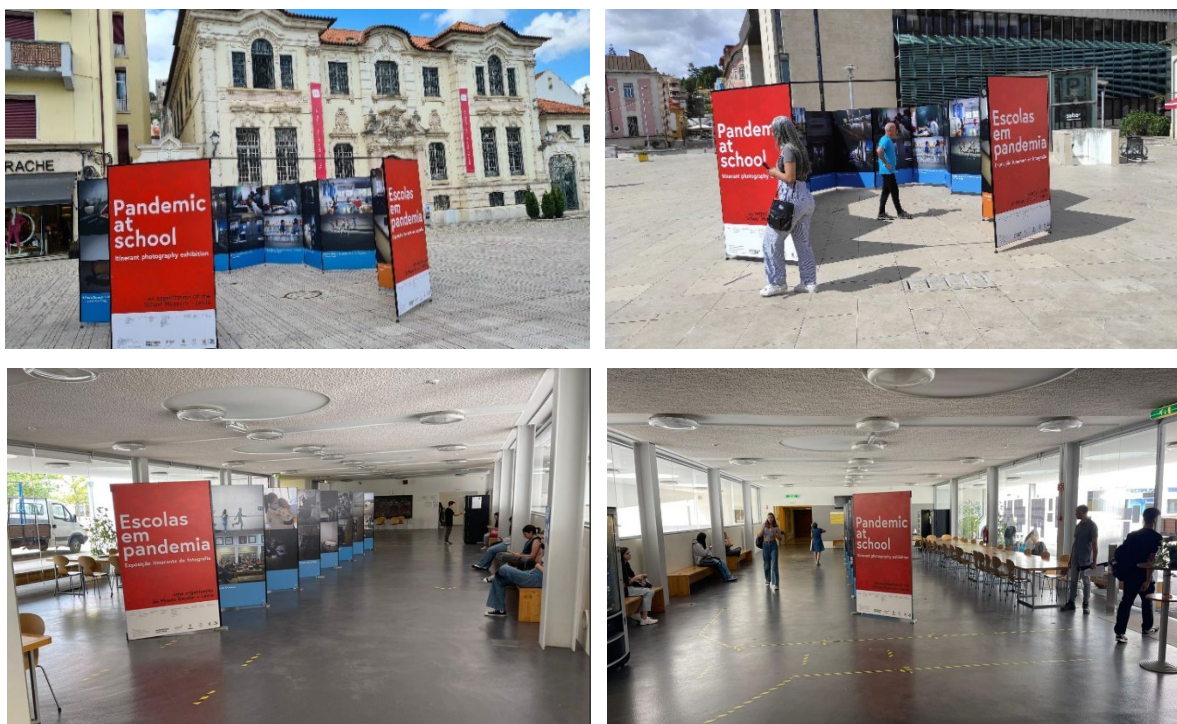


Fig. 5 - Examples of exhibition locations

We believe that more than just showing photographs, this exhibition awakens unique memories, resulting from a singular moment, which will certainly have an impact on the future.

Conclusion

As we are more and more concerned about the safeguard of school heritage, it is necessary to find ways to preserve our collection. As a rule, it is in the school archives that we can find information about the administration, functioning and history of educational institutions, with the description of the cultural and pedagogical activities developed by the school community. However, there are other items that should be taken into account, such as school memories, which reflect the history of education in itself, items that can be found in museums, as is the case of the photographic survey of the exhibition "Pandemic at School" organised by the School Museum.

The whole process, from taking the photographs in schools' environment to watching the reactions of the different school participants when they could see the final result of the exhibition reveals significant considerations on an awkward period in education, in which collective memory is a strong asset for the construction of the History of Education.

Although each student, teacher or caretaker has their own individual thoughts bearing in mind their individual experiences, we focus on the collective school experiences narrated in writing or reported orally through the description of items and images, as they are not so person-centred information, but can reconstruct the school environment experienced in a certain period by a certain social group.

It is through collective memory that we want to reconstruct, investigate and explore, in the future, the consequences of the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 Pandemic, which forced students and teachers to isolate themselves and maintain a distance, never experienced before, which had a specific effect on the learning process, and which will have a strong impact on the academic life of millions of students, not only in Portugal but all over the world.

This is the purpose of the School of Marrazes Museum, in Leiria (Portugal). We aim at being a Museum that presents several periods of the History of Education in Portugal. However, we don't want to be merely limited to the history of the past, we also want to show what teaching is, or appears to be in the present.

With the financial support of the Portuguese Network of Museums, through its "ProMuseum" programme, which allows museums to develop more ambitious projects, and with the relevant contributions of the School Museum's guardians, the Parish Council of Marrazes, and of Leiria's Town Hall as well, it was possible to design a project in order to produce a photographic survey on the changes in schools, concerning cleanliness, signposting and personal relationships that are so important in the educational process.

The photographs were taken by Nuno André Ferreira, a well-known professional photographer and covered different school of the 26 municipalities in the central part of Portugal, one school from each of them, representing different levels of education from nursery schools to higher education.

This has resulted into an itinerant photography exhibition, consisting of 16 two-sided panels, which are on tour in different locations: squares, schools and museums, awakening different reactions in all those who admire it, as it raises questions not only on school life, but also on life in society, not being indifferent to anyone who has lived and felt the constraints of the Pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

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