

## RESEARCH ON OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS OF PEER EDUCATION IN TUSCANY

### Premise

This research was carried out by IL VIVAIO DEL MALCANTONE, a cultural association active in the Florence area in the field of performing arts and live performance, with particular attention to the contemporary issues.

We point out, therefore, that our reflection and response analysis is enriched by our knowledge of and collaboration with some of the interviewed subjects, and also by our awareness of the socio-political context of culture in Italy and specifically in Florence.

To develop our research we have compiled a list of subjects we've known directly or indirectly, chosen for their importance and their entrenchment in the area they work in.

We proposed them a written questionnaire, consisting of a general section with questions aimed at specifying the type of subject (the working environment, their methods,..) and of a specific part on peer education, aimed at determining their knowledge and possible use of this method.

In some cases we added to the questionnaire specific interviews to enhance some issues, based on the relevance of some of the answers obtained.

We submitted the questionnaire to about 20 subjects, working in the cultural-artistic and social fields, and we received a response from about half of them. We therefore we want to highlight that this is a qualitative and non-quantitative research, since the sample examined is not numerically significant.

### The choice of the subjects taken in consideration for the research

For our research we chose a sample of realities working both in cultural and educational area, the context where the employment of peer educators is more common.

We screened the realities based mainly in Florence and surroundings, plus we also contacted some subjects working in the nearby area (still in Tuscany) that in our opinion were important for their work and connection with their territory.

We chose realities characterized by a longtime experience in artistic research and educational projects, whose projects have a relevance in their specific context and well connected with their territory.

We knew personally many of the realities we interviewed (due to collaboration or previous contact): this allowed us to upgrade the merely quantitative data with our experience and observations, and lent us to pinpoint very valuable subjects, with very high standard, both in artistic and educational area.

Our choice of the subjects to submit our questionnaire was based on some simple parameters, shared by almost all the realities.

Their common characteristic was their capability to range between different artistic form, experiencing different means and making an effort to use them as a tool for emancipation and community activism.

Also, almost all the realities we interviewed work in a tight relationship with the territory and the area they are in, realizing projects connected to the social context they are involved in.

Another common characteristic was their tendency to experience new training and educational processes and their aim to work in network with other subjects.

We alternated cultural independent centers with institutional realities, being aware that they both could be the right partners for an educational and artistic project, in order to develop high-level complex educational processes.

We confronted ourselves also with realities working on social care, outreach education and other social-educational areas, for their being focused on organized pedagogical projects.

In these cases we also researched subjects we knew, looking for those who use peer coaching and informal education as common tools.

## **List of the realities we contacted**

Shown below the complete list of all the subjects we contacted and the list of all those who answered to our questionnaire/interview, and a brief description of each subject.

We submitted the questionnaire by e-mail, followed by telephone contact to explain our goal.

### Institutional area:

Sesto Idee  
Scandicci Cultura  
CRED Scandicci

### Cultural area:

Laboratorio Nove  
Venti Lucenti  
Teatro Studio

Teatro Everest  
Fosca  
Scuola Cinema Immagina  
Fua  
CCCStrozina  
Museo Marino Marini  
La Tenuta dello Scompiglio  
Il Funaro  
Sala Gialla  
L'Officina Multimediale Galileo  
Il Vivaio del Malcantone  
Spazio C.u.r.e  
Il Cantiere  
Ex fila  
Centro Giovani L'isola  
Sonoria  
L'Isola  
Social area:  
CAT  
CO&SO  
Social Net Skill

**Realities that answered to the questionnaire we sent:**

Scandicci Cultura  
Laboratorio nove  
Murmuris | Teatro  
Fosca  
Fua  
Museo Marino Marini  
La Tenuta dello Scompiglio  
Il Funaro  
Il Vivaio del Malcantone  
Social Net Skill  
Sala Gialla  
L'Officina Multimediale Galileo  
CAT  
Cooperativa Spazi Padovani

## **Institutional Area**

### **Sesto Idee**

Institution for educational, cultural and sport services, depending on Sesto Fiorentino municipality (Firenze). [www.sestoidee.it](http://www.sestoidee.it)

### **Scandicci cultura**

Institution depending on Scandicci municipality, managing the local cultural heritage (Abbazia di Badia a Settimo, Il Castello dell'Acciaiuolo, Il Mulinaccio, La villa di Castel Pulci, Il Parco di Poggio Valicaia, Itinerari del Ghirlandaio, Villa Mirenda) and cultural services, such as the local theatre, the library, a music school, a youth center. [www.scandiccicultura.eu](http://www.scandiccicultura.eu)

**C.R.E.D. Scandicci** Centro Risorse Educative e Didattiche del Comune di Scandicci  
It's the actual evolution of the office funded in 1986 to support and help educational and teaching innovation, and supporting public school. [www.comune.scandicci.fi.it/cred/](http://www.comune.scandicci.fi.it/cred/)

## **Artistic and Cultural Area**

### **Laboratorio Nove (Sesto Fiorentino)**

Production centre for stage practices (acting, directing, set design), has been operating in Sesto Fiorentino and Florence for decades, working on different levels to promote live shows and cultural production. [www.laboratorionove.it](http://www.laboratorionove.it)

### **Venti Lucenti**

Cultural association founded in 1992, works in cultural training and production.  
Very active in social theatre, works in many public schools in Florence, and their kids theatre productions were performed all over Italy. [www.ventilucenti.it](http://www.ventilucenti.it)

### **Teatro Studio di Scandicci-Compagnia Krypton**

Krypton is a theatre company founded in the 80's, whose poetic and principal focus has always been to explore new technology and to employ them to scene's arts.  
They have made their home at Teatro Studio, one of the most important theatres in the Florence area for contemporary theatre; there, since 15 years, they founded a permanent centre dedicated to introducing digital technology in the creative dimension, from performing arts to their contamination with architecture, visual art, poetry, music. [www.compagniakrypton.it](http://www.compagniakrypton.it)

### **Murmuris | Teatro**

Murmuris is a young theatre company, involved both in producing and touring with their shows, and also in looking after the programme of Teatro Everest first, while now they are part of FLOW, project of theatrical residences at Teatro Cantiere Florida, a project sponsored by the Tuscany Region for 2013-2015, where they'll look after the program of part of theatrical season. [www.murmuris.it](http://www.murmuris.it)

### **Fosca**

Versatile cultural reality, it stands out for its steady networking and developing projects that range from theatre to education, visual art, outreach projects. Operating since the early 2000's, its projects are characterized by a strong pedagogical interest and by the constant research on mixing together different artistic languages. [www.fosca.eu](http://www.fosca.eu)

### **Scuola di Cinema Immagina**

The school was founded in 1994 by a group of actors, directors and playwrights, and thanks to an independent author, Giuseppe Ferlito. Its aim is to teach the cinema's languages and the ways to represent reality, respecting the individual thoughts, through workshops and research that tend to connect all the disciplines. [www.cinemaimmagine.it](http://www.cinemaimmagine.it)

### **Fua-Florence University of the Arts**

FUA is a multidisciplinary institution that seeks to offer dynamic possibilities of study through a rich selection of academic institutions and departments. It was founded to promote and renew creative disciplines in a city renowned for its history-changing innovations, offering academic programs in order to show the principles of the past and how they are present in today's context. FUA' aim is to transform learning, knowledge and cultural experiences into instruments that shape tomorrow's future. Also it contributes to the local culture with the findings, research, and creations developed over the course of study. [www.fua.it](http://www.fua.it)

### **CCC Strozziina**

The Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozziina (Contemporary Culture Centre) was born in 2007, part of Palazzo Strozzi Foundation, with the intent to provide Florence with an international center to host contemporary art exhibitions following an interdisciplinary concept, up-to-date to the most recent tendency in contemporary art. [www.strozzina.org](http://www.strozzina.org)

### **Museo Marino Marini**

The museum is dedicated to the work of the Italian sculptor Marino Marini. In addition to preserve his work, through the permanent collection, the Museum also hosts temporary exhibitions of contemporary artists, educational activities, events, concerts, working in network with other similar realities in the city area. [www.museomarinomarini.it](http://www.museomarinomarini.it)

### **Il Funaro**

Funaro is a center for educational courses and cultural promotion, whose focus is to develop educational projects that combine an important and visible social repercussion and high artistic value. [www.ilfunaro.org](http://www.ilfunaro.org)

### **IL VIVAIO DEL MALCANTONE\_ centro di ricerca e pratica culturale**

It is a cultural association, founded with the aim to research and diffuse contemporary art, basically working on three macro areas, seen as tool to improve everyone's quality of life: art, self-care and ecology. [www.ilvivaiodelmalcantone.com](http://www.ilvivaiodelmalcantone.com)

## Youth centers supported by the Florence Municipality

### **L'Officina Multimediale Galileo**

Officina Multimediale Galileo is a youth center in the area of the Second District. It's a multipurpose place, especially for students between 15 and 30 years of age. It offers information on European job possibilities, volunteer programs, internships, free council for start-up association, spaces to realize cultural events. <http://galileo2.webs.com/>

### **Sala Gialla**

Sala Gialla is a youth center in the area of San Jacopino (First District). The place is dedicated to daycare and social activities for youngsters between 11 and 29. They can do recreational and artistic activities, together with qualified operators. [http://portalegiovani.comune.fi.it/poggio/jsp/info\\_publish/centrigiovani\\_dettaglio.jsp?ID\\_REC=2636](http://portalegiovani.comune.fi.it/poggio/jsp/info_publish/centrigiovani_dettaglio.jsp?ID_REC=2636)

### **Exfila connessioni metropolitane**

Exfila is supported by Florence Municipality, ARCI, Tuscany Region and the bank Monte dei Paschi di Siena. It is dedicated to arts, civil rights, community activism, and hosts a library, kid's game room, a radio, and is oriented to young people. [www.exfila.it](http://www.exfila.it)

### **Lo Spazio Giovani C.u.r.e**

Spazio Giovani C.u.r.e. is a youth center that hosts different activities, all focused on integration and socialization. It also hosts a music center for young emerging bands, with a recording studio, and the possibilities to attend music workshop. [http://portalegiovani.comune.fi.it/poggio/jsp/info\\_publish/centrigiovani\\_dettaglio.jsp?ID\\_REC=526](http://portalegiovani.comune.fi.it/poggio/jsp/info_publish/centrigiovani_dettaglio.jsp?ID_REC=526)

### **Il Cantiere**

Kantiere is a youth center that hosts and organizes different activities and courses, dedicated to people of all ages. [www.kantierefirenze.it](http://www.kantierefirenze.it)

### **Sonoria**

Sonoria is a youth centre that promotes young socialization in the Fourth District, focused on music. It has three rehearsal rooms equipped with instruments, a recording studio and a listening room. <http://www.sonoriaq4.it/>

### **Centro Giovani L'Isola**

Youth center L'Isola offers to youngster a meeting point, and the possibility to realize specific activities with the help of qualified operators. Also, it offers an orientation job service and workshop dedicated to immigrant kids and teenagers. [http://portalegiovani.comune.fi.it/poggio/jsp/info\\_publish/centrigiovani\\_dettaglio.jsp?ID\\_REC=515](http://portalegiovani.comune.fi.it/poggio/jsp/info_publish/centrigiovani_dettaglio.jsp?ID_REC=515)

## **Social and Educational Area**

### **Cat cooperativa sociale**

Cooperative company founded in 1985, it operates in non-profit sector, especially in social care, prevention and opposition of social marginalization, in constant networking with the public institution. [www.coopcat.it](http://www.coopcat.it)

### **Social Net Skill**

It is a project supported by the Tuscany Region that involves different regions in Italy. It promotes the well-being at school, night life and on social network. Its aim is to foster exchange and listening dynamics between peers, using social networks. It already involves 97 peer (among youngsters) and 33 operators.

[http://www.ccmnetwork.it/documenti\\_Ccm/programmi\\_e\\_progetti/2011/sostegnoPnp&GS/prev-univ/stili%20ed%20ambienti%20di%20vita/27-social-net-skills\\_Toscana.pdf](http://www.ccmnetwork.it/documenti_Ccm/programmi_e_progetti/2011/sostegnoPnp&GS/prev-univ/stili%20ed%20ambienti%20di%20vita/27-social-net-skills_Toscana.pdf)

### **CO&SO consorzio per la cooperazione e la solidarietà**

It is a consortium gathering almost 40 different cooperative companies working in the non-profit sector, such as social care and social integration. [www.coeso.org](http://www.coeso.org)

## **Subjects interviewed**

Along with the questionnaire we submitted to all enlisted realities, we also conducted some interviews with qualified operators, with long-term experience in their professional field, that helped us to clear some doubts and themes highlighted by the analysis of the answers.

### **Andrea Cagioni**

Person in charge for public relations at CAT Firenze, sociologist and educator since 2000, involved in outreach and *peer to peer* projects, focused on reduce youngster's disadvantage.

### **Samantha Buosi**

Educator in Cooperativa Spazi Padovani, a social cooperative company in Padua, manager for youth center "Matita Matta" in Padua, involved in social care and intercultural integration projects and community development in Padua's area.

### **Francesca Giaconi**

Person in charge for public relations and founder of cultural center Il Funaro (see above).

### **Tenuta dello Scompiglio**

It is a multidisciplinary cultural center that works in cultural research and education.

They produce theatre show and promotes artistic residence, workshop, visual art events, kids theatre shows.

## General picture of the realities taken into consideration

Almost all the subjects examined are cultural realities, associations and public institutions operating mainly in the cultural field, and having a strong link with the territory in which they act.

Among them, the majority depends mainly on public financing and self-financing (poor external support, tendency to self-employment). Less relevant in supplying funds are bank foundations, private donors and sponsors.

Almost all the organizations were formed starting from the available human resources and creative staff, brought together by a common idea and cultural urgencies. Usually the public administration, which is fundamental for the financial support of the structure, is not involved neither in design nor in the start-up: associations are formed on the basis of their own projects and their instances, and only later they seek a connection with the public administration.

Subjects starting not only from human resources are those supported by private funds. They consider the site as relevant as the team and human resources in the process of project designing and they also are the only ones who evaluate the market and the business value of their project.

But in general, according to all the interviewed subjects, public funding still remains the main supporter for culture in Italy.

Networking is assigned high value by all subjects, who all state that they use it: it is clear, however that networking is employed merely on single projects and in an episodic manner, without a real durable exchange of skills and methods (which for peer education is severely limiting).

All subjects recognize art to be an important vehicle for social values and useful to the fight against intolerance and stereotypes, but no-one can tell precisely the projects in which this practice takes place.

It's interesting to notice that the subjects working specifically in the social field and using peer education, don't really recognize art as a vehicle for training and social promotion. And if they used it, they did it in a marginal and experimental way.

Half of the subjects declare to use tools for tracing user satisfaction (basically questionnaires), but it isn't clear what strategies are derived from it, also for the needs analysis.

It seems to be not very clear what needs analysis really is, as it shown by the further questions about the timing and procedure intervention. In our opinion a real and effective needs analysis is not possible without constant supervision in short-and long-term combined with an analysis of consequences.

## **The subjects' position towards the concept of peer education**

In our research we assumed to consider a peer education project as one based on a specific design, carried out in a planned, conscious and communicable way.

We realized that many of the interviewed don't have clear neither what peer education is nor which are the possible fields of employing it. They thus fail to put in place procedures to achieve results, by working on a middle-long term.

5 out of 10 say they actually use peer education (Scandicci Cultura, Fosca, Social Net Skills, Fua, Museo Marino Marini). In fact, only one subject, operating in the social field, gives the example of a true peer education project, confirmed by precise answers to subsequent questions on the type of project, its timing of design and realization, the professional background of the educators and their wage system.

Despite that many of the subjects we examined claimed to use p.e. as a working method, actually they refer to naturally born and self-organized peer education experiences, speaking of students' groups that start self-training, or find a role in the structure they have been studying in. These practices, while virtuous, are neither assisted nor monitored, nor programmed, if not in an instinctive way. We then realized then that in Italy and in Tuscany, the geographic area our research is based on, peer education is not used in a well-framed way.

Despite this, almost all subjects are interested in developing peer education in educational activities, promotion of social values and of young artists. They evaluate the projects one by one, basing their evaluation mainly on the quality of the proposal and the face-to-face impression given by individual interviews. While declaring to know other subjects practicing p.e., in fact no one has been able to suggest specific names.

## **Conclusions**

From our investigation we conclude that peer education is a method rarely used in Tuscany, especially in the cultural field.

In our view, the reasons for this gap refer to several issues:

- both public and private institutions have little knowledge of the method
- cultural subjects also have little knowledge of p.e.
- difficulties in applying this method due to ongoing:
  - problems such as the difficulty of medium and long term projecting, due to the uncertainty and irregularity of funding, both in the cultural and social fields, or the lack of a sustainable, clear and shared cultural planning

- difficulties in applying this method also because knowledge transmission in the cultural field still seemed to be based on a vertical scheme, addressing recognized teachers and trainers.

To use an innovative and dynamic method such as p.e., a reflection on teaching and training schemes and models must take place. In fact, beyond the sample examined, in the Italian educational field we notice that the only subjects using p.e., maybe not well aware in theory but practically using it, are the Catholic associations (boy scouts) and the subjects working on social distress (outreach education, harm reduction...) within the scope of direct intervention on the social problems (risk reduction, outreach in communities at risk...).

## Strategies

We are going to make some considerations on peer education and its possible employment in Italy, that we think could represent an invitation for educational agencies to take in consideration this new training method.

We think it is important to state what p.e. is: not only informal communication, but a structured procedure with clear goals, embraceable methods, still remaining flexible and adaptable to the upcoming issues.

We need to be aware that the cultural and political context the p.e. should be practiced in, lacks of medium-long term planning, both by public institutions (usually the commissioning body and financial supporters of the projects) and by the single associations.

Furthermore, often the administrative and economic process that leads to obtain funds is not clear, due to a not homogeneous communication by the institutions, and to a lack of information exchange among the associations.

A context where often individual projects or singular events on large-scale are chosen to the detriment of longer project, which do not have an immediate result.

We think that it is necessary to help to re-organize the planning and method about cultural design.

To do this, it is necessary to work planning on medium and long term, on 2 levels:

- institutions: for achieving a structured and systematic distribution of funds, in order to ensure the continuity of projects
- associations and other subjects: for organizing the work and focus on the context's needs.

The peer coach in this perspective may in fact represents a useful resource to bring on different actions:

- create a new educational model based on networking and fostering the flow of content
- point out new needs and issues

- allow informal access to information, with the aim of building a network
- enhance and spread best practices borrowed from self-organized and independent experiences

This should lead to a real development of the social context.

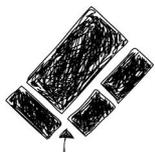
It can be expected that the intervention of the peer coach can generate actions aimed at integrating culture within people's existence, both as a form of self-care and of awareness of social relationships.

These actions require to be steady and continuous, within a long term implementation, to foster not only cultural and social but also personal growth of all the people involved, to let them be more and more active part of a shared cultural project.

The task of the peer coach should be to propose initiatives and projects regarding this historical moment's critical issues, working as operators able to join informal and widespread distribution of cultural and artistic practices.

It is essential that the peer coach interacts with the subjects working in the social, cultural and educational fields within the same territory, proposing innovative ways and training models, and a new concept of cultural planning and fruition, also though the use of social networks and new technology.

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