



DGB BILDUNGSWERK HESSEN E.V.
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Interview with Marta Lusuardi October 2019

The period of the Resistance I was little, I was thirteen so my contribution is a fairly limited contribution because given my age, then I went to school from Correggio I came to school given the times by bicycle and it's 18 km, we went back and forth both in the morning and in the afternoon.

Every little signal from an airplane stopped us, we threw ourselves into the ditches because we didn't know what could happen to us.

So even when Mussolini came to power in 1922 I was still a little girl, I was five years old so all the things that I learned I learned from within my family, above all from my father who was persecuted a lot by fascism: he took many beatings, took castor oil, got some jail time, etc. so these are my first sources of anti-fascist experience that I learned within my family.

So the first troubles, the first killings begin with the fascist events: we have a famous Italian martyr, Matteotti, who after being killed by the fascists we secretly kept a small photo with each family, just to remind us, to stimulate us that the fascism led to these consequences.

So when I go to my first school, elementary school, I was six years old, I wasn't older, I entered a school that was already entirely organized from a fascist point of view: we little girls were Little Italian girls, with a special uniform, then we became at a certain age young Italian women; the boys instead were the Sons of the wolf and then became Balilla, all fascist names.

But they were all already part of this fascist order and the programs were from fascist schools, so we had few resources on our own.

Saturday was a very important day for us who went to elementary school because while the boys devoted themselves to marches, devoted themselves to sports, devoted themselves to these activities, we girls, we little girls, on the other hand, had to learn how to cook, we had to learn knitting, making sweaters for the children of fascist families and so the business continued. A great deal of importance was attached to the gymnastic essays, which became manifestations of power, of precision but always in a fascist tone.

With these most trusted friends we met at their homes because they had a large trade in wines, trucks that came and went and we did some business. I remember that we dedicated a few days to preparing small medicinal interventions, that is, to give them to the partisans when they went out: alcohol, aspirin, all those things there, and it took us a lot of time.

Our activity was also that: for example, it was to call a doctor who was very trustworthy to treat the wounded, nurses to treat the wounded, but always everything clandestinely because I remember that a friend of ours called Ada Schiatti who lived in Correggio she was arrested one day and then they all told us "you girls who are around Schiatti must leave immediately, go to fugitive houses, to houses that can protect you because if they have seen you with this lady they can even stop you, ask, etc., etc., so we cannot



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know the consequences, so go “.

Here on this trip that we made outside our country we were also arrested: for example we were in a small house on the run, one very early morning an armored car arrived (do you say armored car?) full of Germans who came to pick us up from bed and they took them down to a large threshing floor and there they all stopped at gunpoint.

And we were kept like this while they ransacked the house, they searched and who knows what they were looking for, we were kept there until towards evening, but fortunately towards evening they freed us and we girls went back to our usual work. After a month or so we returned to Correggio but Signora Schiatti had already left the Servite prison in Reggio tortured and yet this was the reality of the facts.

Yes, I must first state one thing: in that period the figure of the woman counted for nothing, neither at work, nor from a social and political point of view.

It didn't count for anything: the woman had to take care exclusively of the house, of the children, bring many children into the world and for this she also received decorations, medals, and even economic subsidies especially if they were males because the males then had to reproduce their forces for the fascist war.

Just think that we didn't have any rights: we didn't even know what the right to vote was, we didn't even know what it was, the right to culture, to social equality, so during our meetings, which were short but dense, we talked about these activities that we wanted to conquer after the Liberation; think that instead there was a magazine of the city of Bologna of this time that praised dairy women and procreative women because they were so fascist let's say so, so good that by keeping only to the family they had allowed themselves to produce a lot of milk, even two kg and a half of milk a day, and these were valued as mothers of the moment, as mothers who could very well look after a queue of children who would later become fascists.

So women, even from the point of view of work, were very different: in addition to not having the right to vote, they were also very different as workers, for example they did not have positions of responsibility. The first woman to graduate in Italy was in 1800 and something who became a doctor but after so many sacrifices and so many controversies: she had to be a wife and mother of children here, and this was to be the promoter of the new lineage of young people.

In fact, while young people were fired because they certainly could not have great prospects, women could only be typists, librarians, they could make files, keep accounts, process data but they could not have great tasks, they were women, they had to be queens of home.

In the meantime, I wanted equality: think that until a few years ago women and men could not go to school, there was no compulsory schooling, so this too was a big obstacle to being able to think about getting a position, a new job, so it was really necessary to reflect, think...

Sometimes we even had different points of view, but we all agreed on fundamental rights: the right to vote, because we never went to vote; the right to school, the right to study, the right to equality even between the sexes because the man was the man, the woman was inferior.

So all these were claims that we had inside and that we expressed in our particular encounters as girls and as women.

At that time it was still very dangerous to talk about a new pedagogy even though we were already attending the teaching institute here in Reggio.

But they were problems still far from how we set ourselves: it was the period of food rationing, sugar, bread, flour could not be found; it was the period in which you entered a shop and there were huge signs “In this



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shop it is forbidden to talk about politics and high strategy” so the conditions were really tight, restricted as we say.

Fascism had certainly not favored us, it had just inculcated this, and all the things we said were almost secret things, almost kept inside us with the hope of realizing them later, later.

But they were all projects that we had inside, with the hope of being able to implement them once the peace was concluded.

I would like to add this to the period of peace: when we were in these conditions in a hamlet here in Reggio we understood that the women went to work in the fields, they worked canvas and cotton in the stables, so they were already thinking of the children too, where to put these children and they have bought, he thinks well, charging himself, a piece of land and on this piece of land the men who had already returned in part from the war, etc. they built the first kindergarten which was called the Cella school, enough without a name. It later became the April 25 school in remembrance of the Resistance, in remembrance of the participation of both women and men.

Here, to say that even then people were thinking about how to look after and educate young children.

You see these examples were then followed by the women and men of the other districts of the city who also took care of the future of the children, and then from this first example of Villa Cella which was born without having a pedagogical guide right away, because it was impossible : we came out of a war situation and with very very limited tools, then the women of the other districts of the city took care of finding out if there were any free areas, if the Municipality had the means to build kindergartens and then from here a whole series and a network of schools was born which even now exists and lives very well, in short, as a great example.

At the time there were such meetings, as I repeat in the hamlets, then not only on the part of women and citizens, but also on the part of the religious body because even then there were kindergartens, schools for children they were carried out by the nuns but there wasn't all that organization: the citizens inside, the committees, the teachers who were duly graduated, above all who were duly paid, the food, etc.

Then the great I say “chicken coop” began from there, which is not a chicken coop but the great initiatives to see how to build these schools, these nests for the children of the citizens of the hamlet; I remember, for example, Villa Cella, I remember Villa Sesso, all the other initiatives that, like Villa Cella, tended to achieve these things. Then you know after the example of the Municipality which regularly pays salaries, which provides food for the children, which does charge fees, however with many other educational and pedagogical initiatives which accompanies children to the city to visit the theatre, which accompanies children in the city to visit the Municipality, etc., are all things that promote themselves and help other women to want to carry out these initiatives.

The assemblies were like a very diversified presence: there were young fathers, there were young mothers, grandparents who also work very hard to keep up the children, then local authorities, parish priests, priests, women from the 'Azione Cattolica, and also the municipal administrators because from the very beginning there had been the idea that schools, that education had to be a public work, a public initiative, therefore the Municipality, the mayor, the councilors had to be there first to hear and then encode accordingly.

In the meantime, a commission had been set up within the local authority, i.e. within the Municipality, which was already in charge of the first schools born, and then a regulation was also given to continuously renew the participation of the adults living in that place: therefore there was a regulation that was occasionally modified, regulated, adjusted, and then we were lucky enough to also have a great pedagogue who was Loris



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Malaguzzi, who was a university student, had graduated, etc., and his activity was precisely that of creating public bodies, bodies that depended on the mayor, on the municipal administration where children and families did pay a fee but where they questioned educational activities together with the population, together with families, together to staff.

Both the educational staff and the kitchen and cleaning staff, as well as the committees because for each school there was a committee called "Schools and cities" and which committee included all those who wanted to have these experiences regardless of their social and economic position .

The so-called kindergartens of the people belonged to the people only for a very short time because the municipal commissions, the councilors who visited these schools were very active; the educating staff itself was very active because in the meantime there was a need for the local authority for expenses, for heating, for food, for staff wages...

The population has always worked hard to replace the public body, to replace the administrators, then when the first municipal school came along, everyone followed this path to become municipal institutions. First of all because there was a pedagogical regulation, there was qualified personnel, there were auxiliary personnel and then there was the medical personnel who shouldn't be underestimated, who at least once in a while visited all the children, checked if they had some physical problems, also pedagogical, because we also had these problems, in short.

In any case, the public address was the first especially since even parents, even relatives when they saw abandoned areas like this one to say, "But there couldn't be a kindergarten here, now I'm going to the mayor, I ask because we have so many children with families in need..."

The initiative started immediately from the bottom, that's it.

I have always dealt with schools and nursery schools from within, I have not always taught directly from within but I have followed the staff, we have had assemblies of all kinds but above all the "lion", here is the lion to give us a name , who was driving the whole thing was Malaguzzi.

He brought together the teaching staff every 15-20 days to propose new work plans, to propose new initiatives related to these work plans, to ensure that the schools never finished their activity, there was always something to do. Or even visits to clubs, visits to dairies, visits to high schools, visits to doctors, hospitals, and these children participated in all the initiatives together with the teachers.

There were many initiatives, for example even these private schools, we said earlier, made by the religious body at a certain point they were not able to handle this type of activity and so they asked the municipal administration to take charge of these schools and therefore these schools from the religious body they passed to the municipal administration.

Then the initiatives undertaken together with their parents were numerous: just think that the children even went to the beach in the summer with personnel who came from their families, for example those who knew how to cook, those who knew how to clean, with the educating staff, the teachers, etc., so it was all a continuous study around these initiatives but the local authority has always been there.

Around the end of the 1950s, early 1960s, that's because even for the local authority it was not easy to maintain a school from an economic point of view, and then to pay the staff because then the staff had to deal with the staff of the Municipality so there too the pay was different, care was different, insurance was different.

When a school is built then things start there: you are in contact with the staff, you are in contact with the pa-



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rents, you are in contact with the doctors who have certain positions for the children, on the children's food, so it has been a continuous maturation on the initiative and then above all always spurred on by Malaguzzi, always spurred on by the atelieristas, always spurred on by the teaching pedagogical team because Malaguzzi was not the only one but also every two schools, three schools at the most according to the periods, also some pedagogues that is, those who looked after the progress of the school from the point of view of the initiatives, from the point of view of training, from the point of view of how the initiatives were carried out, etc.

Seeing the results: seeing happy families, happy children, seeing satisfied staff even with so many problems, so this gave you energy day by day, you didn't think about the division of schools, about setbacks, you gave all of yourself as I think we did everyone who worked there, everyone.

The same elementary school teaching staff who received the children who came from kindergartens themselves expressed very positive judgments on the overall behavior of these children.

Then the same let's say pedagogical staff who came from all over Italy and even from abroad to visit these schools because they are not invented lies it is true, because we have had university professors of any religious-political tendency mind you, but who visited, they stayed, they stayed inside the schools so they too expressed more than positive judgments.

My life is too short to be able to continue working in institutions: once I said to Malaguzzi: "Look, Malaguzzi, my conditions lead me to ask to retire" and then he replied: "No! You in retire you will go when I tell you to!" to say how precious we all were within these institutions.

So of my life I can only say that I get old too soon to continue working.

There is a crèche here, every now and then I go to some school because my grandchildren, among other things, all went to crèches and then to kindergartens, consequently it is an activity that I still miss despite the fact that I have given all that I could I still miss.

There was a bit of everything to take care of: from hiring the staff, to the public competitions that were held, from the commissions you participated in, then you had another return in the sense that you participated in the staff meeting when they established new programs, when they thought about changing certain things internally, then the biggest piece was the budgets to maintain this whole big institution. The food for the children, the fees that came from the families, the personnel, the preparation of the personnel, the courses that certain people had to attend for the work to be successful, in short, I had all this great function.

That's why "no you don't retire".

Then there were more collective moments, for example at the beginning of the school year or in the middle there were general assemblies of all the educational staff, there were other moments in which the general assembly of all the school committees and city because each school had this committee that was elected regularly, or of all the auxiliary staff according to the initiatives we had in place.

And then when it was known that in a certain place, for example the nursery school here, an institution of the Municipality had to be opened, the activity immediately began with the people, with the citizens who lived there: the Municipality intends to do here a school or a nursery for many children, this will be the activity, these will be the committees, this will be the educational staff for many children...

It started right away when the initiative was learned that a municipal service would be opened, the activity began immediately, immediately to establish relations with the population, with families.



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(What did you call Malaguzzi?): Malaguzzi, it was more comfortable that way. There was really a Spartan way of treating each other, in short, comradely.

(What did he call you?): Marta or Martina, depending on how he came to him. Those barriers never existed... Or Giaroni who was the councilor "Veh Loretta", or the mayor "Bonazzi", there was really a fraternal exchange here.

And yet, if someone made a mistake, they also made themselves known "look, I think you were wrong there, you shouldn't have done that"; there really was a climate suitable for schools, suitable for children, where a child could also learn from these things that were emphasized in a negative sense.

After the war the women immediately tried to have women's commissions, to have women's organizations I met Loretta there, at ARI it was called, Association of Italian Girls.

These associations, these organizations carried forward those programmes, those demands that we dreamed of during the war: equality between the sexes, equality of initiatives, conferences that were good for both, political initiatives, demands because, you know, not everything was going well heh!

We met very often: if she had any news she would let us know and vice versa we would let her know, but the relationship has always been excellent, as we can tell we collaborated 100%. We have never had any bans, neither from the mayor nor from the councilors for this activity because then the reputation that all this activity had for children had gone beyond the Italian borders.

(Lidia Greci, did you know her, did you work with her?): No, I met her through Loretta, she too was part of these women's associations because I didn't say it but after the war there was an explosion of organizations: for example there was the organization of small children, it was called "Pionieri"; there was the "Lari" organization for girls, there was the youth organization called "Youth Front", many came from the military, from the war, etc.

Then later there were still the pensioners' associations, the union associations; I don't know if it's because we have this hole in our heads but organizations are a panacea for us, they are a future, they are a resource. Then these associations also help a lot in personal training, they help a lot in learning, in dealing with people, etc., therefore I met Lidia in these situations, in these associations of the ARI because then we were many in the ARI.

Lidia Greci was also councilor for the Municipality of Reggio, councilor for health I think, ah here is councilor for assistance, I know she was also councilor for the Municipality of Reggio: because then these girls who expressed ideas, logical consequences, helping people have also made a certain political career, so was Loretta, so are many others...

It was also in these associations that future programs and municipal administration policies were discussed: everyone gave their suggestions, everyone gave their ideas, so it is a continuum of life that begins and continues.

So I went to the Municipality, I took part in a public competition where schools had nothing to do with it yet because they hadn't been born: I immediately took part in a schools commission I believe with Cavandoli, with Morini, with Gianolio, with Malaguzzi of course, then slowly ... "Schools are needed, here guys there is no escaping, schools are needed because etc." and then we began.

Eh because the school sector didn't exist yet...



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(And were you interested...?): Well it was interesting, I went to work because I won a competition and I was put on the school commission: slowly, slowly, talking, ideas, needs and everything pop up, but I didn't have a tac that has me...

I was born and raised there.