

The Italian school in Pelotas (RS, Brazil) during the decades of 1920 and 1930: among local, national and international contexts

A escola italiana em Pelotas (RS, Brasil) durante as décadas de 1920 e 1930: entre contextos locais, nacionais e internacionais¹

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ABSTRACT

This text aims to investigate the Italian school in Pelotas, in the decades of 1920 and 1930, when there were important changes in the institutions related to immigration groups. The research is justified by the need to boost studies about the scholarization of Italian immigrants in these decades, since most of the knowledge about it up to now is focused on the late 19th and early 20th century. To contemplate the discussion on this context, the research uses the theoretical perspective of transnational history and transnational history of educations. Sources are Italian consulate documents, reports by commissions in charge of the restructuring of Italian schools abroad, and reports by the Italian Society in Pelotas and by the city's mayors. Analyzing the sources from the perspective proposed herein, it was observed that Italian school, along the years analyzed, was influenced by both Italian fascist policies of Mussolini's governments and by the my the municipal context of Pelotas' government, with the opening of new public schools: in addition to that, it was also affected by the greater Brazilian context, with nationalist policies by the government of Getulio Vargas', that culminated with the closing of the school in 1938.

Keywords: Pelotas Italian Dchool. Nationalization. Municipality. Italian fascism.

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RESUMO

Esta contribuição visa investigar a escola italiana em Pelotas nas décadas de 1920 a 1930, período em que houve modificações importantes para as instituições ligadas a grupos imigratórios. A pesquisa justifica-se pela necessidade de ampliar os estudos sobre a escolarização dos imigrantes italianos nas décadas mencionadas, uma vez que grande parte do saber acumulado está concentrada sobre o final do século XIX e o início do XX. Para contemplar as discussões que englobam tal contexto, a pesquisa usa a perspectiva teórica da história transnacional e história transnacional da educação. No que concerne as fontes, são utilizados documentos consulares italianos, relatórios de comissões encarregadas da reestruturação da escola italiana no exterior e relatórios da sociedade italiana de Pelotas e de intendentes municipais em Pelotas. Com a análise das fontes a partir da perspectiva proposta observou-se que a escola italiana, durante os anos analisados, foi tanto influenciada pelas políticas italianas fascistas do governo de Mussolini quanto pelo contexto municipal do governo de Pelotas, com a abertura de novas escolas públicas; além disso, também sofreu influência do contexto maior brasileiro, com as políticas nacionalistas do governo de Getúlio Vargas que culminaram com o fechamento no ano de 1938.

Palavras-chave: Escola Italiana em Pelotas. Nacionalização. Municipalidade. Fascismo Italiano.

Initial considerations

The article herein analyzes the Italian school maintained by Italian Society in the city of Pelotas (RS, Brazil) from the 1920s to the 1930s. Previous studies (CASTRO, 2020; 2021) had shown the relationship between Italian societies and the school in Pelotas, as well as the school culture and Italianity in this institution. For this text, we opted for the decades of 1920 and 1930 for they were a rather peculiar period in history: on the one hand, there were changes in the policies of Benito Mussolini's government in Italy, with fascist ideas; on the other hand, the influence of Getulio Vargas' government in Brazil, with nationalism in foreign institutions; and finally, with the offer, in the 1920s, of public education by Pelotas' municipality. In this sense, this study operates in the threshold of the government policies that affected Italian schools in Brazil, and specifically in Pelotas.

This way, in consonance with the intended analysis, the theoretical choice is for transnational history and transnational history of education, for these are perspectives that aid to investigate the migration phenomenon and the immigrants' institutions, from a point of view that brings different space scales to the analysis: local, national, and transnational. Thus, the research starts from a triad of empiricism, theory, and context, using the latter with analytic potential.

To compose the empirical evidence, the documentary corpus used are mostly documents safeguarded by the Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, in Italy, such as consulate reports, emigration bulletins, and yearbooks of Italian schools

abroad. The research also uses the reports by some Italian commissions in charge of diagnosing and structuring Italian schools in Brazil.

To contemplate all the discussions proposed, the text is divided into three parts, in addition to the initial and final considerations: the first one discusses about the changes that occurred in the policies for Italian schools abroad during the studied period; the second one, brings some theoretical elements; and the third approaches specifically the school institution existing in Pelotas during the decades of 1920 and 1930.

Governmental policies for Italian schools during the *Novecento*

During the period in which Italian schools were in operation, they were influenced and managed by Italian policies from several governments, that oscillated in what concerned immigrants and Italian schools in other countries and were more or less active, with strong recommendations or not, in different moments (LUCHESE, 2017). From the Francesco Crispi government in 1889 on, policies became more emphatic, and determinations for these school institutions developed and were modified according to the different governments throughout the years that followed.

In the beginning of the 20th century, a significant period was the one that culminated in the creation of the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione*, in 1901, and the Prinetti Act (D'ALESSIO, 2019). At that time, the commission acted in many fronts, among which the foundation of the *Direzione dalle scuole italiane all'estero*, a department with the responsibility of managing Italian schools abroad. Another activity was to offer special attention to those who wished to emigrate.

Another important law for immigration and Italian schools was the *Tittoni Law*, elaborated in 1910 by Minister Tittony. About this specific law, "in the year in which Italian migration movement recorded one of its highest peaks, law 867 of December 18th, 1910 was approved, aiming to reorganize our schools abroad [...]" (FLORIANI, 1974, our translation). More laws and regulations for Italians and schools abroad came up at that time, introducing new orientations for schools to be subsidized. One of them was the unification of the General Direction of Italian Schools Abroad and the General Emigration Commission, which changed into General Direction of Italians Abroad and Schools (CIAMPI, 1998). In the same year, Angelo Scalabrini, former head of the *Ispettorato delle Scuole Italiane all'estero*, was appointed central director of Italian schools (CIAMPI, 1998).

It is important to stress that in the period studied in the article herein, there were different context in both countries – Italy and Brazil –, in comparison to the context of the early 20th century. In the time studied, Benito Mussolini's fascist ideas had a strong impact in Italy, whereas Getulio Vargas' nationalist policies impacted Brazil and the foreign groups' schools and institutions. Immigrant groups were strongly affected, especially in the 1930s, when our country aimed at nationalization, fighting

against the forms of expression of foreign groups. In this combat, there were orientations and guidelines regarding the teaching in the so called foreign schools. During the period of Estado Novo (Portuguese for New State, as the Vargas Era is known), educational policies were guided by the aspects that constituted this New State, that means, centralization, authoritarianism, nationalization and modernization. This way, the policies for schooling developed in an authoritarian way and treated immigrants as those who denationalized Brazil (HILSDORF, 2003).

Thus, during the period of analysis, Italian schools in Brazil, and specifically the one located in Pelotas, were influenced by government policies that were, at a given point, divergent. On the one side, Mussolini's government restructured and reopened schools that were closed, now under fascist ideas and guidelines. Aiming at an education for an Italianity according to what fascism propagated, schools in Brazil received subventions and means to reorganized. However, on the other side, Getulio Vargas' government, especially with the institution of Estado Novo in 1937, sought to nationalize foreign institutions and restrict the use of other languages among immigrants and their descendants. In this context, schools that taught in different languages than Portuguese went on two directions: nationalization or closing. Franchini, in her master thesis, observes this aspect as she studies the Dante Alighieri School in Sao Paulo. For the author, "[...] in the nationalization process, the institution and the subjects found themselves in threshold of the crossings and ruptures between two projects: on one side, the Vargas government, on the other, the fascist expansionist cultural policy" (FRANCHINI, 2015, p. 29, our translation).

In this light, to analyze the sources from the contexts, in the plural, it is proposed herein to use the theoretical perspective of transnational history and transnational history of education.

The history theoretical and methodological aspects of transnational history to analyze the Italian immigration phenomenon

To analyze immigration processes and specifically the immigrants' schooling process, one of the paths to be followed is the one of transnational history studies.

Transnational can be considered as an unfolding of compared history (GUIMARAES, 2015) and, along the years, it went together with postcolonial studies (OSSEMBACH; DEL POZZO, 2011). Ossembach & del Pozzo explain the term: "[...] 'Transnational history' examines units that spill over and leak through national borders [...]" (OSSEMBACH; DEL POZZO, 2011, p. 581, our translation).

In addition to that, Conrad explains that the approaches of transnational history also come up promoted by a generation change and, in some countries, influenced by the internationalization of academic work. For Guimaraes, "in short, *transnational*

can be understood as something that goes ‘beyond borders’, which implies, according to term itself, transformation, and even denial [...]” (GUIMARAES, 2015, p. 91, our translation). In what concerns the History of Education, for Fuchs (2014), from 2005 on, this perspective gradually went towards new spatial trends from other areas.

Regarding the Brazilian research in History of Education, some (but not many) studies do resort to the idea of transnational. An important contribution, for example, is the publication organized by Vidal & Rabello (2020), which focuses on the international movement of new education. The book, written by several authors, puts the transnational perspective on education on the scene, with many studies that approach this dimension. For Vidal, “by allowing the analysis of the multiplicity of the space in the lives of the subjects and their experiences, switching from a microscale to a macrolevel, from national to global dimensions, transnational history brings up a variety of polycentric scales in interaction” (VIDAL, 2020, p. 11, our translation). In the specific scope of the interconnection of research on both history-education and on immigration, it is worth highlighting the dossier organized by Ascenzi et al. (2019), in which authors indicate research possibilities.

There is still some imprecision of concepts and their names: transnational, connected, crossed, transborders (GUIMARAES, 2015)... However, the common point is the critique of the so called methodological nationalism (BECK, 2000 *apud* BERTRAND, 2015, p. 20). Marjanen (2009) also stresses that the richness of these expressions, that sometimes cause confusion, may indicate a detachment from the analysis that is only based on the nation-state. In this direction, it is possible to consider that Italian ethnical schools, within their specificities, were permeated by ideas and precepts that were connected to different realities, from both the immigrants’ homelands and Brazil.

The Italian school in Pelotas in the 1920s and 1930s

In order to analyze the Italian school in Pelotas in the 1920s and 1930s, a brief institutional overview on it is necessary. This kind of institution existed in Pelotas since 1872, in an initiative by the *Società Italiana Unione e Filantropia*, and has always been somehow connected to the several Italian societies in the city (CASTRO, 2021). During the 19th century, it went through several moments of closing and reopening, dissidence issues among societies, relationships with the Italian consulate and its subventions, as well as changes of teachers, which were detailed in the study by Castro & Barausse (2020). In the early 20th century, Italian schools in Pelotas were reorganized, with the arrival of *maestro-agente* Umberto Ancarani and his wife Irò Ancarani. Both, through the *Società Italiene Riunite Unione e Filantropia e Circolo Garibaldi*, restructured and managed the school in Pelotas from 1905 to 1907 (CASTRO; BARAUSSE, 2019), and had crucial roles in the Italian community during the approximately 2 years they spent in the city. Italian school remained present until 1909, under the responsibility

of other teachers and after that, no evidence is found of any Italian school in the city, until the moment it was reopened, during the years of Italian fascism.

There is also information on the two decades studied herein in the yearbooks of Italian schools abroad². In both the 1924 and 1925 yearbooks, there are descriptions of a then new Italian course in the city. However, in none of them it is possible to know how many students attended to this course or other additional information (MINISTERO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI, 1925; 1926). There are no records of a subsidized Italian school in Pelotas from 1924 to 1925, which leads to the hypothesis that they did not exist, otherwise they would be mentioned in the yearbooks.

The organization of Italian schools abroad are not a theme restricted to Pelotas or the state of Rio Grande do Sul, but affects all the places Italians migrated to and where Italian schools were opened, either subsidized or governmental³. In this sense, there are documents by the *Commissione per la riorganizzazione delle scuole italiane in America*, founded on December 18th, 1910, that was in charge of preparing the legal project to organize and inspect Italian schools in (COMMISSIONE PER LA RIORGANIZZAZIONE E LA VIGILANZA DELLE SCUOLE ITALIANE ALL'ESTERO, [1911-1922], n.p.).

In addition to the yearbooks, this research uses the consulate reports and the ones elaborated according to ministry prescriptions that followed the renovation of the Italian schools abroad, such as documents by the above-mentioned commission designated by the *Ministro degli Affari Esteri* in the end of 1921, to reform Italian schools in the Americas, which counted on Ernesto Schiaparelli and Vittore Alemanni (BARAUSSE, 2016). Whereas the first elaborated a report about the schools in the United States, the second wrote about Italian schools in Brazil (BARAUSSE, 2016). Teacher Alemanni, in the appendix of his report, addresses the situation of primary education in the southern states of Brazil – Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná –, approaching the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, and other two important urban centers: Rio Grande and Pelotas. In what concerns Pelotas, there were one thousand Italians in the city, who worked in commerce, with several professions (ALEMANNI, 1923). To prepare his report, Alemanni also used the reports elaborated and sent by

² The yearbooks of the Italian schools abroad were produced by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri and provide an overview on the general situation of the schools in different continents, such as number of schools, teachers, Italian courses, Italian societies.

³ Italian schools abroad divided into government schools and private schools subsidized by the Italian government: the first, less numerous, located in the Levant and the Mediterranean basin, were entirely funded by the Italian government, the second were laic or confessional private schools, created within Italian societies abroad, and received subventions from the Italian government as long as they adapted to the teaching programs and methods of Italian schools, which was controlled by consulates and regular ministerial inspections (SALVETTI, 2002, p. 536, our translation).

one of the philo-ministerial associations that, from the early 1920s, started playing a greater role in the management and coordination of efforts to develop Italian schools in Brazil and above all in Rio Grande do Sul, the catholic association *Italica Gens*⁴ (BARAUSSE, 2019b).

The direct association of Schiaparelli trusted captain Louis Seghetti with a specific mission to verify the possibility to reenact the presence of educational institutions in southern Brazil. During the mission, that occurred for almost two years, Seghetti wrote periodic reports and sent them to the ministry. Reading it provides, albeit partially, a photograph and a representation of the Italian schools that are worthy to be investigated (BARAUSSE, 2015). It is from these reports that it is possible to see, for example, how the development of the Italian school in Pelotas along the 1920 decade extinguished:

The one in Pelotas is quite smaller. Italian schools also lack in this city, where religious institutes told me the number of students who are descendants of Italians in minimum. Two willing men, Dr. Ernesto Ronna (who also teaches at the Pelotas lyceum) and Mr. Ernesto Mattola, joined, in full heart and pure love for the homeland, to the opening of an Italian course, when books are provided.

This school will work in a classroom of the Parish, as courtesy from His Excellence Monsignor Gioacchino Ferreira De Mella, Bishop of Pelotas, who assured his interest, together with the two above-mentioned and the Reverend Father of the Cathedral, Priest Pietro Esmeraldo da Silva, Cav. Uff. Federico [Frederico] Trebbi, R. Consular Agent, City Councilor D. Rocco Ambrosini, Bishop Secretary, Eng. Lucano Conedera and Mr. Gaetano Gotuzzo [...] (SEGHETTI, 05/08/1923⁵, p. 06-07, our translation).

This document indicates that, again, for a certain period, there were no Italian schools in Pelotas. From Seghetti's report, it is possible to notice that there are some Italian and their descendants interested in creating an Italian language course in the city, as well as the relationship between this course and Catholic Church, for it would happen in the facilities of one of the parishes. However, despite the interest in the Italian course, the Italian school, just like in the early century, no longer existed. In the given context, it is possible to think about the reasons that would lead to the lack of interest of the Italian descendant population to study at these schools and/or to preserve the language:

⁴ *Italica Gens* “[...] was structured from a central office in Turin and two central secretariats, in New York (USA) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). In Brazil, it started just before World War I, with a strong presence of Italian clergy, and carried out significant activities [...]” (BARAUSSE, 2019b, p. 307, our translation).

⁵ In the dates cited in this article, the North American date style was used, as follows: month/day/year.

the opening of public schools in the city of Pelotas, an anticipated nationalization of these Italian institutions, the unconcern for the scholarization and maintenance of a language that is different of the one spoken where they lived etc. Together with that, it is important to consider the tensions that existed among the members of the Italian community in Pelotas. Several times, the consulate representatives in charge mentioned the dissidences that had consequences in the schools and for the associated.

The Italian community in Pelotas was divided and did not always agree about themes that concerned the schooling of their descendants (CASTRO, 2021). The fact that the Italian school ceased to exist during a given period of the 20th century may also be explained due to the municipal configuration of that time. Castro (2017) analyzed the reports of the city mayors in the decades of 1910 and 1920 in Pelotas, from which it is possible to observe that during the period when the Italian school did not exist, there was a strong discourse on the importance of public education and an increase in the number of schools built by the Municipality, especially in the years of the administration of Mayor Augusto Simees Lopes, from 1924 to 1928. In this period, according to municipal reports, 17 buildings were constructed for rural schools, as well as some schools in the urban area (SIMOES LOPES, 1928). Also in this period, a department was created to specifically address scholarization and the education regulations were published (OLIVEIRA, 2005).

In this sense, the impulse given by the municipality to education may be one of the factors that contributed to the inexistence of an Italian school at the time. Through several reports from city mayors, it is possible to notice that during the two first decades of the 20th century, the city public education was being organized and promoted in Pelotas, just like the authors analyzed mentioned. Along with a discourse to stimulate public education, new schools were opened in the urban and rural areas of the city, and there was a considerable increase in the number of students. So, as observed, the inexistence of an Italian school may be related to a greater offer of public education.

Oliveira (2012) states that although the decade of 1920 was important for an increase in the offer of Pelotas public education and represents a moment of creation and construction of schools, it was in the previous decade, 1910, that the discourse about the importance of education began. The concern about primary public schooling occurred, above all, from 1910 on, which can be easily observed by reading the Pelotas municipality reports. Still according to Oliveira (2012), up to this decade, primary schooling was mostly offered by private initiatives and subsidized classes. For Neves (2012), by the late 19th and early 20th century, in Pelotas, there were educational institutions with different profiles, to attend heterogeneous groups, with different needs regarding education. According to this author, in Pelotas, like in other cities of the country, it is notable that the population looked for private schools due to the lack of an offer of public education (NEVES, 2012).

Thus, the city stimulus to public education, along with the difficulties Italian societies

faced to maintain their schools, may be the factors that contributed for the closings of schools during the 1920s. The period of the 20th century in which the Italian school ceases to exist coincides with these times of greater concern, promotion and creation of public schools, as well as a greater number of vacancies for Pelotas public primary school. Indeed, it is not just a coincidence, maybe the greater offer in public education influenced for the Italian school to close, due to the lack of public. Other aspects may also be considered, like the will for their children to be taught in Portuguese, aiming at a better integration with the local community, or the insertion of this group into other private schools that stood out in the city in the 20th century.

The decades of 1920 and 1930 constitute a period of intense changes, both in the Brazilian and Italian national political contexts. In what concerns the 1920s, in the general context of the schools in Rio Grande do Sul, there are documents by Italian diplomats, that aid the comprehension about that time. In March 1920, the Italian ambassador wrote a report to the Minister in Rome, to inform about the conditions of schools in the state of Rio Grande do Sul:

Minister,

[...] Assuming that I do not have an exact idea of what is the reality of Italian schools in this Consular District, allow me to make some considerations that were suggested to me by the experience along the years and my knowledge of the environment.

In the first place, speaking of Italian schools, one cannot think nor should understand that those are true organic schools, founded and constituted for us, for they are in general Italian-Brazilian schools that emerged from the Colony, in which Portuguese and Italian are learned (REGIO AMBASCIATORE, 03/05/1920, n.p., our translation).

Still in this very same report, the ambassador writes about the teaching program that the schools followed or should follow:

In a way that the teaching program follow by the colony teachers is limited to the most simple and essential things:

- 1) To learn to read and write fluently, training students for the syllabary, to be accomplished until they acquire the right confidence;
- 2) The principle of simple numbers and the four fundamental operations;
- 3) Some basic notions on geography and history of Italy and Brazil;

Readings chosen at the schools by teachers themselves, of educative tales and the most beautiful pages of our *Risorgimento* (REGIO AMBASCIATORE, 03/05/1920, n.p., our translation).

In 1923, Minister Giovanni Gentile promoted a reform of the education in Italy, on fascist basis. In 1922, when Mussolini took the power, he appointed Gentile for the *Ministero dell'istruzione*. According to com Horta (2009), the ministry received the collaboration of some of his disciples, among which there was Lombardo-Radice, who became General Director of primary education and was responsible for the reform of primary education in 1923. Gentile and Lombardo-Radice were part of the Italian government until 1924 (HORTA, 2009). However, their ideas went further on and influenced the thoughts of the fascist government on school and education. The foundations of Gentile's reform continued existing even after they both left the Ministry (HORTA, 2009).

Even though the above-mentioned reforms were important in Italy, according to Salvetti (2002), they did not impact Italian schools abroad significantly, in what concerns the number of schools and the distribution of subventions. However, with these determinations, schools did receive new books, elaborated in consonance with fascist ideas and there was also a gradual movement for administrative centralization and more control over Italian teachers abroad. Schools lost their relative autonomy in this period. Still according to the author, it is not by coincidence that in the year of 1929, Pietro Parini is appointed director of Italians and schools abroad. Parini had been secretary of Italian fascists abroad (SALVETTI, 2014), and “the idea of a nationalism without borders will be one of the maxims pursued by fascists, as part of their policy of overlapping fascism, national identity and ethnicity” (BENEDUZI, 2015, p. 292).

In the particular case of Pelotas, some documents aid to understand the reality of the city at the time. As already analyzed, sources indicate that in the 1920s the school was closed. At that moment, maybe the children of Italians already studied in public schools of the city, for:

[...] in the mid-1920s already, the ephemeral Italian schools were slowly giving way to public schools. Some initiatives, especially in urban areas, remained or were reactivated in the decade of 1930, as a result of fascist actions (LUCHESE, 2007, p. 239, our translation).

Anyhow, to verify if Italians did attend to these institutions is not the objective of this texts. What is fundamental to be perceived about this case is the reactivation of the Italian school in Pelotas in the decade of 1930, precisely due to the incentive from fascist policies for schools abroad. In the beginning of 1937, the consul in Porto Alegre communicates the Ministry in Italy about the opening of an Italian school in Pelotas, with 50 students:

I am honored to communicate Your Excellence that yesterday, the 15th, occurred in Pelotas, a prosperous city of this consular district, and important center of Italian immigrants, merchants and wealthy ones, the opening of an Italian school,

located at the headquarter of the Mutual Support Society.

It has already 50 students, and the expenses are paid by this society, that, under the auspices of this R. Consulate, that welcomed and stimulated the initiative, has truly accomplished its meritorious work.

The school in Pelotas is the third one to open its classrooms during the time of my stay at the Royal Consulate; [...] For now and for another period that is necessary to develop and grow, the onus of the school in Pelotas will be borne by that community, unless this notable Ministry evaluates its operation and possible development as deserving of some little support, in order to make it more efficient and agile for its purposes (*CONSOLE GENERALE*, 03/16/1937e, n.p., our translation).

It is notable in the report that some schools were reopening in Rio Grande do Sul during the 1930s. In the specific case of Pelotas, the Italian Society would bear the maintenance costs at firsts, although they did request resources from the Italian Ministry, a discourse that was not different of the one of the schools from the 19th century.

Still in March, 1937, Ministry Piero Parini wrote to the Porto Alegre consulate addressing the opening of the school.

Pelotas school

In reference to the report n. 527-52 by this General Royal Consulate, I am pleased to express my profound satisfaction with the construction of the Italian School in Pelotas.

I demand you to become the interpreter for the Mutual Support Society of the satisfaction of the fascist government with the generosity and strong sense of Italianity they had shown as they bare all the costs.

I also wish to be particularly informed if the local *Fascio* participates of this school of [Italian] language, for it should be their strict duty, in the terms of the statute, and I look forward to new communications about the activity and development of the several institutions that aim at the well-being of our community (PARINI, 03/31/1937, n.p., our translation).

In the correspondence, Italian Ministry Piero Parini refers directly to the fascist government and to the local *Fascio*, and if they participate in the school, which would be desirable, according to him. The *Fasci all'estero* were the sessions of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) implemented abroad, to promote the fascist ideology in Italian emigrated collectivities (BERTONHA, 1998). The quote also shows that the society counted with the satisfaction of the fascist government as it bore all the costs, which indicates that the Ministry did not support, at least financially, the school in those years. It is noted that, in that specific time, the fascist ideas of Mussolini's government were

present in the guidelines for the Italian immigrants' schools and that it was desirable that these ideas were passed on to students through the schools.

Another consulate report informs the beginning of classes in Pelotas, with the number of 50 students:

Minister,

I am honored to communicate Your Excellence that since the 6th, classes started regularly at our schools in Caxias and Pelotas, with the following number of students:

School in Pelotas: 50 (CONSOLE GENERALE, 03/24/1937c, n.p., our translation).

In the same year of 1937, in August, there is a request for a teacher for the Italian school in Pelotas, justified by the fact that there was a significant number of students, that is, 73. This request is sent by the Italian Consul to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy:

[...] Pelotas is the second city of the state and has a university, our school, if well managed, can lead to a considerable development. In truth, after only a few months of operation, it already reached the overwhelming number of 73 students. It is thus necessary to send a young teacher there, to not only direct the school, but to organize good language courses for foreigners, like in Porto Alegre and Caxias.

If we do wish to obtain the expected results from that institution, sending a head teacher from Italy is imperative.

It would be also necessary to provide some subsidizing for the expenses needed for the school to operate.

The Italian Society has been indeed supporting with all the expenses until now, counting with the promises of the consul prior to me, who committed to paying, through the General Consulate, from the 1st of the current month, for the expenses with electricity, cleaning etc., which compels me to put that promise into practice now [...] (CONSOLE GENERALE, 07/08/1937d, n.p., our translation).

In the correspondence reproduced above, it can be observed that two elements were requested as essential for the development of the Italian school: the teacher and the fundings from the Italian government. Another important factor for the school operation was the management by the Italian Society, which, at that moment in Pelotas, had financial responsibilities. In successive correspondences, it is notable that the request was at least considered by consular representatives, like in the following excerpt: “[...] the Ministry will examine, in the beginning of Brazilian year, the convenience of sending a teacher to Pelotas” (MINISTERO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI, 10/17/1937,

n.p.). However, two months later, the general consul in Porto Alegre writes to the Ministry once again about sending a teacher:

Referring to the document n. 899867/143 on the opportunity to send a teacher to Pelotas, I entreat for urgent follow-up on that, for the new year is imminent and, on the other hand, the need for measures always seems greater.

It is evident that it is important to keep our school well organized and well managed, in that city that is home to a university, as described in my report n. 1485/229 on July 8th, 1937/XVI (CONSOLE GENERALE, 12/31/1937b, n.p., our translation).

In this report, another important element of Italian schools comes up, the teaching staff that worked at these institutions. Castro (2021) points out for the need of deepening the studies on the profile of these teachers. The general consul requires that the Ministry sends a teacher to the school in Pelotas, which leads to the thought that the school, albeit open, faced difficulties and needed support from Rome.

In the year of 1937, Luigi Ledda⁶ wrote about the general conditions of the Italian school in Pelotas and about the teacher that had not yet been sent:

School in Pelotas

At the school, attendance, if not the benefit, is excellent.

It is necessary to predict its definitive organization, with a good head teacher.

From what was exposed, the data of the periodicity from the first report are worthy, as for this management the environment is not simple nor easy. However, these two schools can also operate better next year (LEDDA, 09/12/1937, n.p., our translation).

From the document mentioned, it is notable that, on one side, fascist policies influenced and stimulated the creation and/or reopening of schools, but, on another side, they did not finance them the way they needed, leaving the responsibility for the societies.

Between 1937 and 1938, the Italian consul in Porto Alegre demanded an increase in the subventions from the Italian Ministry, establishing 5,000 lira per year for the school in Pelotas

(CONSOLE GENERALE, 05/01/1937a, n.p.). That brings up at least two elements: first, there was an Italian school with students attending to it; second, this school was aligned, at least in theory, with what was expected from an Italian institution abroad

⁶ Luigi Ledda was born in Sardinia, Italy, in 1903, and after passing by several schools, was appointed by the direction of Italian schools abroad for the Americas, leaving to Brazil in 1932. In 1934, he became responsible for the Italian school in Porto Alegre, in which he worked until 1938 (BARAUSSE, 2019a).

during Mussolini's fascist period. Otherwise, it would not be subsidized.

The sources used herein indicate that the Italian school in the urban context of Pelotas did not work for a quite long time. As previously mentioned, after 1909, there are no references in these sources concerning the schools subsidized by Italian government until 1937, when they were reactivated, precisely when Italian fascism revitalized and reorganized Italian schools abroad. Despite the reactivation in this period, due to the policies of Italian government, after 1938 there are no records of the Italian school anymore, as it was probably closed in definitive due to the nationalization policies carried out by Getúlio Vargas' nationalist project.

In the following decades in Pelotas, there are no records of an Italian school or society. The latter reappears in the 1950s: in 1958, the Italian-Brazilian Cultural Association starts to offer Italian language courses in the city (CONILL, 2022).

This way, the Italian school in Pelotas, in the 1920s and 1930s, was influenced by both the Italian context of Benito Mussolini's government and the local government, that plays its part in the closing of the school, due to the application of the *Estado Novo* policies, that culminate with the definitive closing of the Italian ethnical school institution.

Final considerations

This paper aimed to investigate the Italian school in the city of Pelotas, during the 1920s and 1930s, from the perspective of transnational history and of transnational history of education. For that, a diverse set of sources, especially safeguarded in Italian archive institutions.

The time frame of this research includes a period of significant change in both countries, Brazil and Italy. The political changes altered the situation and the discussions regarding Italian schools abroad, and Pelotas is within this scenario.

On one side of the Atlantic, in Brazil, in the beginning of the Republican period, schools related to ethnical groups were stimulated and desired, due to the lack of public schools in that context. In the beginning of the Republic, initiatives of schools by different groups in different segments were welcome. However, in the 1930s, especially due to the nationalist policies by Getúlio Vargas' government caused the closing and the nationalization of ethnical, not only Italian, initiatives. There were indeed manners and measures to resist against this nationalization of teaching, but schools ended up nationalized or closed. This Brazilian context has set up the basis to understand the moments of creation, interruption, reopening and definitive closing of the Italian school in Pelotas in the years analyzed.

Across the Atlantic, in Italy, the period of this study also contains singularities and historical changes, performed by the then ministries, important and fundamental characters for the analysis about Italian schools abroad. The reforms proposed by

Prinetti in the early 20th century and the creation of the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione* resulted in significant changes in the internal structure of the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri*, in what concerned the attention and the policies for those who had emigrated and for the schools they attended abroad. During the decades of 1920 and 1930, with the rise of Benito Mussolini to power and the empowerment of fascism influenced not only the entire Italy, but also the Italian institutions around the world, among which the schools. During this period, new determinations and new objectives were established for these institutions. It was also at that time, as demonstrated herein, that the Italian school in Pelotas reopened after what can be considered a long time (1909-1937) closed.

At a first moment, in Mussolini's fascist regime, there was some stimulus for the reopening of these schools, which should be in accordance with the fascist principles. However, after a few years, especially from 1938 on, the Brazilian policies of nationalization became central and stronger and resulted in the prohibition of foreign institutions. So, ethnical schools gradually disappeared, and the Italian school in Pelotas was part of this phenomenon.

The school reopened during the Italian fascist period, obviously with objectives and intentions that responded to fascist ideas by Benito Mussolini's government, until another element came up: the nationalization of education, due to the patriotic policies of the Brazilian government of Getulio Vargas. This situation allowed and imposed the closing of the institutions related to groups of foreigners, as well as the end of the use of foreign languages in formal teaching institutions, as well as publications. Despite that, it is not possible to say Italian language was no longer used by descendants, that definitely did not occur. However, subsidized Italian schools ceased to exist. After 1938, there is a total lack of documents and records about Italian schools in Pelotas, which allows to think that these institutions did not exist anymore in the city, nor in other places. Still, the period when the school in Pelotas stopped existing in the 20th century was also the one in which public school was being structured by the municipality and started offering more vacancies for primary school, and that can also be one of the explanations for the interruption of Italian school.

Understanding and analyzing local, national and transnational context in an integrated and connected way, in this work, was possible due to two main elements: the access to sources, as well as to bibliography from both countries, and also, the choice of a theoretical perspective that aids and instrumentalizes to think from an idea of transnational history, of inserting a context that is indeed local into a wider perspective of analysis.

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