

Cosmic Education in Maria Montessori: Arts and Sciences as resources for human development

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Abstract. This article reflects on the concept of cosmic education set out by Maria Montessori in strict correlation to those of cosmic vision and cosmic plan. Cosmic education is considered here as a fundamental direction within the original core of the thought of Maria Montessori since the early twentieth century. Among the different orders of consideration that support the actuality of cosmic education, two are the object of analysis. The first concerns the content plan that aims to create interactions with the various disciplinary fields (scientific, historical and geographical education, etc.) as a unitary vision and development of knowledge. The second concerns the existential level: it embraces and summarizes the concepts of “ecological education”, “education for peace”, and “education for the world” in themselves to the point of recalling implications of ethical and aesthetic education.

Keywords. Maria Montessori, Interdependence, Cosmic Education, India

1. Introduction

This article reflects on the concept of cosmic education set out by Maria Montessori in strict correlation to those of cosmic vision and cosmic plan, starting from the consideration that the volumes of this scientist lend themselves to readings and interpretations which are never exhaustive, but always open to new reflections.

The sphere of cosmic education is extremely wide and complex because it considers all the aspects of the person in relation to every other living form on the planet: it includes the history of the world, of the cosmos and of our role in it, and by extension the history of civilizations, cultures, elaborating a holistic vision of phenomena. The consequence is the activation of an education tending toward universal cooperation, toward the affirmation of democracy, of peace, toward the construction of a “new world”.

This is a dimension that is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, which questions nature by investigating the interweaving of functions and relationships through which its elements live and transform themselves, and thus guaranteeing the survival and development of ecosystems. Above all, the attention of Maria Montessori is focused on the deep connections that link every living form, as interconnected and harmonious

parts of a “canvas”¹ within all movements which she calls “unconscious”² animate living beings, assisting their transformation and concern for the environments in which they live, and by extension, their concern for Planet Earth. “Unconscious” acts on every living being, characterizing it as a sort of cosmic “worker”, as an active part of a movement that can be defined as the “cosmic constant of interdependence”.

The conditions of reciprocity, the influences and the functional connections to the balanced flow of life in its different, contrasting manifestations find their regulative principle in this interdependence. Here we find ourselves in continuity with the concept of telluric economy previously proposed by the geologist Antonio Stoppani, «among the first – if not the first – to grasp the significance of the balance between the different terrestrial, physical and biological, geological and climatic forces»³, recognized by Maria Montessori as the inspiration for her theory of cosmic education⁴. Likewise, during the 1930s, the nature studies carried out by Montessori were solicited by the debate on the “cosmic plan” that took place in England among various scholars⁵ including evolutionary biologists such as Julian Sorell Huxley, who repeatedly mentions it in “The Child’s Mind”; theologians such as Hugh R. L. Sheppard; and anthropologists such as Bronisław Kasper Malinowski.

As will be understood from following pages, interdependence can give rise to new possibilities and unexpected creative emergences.

2. State of the Art

The process of elaboration and the contents of cosmic education have been and continue to be the object of many studies not only in the field of education, but also elsewhere. Furio Pesci takes as his starting point the fact that Maria Montessori elaborates the concept of cosmic education in the most mature phase of her life during her stay in India, first accompanied by her son Mario from 1939 to 1946 and then again from 1947 to 1949⁶. According to Pesci, particular consideration must be given to the connections between the biographical events and the intellectual outcomes of Maria Montessori, albeit with due caution insofar as «a periodization is influenced by the evaluative judgment that the individual scholar makes around the relief of the various elements characterizing the multifaceted Montessori activity in the world»⁷. We can therefore recognize four moments in

¹ Maria Montessori wrote: «Everything is closely connected on this planet and every detail becomes interesting because it is connected to others. We can compare the whole to a canvas: every detail is an embroidery, the whole forms a magnificent fabric». M. Montessori, *Dall’infanzia all’adolescenza*, Milan, Garzanti, 1970, p. 50.

² M. Montessori, *L’inconscio nella storia*, in A. Scocchera, ed., *Il metodo del bambino e la formazione dell’uomo. Scritti e documenti inediti e rari*, Rome, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2002, pp.199-218.

³ G. Honneger Fresco, *L’eroico Robinson e la biosfera*, in G. Honneger Fresco, ed., *Montessori perché no?*, Turin, Il Leone Verde, 2017 (First Edition FrancoAngeli, 2000), p. 163.

⁴ M. Montessori, *L’inconscio nella storia*, cit., p. 218.

⁵ A. Scocchera, *Maria Montessori. Una storia per il nostro tempo*, Rome, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 1997, p. 124.

⁶ G. Cives, *Scienza, spiritualità e laicità in Maria Montessori*, in Giacomo Cives, Paola Trabalzini, eds., *Maria Montessori tra scienza spiritualità e azione sociale*, Rome, Anicia, 2017, p. 87.

⁷ F. Pesci, *Una pedagogia cosmica per l’educazione del potenziale umano*, in “Vita dell’infanzia”, n. 3/4, 2005, p. 32.

the Montessori parable: the young period, that is between her first scientific research (from 1896), and the opening of the first Children's House in Rome in the district of San Lorenzo (1907); that of the first diffusion of Montessori's method at the base of which lies pedagogy, circumscribable between the first concrete realizations and the Italian polemics that will lead Maria Montessori to spend time abroad on a more permanent basis; that of the in-depth works, which will complete the exposure of the method, also giving it some new distinctive notes⁸; finally, the period of her later years are those in which the spiritualistic and cosmic dimension of the Montessorian worldview takes shape, also in contact with the Indian cultural world and, in general, Eastern.

Other studies propose a reading characterized by an anthropological understanding. According to Galeazzi, Montessori's anthropology seeks to outline «a new humanism»⁹, which highlights and deepens what man should do to face the tasks and situations that life sets against him adequately. A strong focus on fraternity is part of this new humanism, understood as a component of the cosmic task in full recognition of the dignity of all persons as belonging to a unique race, the human race. The diversity that distinguishes individuals from each other is therefore considered a wealth, while the enhancement and promotion of the responsibility to participate consciously in the cosmic evolutionary process must be at the center of the actions and interests of educational initiatives aimed above all at the age of infants. As Galeazzi points out, Hans Jonas will start from these assumptions to set out, thirty years later, his theories concerning the principle of responsibility.

Franco Cambi identifies in his reading that Maria Montessori gives the child a «utopian» and «ecological» perspective, characterized by the respect/strengthening of a cosmic order which is in the first instance physio-biological, but also spiritual¹⁰. These are issues that, up to the present day, have continued to attract the interest of scholars, overlapping with the boundaries of contemporary ecology. Among the many of these scholars it is possible to cite Gregory Bateson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and Edgard Morin.

Finally, following in the spirit of this interpretation, Remo Fornaca¹¹ argues that Maria Montessori can be considered a significant reference point for new reflections and comparisons on the origin of life, on research concerning the cosmos in all its dynamic manifestations, and on how the sciences of education can appropriate and reprocess these contents¹².

3. Maria Montessori in India

With regard to her stay in India, an important text is the biography of Maria Montessori, edited by Paola Giovetti which traces the salient features of that experience. By now, from the years immediately following its formation and experimentation, the Method also finds admirers in India. As Giovetti writes, the initial contact takes place in

⁸ Furio Pesci refers here to the religious ones, which are also present in the previous ones, but now expressly and organically included in the Doctor's pedagogy (from the volume on Self-Education in Elementary Schools to The Secret of Infancy).

⁹ G. Galeazzi, *L'educazione cosmica per un nuovo umanesimo*, in "Vita dell'infanzia", n. 3/4, 2005, pp. 22-26.

¹⁰ F. Cambi, *L'educazione cosmica da Maria Montessori a noi*, in "Vita dell'infanzia", n. 3/4, 2005, pp. 29-30.

¹¹ R. Fornaca, *Montessori e l'istanza dell'educazione cosmica*, in "Vita dell'infanzia", n. 3/4, 2005, pp. 18-21.

¹² *Ivi*, p. 21.

1913¹³ when a student from Mysore takes part in the first international course in Rome. Other students then begin to participate in similar initiatives and, in the twenties, the Method will be translated into Gujarati and Hindi. In that same period, Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, follows a Montessori course in London, and subsequently decides to establish a Montessori section in the Guindy School. For many years Maria Montessori received numerous invitations to hold courses and informative meetings for teachers in India, among them that of Annie Besant in 1917 and that of the Calcutta University in 1932; until, in 1939, she decided to accept the call of George Sydney Arundale, successor to Annie Besant, as president of the Theosophical Society.

In a context characterized by a small number of children attending schools and high rates of abandonment, the representatives of the Theosophical Society become promoters of a renewal of the school system, so that education could be increasingly accessible to everyone. During this first stay in India, Maria Montessori came into contact with Arundale's wife, the dancer Rukmini Devi, founder of the Kalashetra Academy¹⁴ in 1936, aimed at enhancing the ancient Indian tradition in the fields of dance, singing, acting and of music. The Kalashetra headquarters (including a large theater, a library, an elementary and secondary school, a museum) is located near the headquarters of the Theosophical Society: it is, as Ela Elackert says in his text "Concretizing Cosmic Education in India, a Montessori Historical Account"¹⁵, of «a living example of cosmic education», from which Maria Montessori draws significant influences. It is no coincidence that, precisely in those premises and thanks to the close collaboration between the two women, a Children's Home and a Montessori primary school opened for the first time in India.

When moving from Adyar to Kodaikanal, Maria Montessori had the opportunity to observe the coexistence in some schools of younger and older children, indigenous and European¹⁶, tracing the common characteristics of human beings in education. Here she holds those courses whose contents will flow into the texts "Education for a new world" and "How to educate human potential"¹⁷, in which she condenses the basic elements of cosmic education. As Giovetti highlights, in those years, Maria Montessori consolidates relationships of mutual esteem and influence with Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, who recognize in her the figure of a potential, important promoter of an education in dialogue and intercultural encounters within of Indian society.

4. Cosmic vision and cosmic plan

In his article entitled "Maria Montessori's cosmic vision, cosmic plan, and cosmic education", Camillo Grazzini reports on and analyzes the fundamental elements of the cosmic vision, the cosmic plan and cosmic education – three expressions which represent complementary aspects of a unique way of thinking.

¹³ P. Giovetti, *Maria Montessori*, Rome, Mediterranee, 2009, p. 99.

¹⁴ The term means "field of the arts".

¹⁵ Ela Eckert, *Concretizing Cosmic Education in India, a Montessori Historical Account*, in "NAMTA Journal", n. 2, 2005.

¹⁶ M. Duffy, D. Duffy, *Children of the Universe*, Hollidaysburg, Parent Child Press, 2002, p. 3.

¹⁷ D. Kahn, *L'esperienza di Kodaikanal (India): interviste a Lena Wikramaratne a Mario M. Montessori Sr.*, in G. Honegger Fresco, ed., *Montessori perché no?*, cit., p. 171.

The word *cosmos* derives from the ancient Greek *kosmos* which means “order”, or better, “a whole regulated by an order”. Applied to the context of Montessori’s thought, this order finds its expression in the cosmic vision as a way to look at the world in its unity on its widest scale, within which all inorganic and organic beings are ecologically connected in countless ways in order “to form a whole unity”¹⁸. Humankind is here considered according to its biological and psychological aspects, conscious and unconscious, transversal to all ages, differences, affinities and to all forms of sociality. Human beings, animals, plants and all other objects of the creation inhabit the cosmic plan which consists in an integrated structure (or a cosmic organization) where everything that exists has a task to fulfill, following a global design. Within this framework Sun, Earth, water and air act on a large scale and follow the cosmic laws according to their own nature; plants and animals behave in the same way in smaller environments, they are guided in their actions by a universal intelligence which is characterized as an impulse, a desire, an “unconscious” guide in the direction of evolution. Each agent, therefore, has its own mandate to carry on, not in an autonomous way, but in correlation with a multitude of other mandates.

Even the trees that purify the air, herbs which take vitamins from the sun, corals which keep clean the waters of the oceans where many creatures live that would be destroyed if there were not the work of purifiers; even animals which inhabit the earth are unaware of their cosmic task, without which the harmony of the creation and the preservation of life would not exist. They do all this work as they were driven by their vital instincts which make them breathe and eat for their self-preservation.

And yet «The bee, depriving the flower of its nectar, knows only its own needs or those of the hive, it does not know that the need of the flower of its visit is just as great for the purposes of its reproduction»¹⁹. In the book “From childhood to Adolescence” she came to the conclusion that «on the one hand, therefore, there are always destructive physical forces, and on the other hand, there are reconstructive vital forces»²⁰, which contribute to the wellbeing of other living beings.

Maria Montessori, together with her son Mario, who was also her collaborator, supporter, advisor, classmate of studies and observations²¹, and with some students, develops a collection of stories on various protagonists of the creation (the universe, the Solar system, the Earth, the human beings): these stories are rich in mental images and can

¹⁸ M. Montessori, *Come educare il potenziale umano*, Milan, Garzanti, 1970, p. 19.

¹⁹ These examples are drawn by “Come educare il potenziale umano”, pp. 63-64.

²⁰ M. Montessori, *Dall’infanzia all’adolescenza*, cit., p. 61.

²¹ Mario says this. The research on “cosmic education” began in a small school at Kodaikanal, India, initially attended by four European children aged between two and half and four and half. Mario, a keen observer and connoisseur of natural phenomena of the plant and animal kingdoms, visited them and they undertook some trips together during which he got them interested in nature, and in the observation of plants and flowers. «Biology is not just about plants – Mario tells –, but it also has to do with animals and the relationships between them. [...] So we created terrariums to discover the collaboration between animals and plants. We took one animal at a time, for some time; we looked at him in our terrarium, then we brought him back to his environment. When children’s curiosity seemed to be satisfied, we were looking for another animal in another environment». In the evening Maria and Mario discussed together with the school teacher Lena Wikramaratne about the life of animals and plants, inserted in nature in different ways and with different functions, about children’s observations and curiosities.

awaken curiosity, arouse interest and stimulate the imagination; the latter is considered as a “great power of the child at an age between 7 and 12 years, from which the representation of reality must emerge. Active and participatory experiences, aimed at bringing children on one side to the key concepts of scientific disciplines, can arise from the cosmic fairy tales; from another perspective, they can let them understand and interpret the interdependencies also implicit among the elements of the creation. In this way, they can perceive themselves as part of a whole, involved in common designs and with common purposes. The cosmic stories, also known as “Great Lessons”, are five in number and their titles enable the reader to guess their topics clearly: The story of God who has no hands (from the primary formation of the universe to the cooling of the Earth); The coming of life on Earth (from the first unicellular beings to the whole evolution of forms); The coming of human beings (from the Neanderthal man to the Homo Sapiens Sapiens); The Story of signs (language as a means of communication); the Story of numbers (the language developed by human beings to fix and transmit discoveries and inventions)²².

In this framework, what is the task of the human being? Maria Montessori distinguishes two tasks: the first one is directed toward children, the second one toward adults.

The child is called on to build and form «his personality by virtue of his hidden energies» through a process which is «rigorously the same in all continents»²³. In this regard, Maria Montessori talks of «education from the birth», stressing the need to give life to a new education, different from an education meant as a mere transmission of knowledge, but instead an education aimed at the full development of all human potentialities from the first months of the child’s life. The scholar highlights how childhood is the richest period in terms of development, evolution, and acquisition of fundamental skills, especially the first two years of life. She underlines how it would be a great mistake to underestimate and disregard this essential moment of life, because in doing so, the subject would not fully develop his own abilities, and would lose fundamental resources for a healthy and original growth²⁴.

This new concept of education takes its cue from the discovery of extraordinary child’s abilities since his early years, because, despite being physically and psychically incomplete, and seeming inert as a being, he shows an incredible cerebral and psychic activity. In this aspect lies the great difference between an animal and a human being: while the former learns rather quickly all that there is to know for its own survival as soon as it comes into contact with its environment, the latter spends his first year of life for developing his intelligence, preparing the «wonderful surprise of his individuality»²⁵; in fact, at an early stage of life, the child is engaged in doing the hard work of storing and absorbing everything that comes from the external environment and this task belongs to his cognitive abilities, so that, during this period, there is an intense psychic activity²⁶. Through the activity of this “absorbent mind” the child instructs himself, as if

²² D. Duffy, M. Duffy, *Educazione cosmica in concreto*, in G. Honneger Fresco, eds, *Montessori perché no?*, cit., p. 191.

²³ M. Montessori, *La mente assorbente*, in A. Scocchera, eds, *Il metodo del bambino e la formazione dell'uomo. Scritti e documenti inediti e rari*, Rome, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2002, p. 156.

²⁴ M. Montessori, *La mente del bambino*, Milan, Garzanti, 1952.

²⁵ M. Montessori, *Il segreto dell'infanzia*, Milan, Garzanti, 1950, p. 45.

²⁶ M. Montessori, *Educazione per un mondo nuovo*, Milan, Garzanti, 1970.

he were guided, before human intelligence develops, by an inner master²⁷; in this sense, Maria Montessori shows how the true education is a natural process that occurs spontaneously in the subject, and through the direct experience of the world around him²⁸. For these reasons a human being has a longer childhood than any other animal: he is engaged not only in a single path of development, but in a process of creation through which he defines language, physical movement, every means of intelligent expression, as well as the physical organs necessary to exercise these skills. This creation does not occur through conscious will, but thanks to a “subconscious” mind which has the task of both registering what happens in the child’s environment, and discriminating and selecting the elements he must absorb according to their importance²⁹. In this way the child becomes an explorer. «The instinct to move in the environment, passing from one discovery to another, belongs to nature itself and to education: education must consider the child who walks as an explorer»³⁰, that is «the child as explorer, spectator, and protagonist of the complex and ambivalent society of adults»³¹.

Nobody has taught it to the child who has learned through his own individual activity, gaining knowledge from the surrounding environment and from his own experiences. For this reason, the teacher’s and the parents’ task will not consist in sharing and transmitting notions and knowledge, but to prepare the environment in a way that it does not hinder the free development of the child, instead fostering the child by providing him with cultural incentives and a non-directive intervention³². As Maria Montessori writes in “The absorbent mind”, «the child is father of humanity and civilization, he is our teacher, also with regard to his own education. This is not an exaggerated exaltation of childhood: it is a big truth»³³.

Once an adult, the subject has the task to gain a new level of life that surpasses the natural one and that implies his responsibility as a builder of a “super-nature”, in which the elements already present at the beginning are enriched and strengthened with new meanings and functions owing to the cooperation of all human beings³⁴: as Maria Montessori argues in her book “How to educate the human potential”, the human being with his intelligence has been able to transform and enrich the world³⁵, he is one of the greatest cosmic forces, he is the prosecutor of creation. She thus strongly states:

²⁷ M. Montessori, *La mente del bambino*, cit.

²⁸ M. Montessori, *Educazione per un mondo nuovo*, cit.

²⁹ *Ivi*.

³⁰ M. Montessori, *La mente del bambino*, cit., p. 162.

³¹ F. Frabboni, *La scuola dell’infanzia: la prima frontiera dell’educazione*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1990, pp. 74-75.

³² *Ivi*. And again: «But if we consider education as the development of latent possibilities, rather than using this word, we must use another: cultivation. The educator must cultivate the existing potentialities in the child so that they develop and expand. We need to use this most sensitive period of human life to improve humankind». M. Montessori, *La capacità creatrice della prima infanzia*, in A. Scocchera, ed., *Il metodo del bambino e la formazione dell’uomo. Scritti e documenti inediti e rari*, Rome, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2002, p. 135. And cultivating humankind means «to activate the occult psychic energies existing in the child for giving to this flower of humankind some richer and more beautiful forms». *Ivi*, p. 136.

³³ M. Montessori, *La mente assorbente*, cit., pp. 150-151.

³⁴ M. Montessori, *La solidarietà umana nel tempo e nello spazio*, in A. Scocchera, a cura di, *Il metodo del bambino e la formazione dell’uomo. Scritti e documenti inediti e rari*, cit., p. 141.

³⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 140-141.

Of course, it is evident that man has a mission. He has been able to draw from the earth's hidden richness, wonderful energies, and he has created a superworld, or, if we want, a supernature; and by gradually building this supernature, man has elevated himself, and from a natural man he has become a supernatural man. Nature is a level that has existed for centuries, supernature is another level which man has been building. Today's man no longer lives in nature, but in the supernature. [...] man depends on man. How many men work in order that the bread we eat comes to us! And a fruit coming from distant lands can represent an entire organization of people, an incredible and serious organization which holds together human society³⁶.

For this reason, Maria Montessori speaks also of "cosmic philosophy" with reference to human destiny or task³⁷.

5. Cosmic Education

Definitions of the cosmic vision and cosmic plan constitute the prerequisites necessary for embarking on cosmic education, and at the same time, the latter is the tool through which it is possible to consolidate these concepts. According to Maria Montessori, the most appropriate age to bring children closer to cosmic education is between 6 and 12 years, which she defines as «the time of culture» during which the human spirit is organized. This lifespan is compared to a field intended for sowing wheat, which can welcome many seeds, in quantities no longer reachable in the following periods of life. Cosmic education is, as Schocchera writes, «a new way of observing and interpreting the phenomena of life»³⁸: it allows the child to approach the world in a global way, by perceiving its unity, the meaning and the goals that move the single elements. Or better «for cosmic education we mean an effective preparation of the new generations to understand that the whole humankind tends to unite in one organism»³⁹. This type of vision allows the child to move in space and time, capturing the evolutionary changes in the world and its ecological functioning. Exploring and studying its entirety, the child also comes into contact with the complexity of the world characterized by the intertwining of cosmic forces, natural laws, and human interventions, capturing the essence of a unitary, orderly and harmonious structure. Within this complexity the child develops the ability to grasp the multiple interpretations present in the world, whether they are independent or interdependent, and thus to appreciate the importance of cooperation at a global level, perceived in a non-abstract way, but at the same time tangible and spiritual.

In other words, cosmic education allows the child to be aware and familiar with tasks and duties of a global nature, understood as necessary to the functioning of the whole world system, which implies the taking of responsibility in its small daily dimension by everyone, also in order to strengthen «links of interdependence and social solidarity

³⁶ M. Montessori, *Educazione e pace*, Rome, Opera Montessori, 1949, pp. 98-99.

³⁷ We refer here to the Conference held by Maria Montessori for the Vereeninging van Bijeenkomste van Montessori Leid(st)ers (Union of Montessori's Directors' Meetings) in Netherland, Sunday, the 25th September 1938, in "Il Quaderno Montessori", n. 109, p. 62.

³⁸ A. Scocchera, *Dentro l'educazione cosmica*, in "Vita dell'infanzia", n. 3/4, 2005, pp. 35-46.

³⁹ Maria Montessori, *Che cos'è l'educazione cosmica*, in G.H. Fresco, a cura di, *Montessori perché no?*, cit., p. 165.

among people living in the whole earth»⁴⁰. In the same vein, children can become an active means of exhibiting content, values, and attitudes learned and reworked at school, thus becoming promoters of new plots and changes. Practices of this kind, in which children transmit knowledge to their parents, have been realized concretely and are mentioned in the article written by Camillo Grazzini⁴¹. The revolutionary significance of the experience of Maria Montessori lies in the fact that education transcends the boundaries of educational institutions for projecting themselves also in the contexts of their own lives, thereby involving families. As early as 1907, in correspondence with the famous experiment of San Lorenzo, we find the beginnings of this particular intentionality.

In this and so many other ways, Maria Montessori, as Giacomo Cives points out, expresses full «attestation and trust in the child's potentialities»⁴², as she considers him at the same time «hope and promise for humankind»⁴³. As a “forgotten citizen”, the child becomes the one who holds the fate of the «future human power», which is why the society is required not only to take the child in consideration, but above all to provide him with «an environment suitable for his vital needs and his spiritual liberation». Maria Montessori thus arrives at theorizing the introduction of a Ministry of the Child and a Party of the Child which can promote his dignity and recognize his social value.

In this way, cosmic education opens up to every responsibility and commitment to stimulate all children to build themselves as “new men” in a “new world” characterized by solidarity and social responsibility, in which peace comes to assume a central value. This is the topic of the book “Education and peace”, that collects the reports held in occasion of many conferences to which Maria Montessori participated (in 1932 at the Bureau International d'Education in Geneva, in 1936 in Brussels and London, in 1937 in Copenhagen and at the International School of Philosophy of the Scientific Society in Utrecht and, finally in 1939 at the World Fellowship of Faiths). Peace is understood as one of the main “social questions” involving the whole humankind and it is considered according to two interpretations: on the one hand, it allows the “development of human values”, and above all, of moral values; on the other hand, it give to men the opportunity to make them aware of their *goals*, which are the goals of their work in the economy of the whole. The horizon of peace can be approached only through “the agreement”, in turn possible when conflicts are managed and resolved in a non-violent way. If this last function belongs to politics, education remains the universal task to «build peace among men constantly». A child will have a propensity for peace if he is brought up to love even before he has something to possess; a child who has had the opportunity to express love towards the environment and human beings, finding joy and enthusiasm in relationships with people, formed in the conception of a world of being industrious and supportive, and expressing gratitude for the work carried out by others. Educated thus, a “better man” will be able to be an active citizen of a so-called “unique Nation” that is configured as a kind of “organism” absorbing all humanity in itself. In this Unique Nation, peace is

⁴⁰ M. Montessori, *La solidarietà umana nel tempo e nello spazio*, cit., p. 143

⁴¹ C. Grazzini, *Maria Montessori's cosmic vision, cosmic plan, and cosmic education*, in “The NAMTA Journal”, n. 1, 2013, pp. 107-116.

⁴² G. Cives, *La pedagogia scomoda: da Pasquale Villari a Maria Montessori*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1994, p. 154.

⁴³ M. Montessori, *Educazione e pace*, cit., p. 41.

characterized as a universal principle which reflects the deepest nature of people, erecting itself as the foundation of the social equilibrium.

It is necessary to put peace at the centre of educational processes, and to educate to a representation of peace which does not correspond to a partial truce between conflicting social bodies, but rather, to «a permanent state that embraces the whole of humankind»⁴⁴. In this way, man learns to act for the global interest, even before his own individual purposes, feeling fully involved in his “cosmic mission” as a subject «at the service of humankind».

6. Conclusion

We can certainly recognize that cosmic education represents a fundamental direction of the original core of Montessori’s thought since the early years of the Twentieth Century. It is possible, for example, to find traces of it in her famous speech on sexual education, held in occasion of the Women’s National Congress in 1908, when she writes:

the child who loves the wonderful will feel the wonderful sides of nature. What is the fairy who advances with the wand and who makes a large palace appear, what is she in comparison to the pollen, to the golden and divine dust which flies on the wings of the wind and which contains in itself oaks, palm trees, corn that nourishes man, the most colorful and scented flowers on the earth? To this magical wand of the universe, to this divine magical wand the child should direct his imagination, delighted in the contemplation of life as it happens.

Therefore, cosmic education can be considered as a kind of *filo rosso* that continually pervades the Montessorian conception. The greatest actuality of the cosmic education lies at least in two orders of consideration: on the one hand, in terms of content, it aims at making the different disciplinary fields interact (scientific, historical, and geographical education, etc.) in a unified vision and development of knowledge. As Maria Montessori writes, «Studies separated from each another do not favor human intelligence that continually seeks relationships between things and unity or, if you wish, each separate study is in a certain sense chaotic, whereas if we bring order to the different sciences, we not only understand the final goal of all them, but we take advantage of them on the level of knowledge»⁴⁵. On the other hand, on an existential level, it embraces and summarizes in itself the concepts of “ecological education”, “education for peace”, “education for the world”, to the point of recalling implications of ethical and aesthetic education. It is therefore a knowledge, understood as a whole, being aimed at educating a subject which is a “builder of humanity” since its childhood. In this way, personalities develop positively «by educating to greatness and vastness» and thus overcoming the limits of exclusive individualism, possession and domination, in the perspective of the unification of Humanity and Nature, of universal peace and the “Cosmic Plan”.

⁴⁴ M. Montessori, *Educazione e pace*, cit., p. 43.

⁴⁵ Conference held by Maria Montessori for the Vereeninging van Bijeenkomste van Montessori Leid(st)ers (Union of Montessori’s Directors’ Meetings) in the Netherlands, on Sunday, 25th September 1938, in “Il Quaderno Montessori”, n. 109, p. 64.

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