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THE PORTICOES OF BOLOGNA

"I was very tempted to stay here in Bologna, extremely quiet, joyful and hospitable city."

The Letters of Giacomo Leopardi, Giacomo Leopardi

The laughs of friends gathered around a bar table resonate in the shade of the porticoes, like in a film directed by Pupi Avati; two young people start dancing *polka chinata*, the traditional dance from Bologna back in fashion over the last few years, and the delicious smell of *tortellini in brodo* lingers under the arcades, to remind passers-by that it is lunchtime. All over the porticoes you can breathe the "extremely hospitable" soul of Bologna that conquered even Leopardi: 62 km of columns, vaults and arcades, between the city centre and the outskirts, creating a microcosm where the boundary between public and private disappears and families open their doors to the outside world. It all started in the High Middle Ages when, to increase the house surface area, the floors above the ground were extended to the street side and, to prevent the new overhanging spaces from collapsing, columns were erected to support them. Then, in 1288, a municipal law required all houses to have a private portico for public use, high and large enough to allow the passage of a man on a horseback. Whether made of wood, stone or concrete, the porticoes have always been the heart of public life, the place where people like to stroll, where they "can come and go sheltered from the sun and the rain, amuse themselves, go shopping and about their business", as Goethe wrote in his *Italian Journey*. The Porticoes of Bologna represent the city's identity, they are a concentrate of "emilianità", the spirit of those born in Emilia Romagna.



SERIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE
UNESCO DOSSIER: 1650
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: FUZHOU, CHINA
DATE OF INSCRIPTION: 2021



CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The public porticoes, as a model of active social life, at any given moment and in any climatic conditions, are an ancient urban element of global interest that in Bologna are represented in an exceptional and complete way from a chronological, typological and functional point of view.



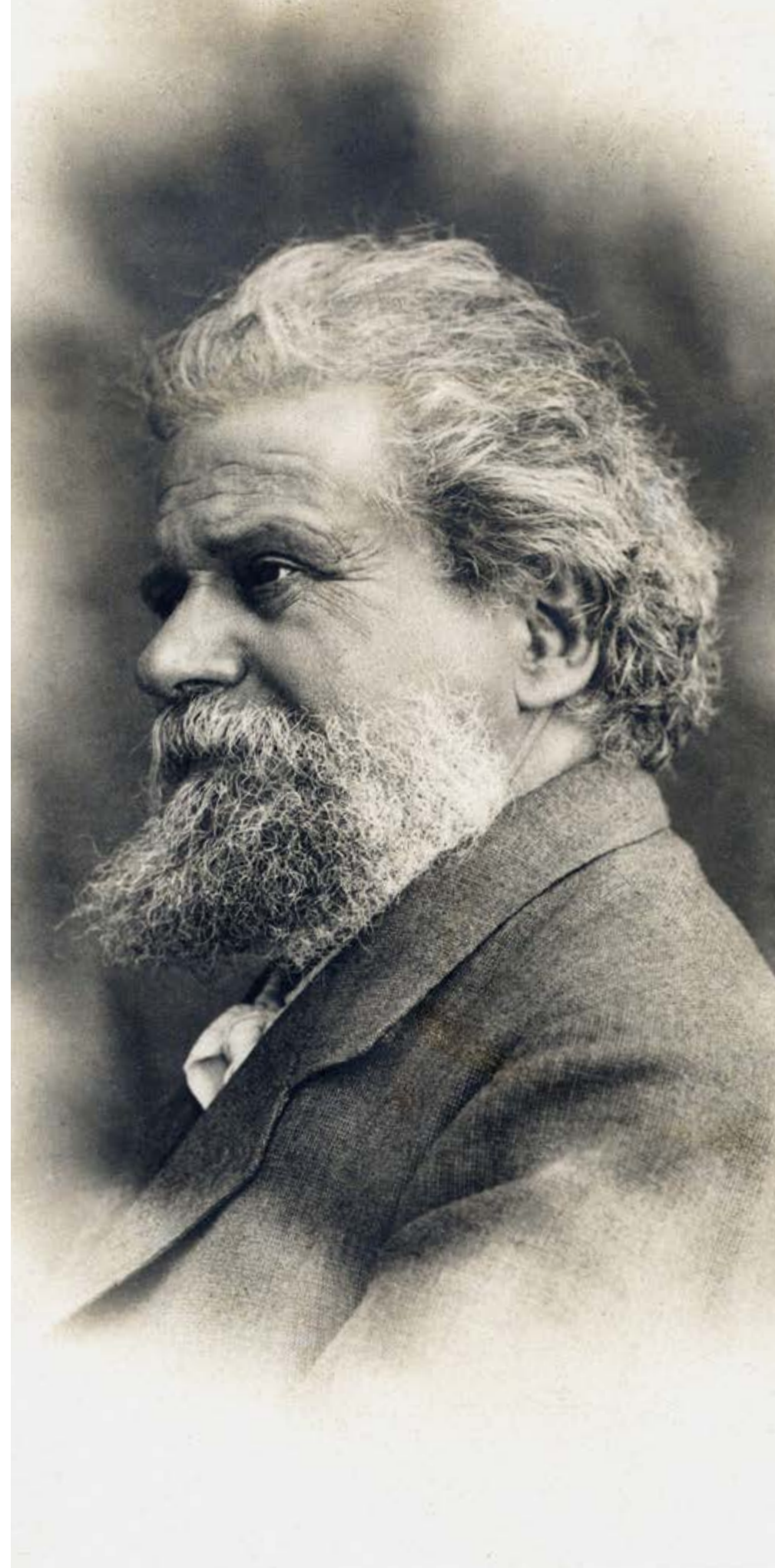
“Oh how poetic we were, but with no decency or fear / And the old drunkards seemed literature / Oh how artistic we all were, but with no decency or shame / Lulled between the porticoes thighs of mother Bologna.”

That is what Francesco Guccini says in his song Bologna. Here is an itinerary for walking slowly under the porticoes of this extraordinary city.

We start right away with a record-breaking monument: the **1 loggia of the Archbishop's Palace**, among the most ancient porticoes built of stone (it dates back to 1293), is certainly the tallest in Bologna (almost 10 m high). The next stop is the elegant **2 portico of the Basilica of San Giacomo Maggiore**, with its grooved sandstone columns. It started to be erected in 1477 at the behest of Giovanni II Bentivoglio, who commissioned also the construction of the **Oratory of Santa Cecilia** (1505-6). To see one of the eight wooden porticoes left in the city, we go to **3 Casa Isolani**. This tall structure, dating back to 1200, is supported by beams made of oak wood. This portico is linked to the legend of the three arrows, stuck into the wooden covering, which (people say) were supposed to

have punished a beautiful adulteress. The next visit is to the largest portico in Bologna: the **4 four-sided portico of the Basilica of Santa Maria dei Servi**, supported by slender marble columns which confer extreme lightness to the whole structure. Started in the late 14th century, it was completed in the 19th century. Inside the church you can admire the *Maestà di Santa Maria dei Servi* painted by Cimabue. Then we head to **5 Casa Berò** to enjoy a nice example of “*beccatelli*”, the corbels, supporting the exposed brick, overhang, creating semi-porticoes without columns. Not far, there is one of the most elegant walkways in the city: the long **6 portico of Archiginnasio**, also called “*del Pavaglione*”, with its 30 arcades and marble flooring, studded with fossil shells. It was built in 1563

by Antonio Morandi, from the family of architects known as Terribilia. We then go back to Via Barberia to reach the narrow Via de' Gombruti: at number 7 we can admire a more recent **7 wooden portico** erected in the 15th century despite the municipal ordinance that banned the construction of wooden porticoes already since the end of the 13th century. Our itinerary is about to end. After searching for the **8 narrowest portico** in the city (only 95 cm large) in Via Senzanome, we reach the **9 longest portico in Bologna and in the world**: 3,796 km, from Meloncello Arch to Sanctuary of San Luca that, from the top of Colle della Guardia, watches over the city like the precious icon of the Blessed Virgin kept inside. It is usual, for many Bologna citizens, to walk along its entire length.



CASA CARDUCCI

“And I recall moments with a sense of nostalgia the solemn porticoed streets looking like classical sceneries [...]”

Bologna nel 1888, special supplement of *Il Secolo*, 10th June 1888, for the Centenary of the University, Giosuè Carducci

A 10-minute walk from the four-sided portico of the Basilica of Santa Maria dei Servi will take you to the house of the first Italian Nobel prize winner for literature, who was a lecturer at Bologna University from 1860 to 1904: Giosuè Carducci. Peculiarities: the clock in the dining room stopped at the time of the poet's death, the Nobel prize is clearly visible, the 40,000 texts were orderly arranged by the poet himself, a framed fragment of Petrarca's tunic is kept in his study room, there is even the armchair where Garibaldi was laid down when he was wounded in Aspromonte.



'[...] IN THE CENTRE OF BOLOGNA / NO CHILDREN GET LOST [...].'

That is what Lucio Dalla sang in *Disperato erotico stomp*. And we might say, jokingly, that in the centre of Bologna no children are "found", because the porticoes are the favourite place where generations of inhabitants have been playing hide and seek. Bologna is a city tailor-made for children, with a large pedestrian historic centre, where it is possible to ride the bike everywhere and where several events and museums are conceived

for young people. Starting from the

1 Giovanni Capellini Geological and Palaeontological Museum, that has over 160 years of history and a collection of nearly a million finds kept inside the original 19th-century furniture – skeletons of prehistoric elephants and whales and a model of diplodocus, a Jurassic herbivorous dinosaur arrived here in 1909 from America. The overview of unmissable places for children of all ages includes also the **2 Salaborsa Ragazzi Library**, where several events are organised, such as meetings between newborn babies' parents, obstetricians and librarians, workshops for children and teenagers,

activities for adolescents and young adults including book clubs, workshops, internships, events, exhibitions and competitions. The library also provides spaces where people can chat, listen to music, play and watch films. Another must-see venue for under 18s is **3 Testoni Theatre**, Bologna's permanent theatre with a programme of events for children and youngsters: 200 shows a year intended for schools during the week and families at the weekend. Bologna will soon have its **4 MUBA**, the museum of boys and girls, including a park and an indoor space where activities and workshops will be organised. In the suburbs of Bologna, there are three truly unique museums: at **5 Ducati Museum** it is possible to go through the over 90 years of history of this company, from its beginnings, when it made radio sets, moving on to the manufacturing of the first engines for bicycles, until the current production. The gallery displays 18 road bikes and 23 racing bikes, from 1946 up to now, next to the trophies, the pilots' original racing suits and information panels. The Borgo Panigale Experience includes also the visit to the factory. In Sant'Agata Bolognese there are the headquarters of **6 Lamborghini**. During the visit to the plant you will see the production lines of Aventador and Huracán, perfect combinations of design and technology. Besides admiring the dedication of the workers in building these two jewels piece by piece and learning more about each manufacturing phase, you will also see the huge engines, the customized accessories and the leather goods department. Around 15 km north-west of Bologna, the **7 Gelato Museum Carpigiani** tells you the story of artisanal gelato and its production, with tastings, demonstration lessons, workshops for families and masterclasses to become gelato masters.



KIDS



THE PORTICOES OF BOLOGNA in books

Reading suggestions to get in the heart of Bologna city life.

• **Ottocento bolognese. Nuovi ricordi di Bologna che scompare**, Alfredo Testoni (1933). Anecdotes and memories told through the irony of the "poet of Bologna", famous especially for *Il cardinale Lambertini*, played on the silver screen by Gino Cervi.

• **Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal** (1977) and **Tutto Zanardi** (1981), Andrea Pazienza, or Paz. Following the pencil of the artist, who attended DAMS (school of music & art and performing arts), you can discover the streets, the porticoes and the facts dating back to the 1970s and '80s, during the students' upheaval.

• **Jack Frusciante Has Left the Band**, Enrico Brizzi (1994). A gripping coming-

of-age story of 17-year-old Alex, who by drifting away from the good and respectful morality of his high school under the porticoes, offers a picture of Bologna in the 1990s.

• **Almost Blue**, Carlo Lucarelli (1999). In search of a serial killer in a dark Bologna: "Under the porticoes there is shade but, sometimes, when the sun goes away, they get dark".

• **La notte del Pratello**, Emidio Clementi (2001). An immersion in the underground atmosphere of Bologna of the 1990s, between the porticoes of Via del Pratello, led by the voice of the band Massimo Volume.

• **Tango e gli altri: romanzo di una raffica, anzi tre**, Lorian Macchiavelli, Francesco Guccini (2007). In this co-written novel, Bologna "with its low and silent porticoes, its ancient atmosphere, its twilight" is the setting of a choral story about partisans' resistance, without hiding its dark sides.

• **Gli amici del bar Margherita**, Pupi Avati (2009). Genuine and exuberant like Bologna in the 1950s, this group of friends, whose hangout is the bar under the porticoes of Via Saragozza, spend their time having fun with jokes, irony and the emotions of a daily life vividly described by Pupi Avati.

• **A Bologna le bici erano come i cani**, Paolo Nori (2010). The citizens of Bologna never separated from their bicycles, they carried them also when they were walking, like dogs on a leash. Everyday stories collected under the porticoes, at the tables of a café or in the hallway of a house.

Children's books:

• **La voce del cortile. Di bambini, di ragazzi che crescevano a Bologna**, Andrea Bartoli (2023). This delicate novel, suitable for adults and children, gives voice to some adolescents from Bologna that play and imagine their future in their house courtyard.