Instead of offering the conventional, anonymous, box-type classroom solution, they deliberately broke up the space into a number of linked learning areas, each with a special function and character which positively invited a particular activity.”

(Eric Pearson, 1972)

In 2013 the Italian Ministry of Education has set up a working group in order to draw a new framework for the building of new schools at national level. INDIRE research team had the aim to provide a new vision of the schools spatial organization based on the outcomes of educational research and on the analysis of best practices in Europe. The necessity to analyze the relation between space organization and pedagogy emerged in Italy for three main reasons: the rise of innovative student centered pedagogies, the shift of focus on learning outcomes from knowledge to competencies and the widespread of devices and digital contents in classroom. The above elements required a deeper analysis of the role of the learning environment considering the space as a “third teacher” (Malaguzzi, 1992) within an ecolo-systemic approach (Brofenbrenner, 1989).

The research results promote a new vision of the school and the learning environment. The classroom should be designed as a multipurpose space, where a students can work and play and the learning space should become a learning landscape (Weyland, Attia, 2015), a place where formal and informal learning come together to focus on individual and concentration dimension.

The Institute
INDIRE - Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research) is the national research institute of the Italian Ministry of Education. It was founded in 1925 as a National Educational Exhibition with the aim of collecting and exploiting school activities of that period. Over the years, it has always accompanied the evolution of the Italian school system. Today, the Institute is the reference point for educational research. INDIRE promotes school innovation processes: developing new teaching models, testing the use of ITC in education and training, redefining the relationship between space and time in learning and teaching.
The findings of INDIRE’s research on that topic can be expressed with the formula 1+4 learning spaces for schools of the new millennium.

“1” stands for the former classroom, now a modern learning environment that is open to the rest of the school and to the world.

“4” stands for the four school’s main types of spaces: Agorà, Individual area, Informal area, Exploration lab.

The school as a whole is a learning landscape enabling different types of activities where flexible settings and network technologies are available.

The learning space model is based on multiple theoretical levels which are focused on different nested strands of the learning context (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The school is not regarded as the sum of classrooms (Airoldi, 1978) but as a place that includes the teaching dimension, the social context and the social relationships (Leemans & von Ahlefeld, 2013, Lefebvre, 1991).

Four different lines of investigation:
» identification of case studies at European level;
» analysis of educational policies that foster innovative learning spaces;
» in depth study of technical guidelines in different countries in the school building sector;
» review of literature in this field.

The research methodology includes desk research, comparative analysis of the international technical specifications, observation visits to innovative European and Italian schools, semi-structured interviews to architects, pedagogists, head-teachers, teachers, students, parents.

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TECHNOLOGICAL AREA

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LEARNING SPACES 1+4
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