



ISTITUTO DEGLI INNOCENTI

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The "Istituto degli Innocenti" (Institutes of the Innocents) in Florence has been working for nearly six centuries on behalf of the family and the child. At the time when it was established, during the first half of the fifteenth century, it was the first institution in the known world devoted exclusively to child care.

Still today, the Institute is accommodated at Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, in the building of the historical Hospital designed and built by Filippo Brunelleschi, which turned it into a wonderful example of Renaissance architecture. With the passing of time, it has kept on being enriched by the contribution of famous artists. The history of the Institute is immense and, in addition to its complex artistic and monumental heritage, it develops over an age-old experience in caring for children. .

The commitment to the protection of children and their rights has never witnessed a stop, even though it was brought up to date in response to the evolution of culture and society. Suffice it to think that, while in the early 1960s it was still devoted exclusively to reception and care (it accommodated nearly 300 children in a state of abandonment), to-date the Istituto degli Innocenti is a center of services and diversified activities: a home for the reception of minors, a home sheltering pregnant women and mothers with children; a number of day nurseries and supplementary educational services; a center engaged in the documentation, research, analysis and training on matters related to children, adolescents, and families.

This transformation has taken place through a number of stages, including the enforcement of the special adoption law (1967), the law on the first few day nurseries (1971) and the reform of the family law (1975), which contributed to the identification of innovative solutions to shelter and care for the children that, at that time, were still institutionalized. It was a time that marked the beginning of the so-called de-institutionalization process (which has meant an opening to the outside world and a de-concentration). In the early 1980s, the average number of children being cared for and the average time of their stay in the Istituto degli Innocenti were already in keeping with standards that are deemed acceptable today.

Meanwhile, the Institute started experimenting and verifying the fundamental ideas that were later to lead to the reorganization of the project for a Home for pregnant women and mothers with children (1988) and a Home for Children (1989). This period was finalized by the opening of "Casa Le Rondini" (The Swallows Home) that was to accommodate pregnant women and mothers with children.

At the same time, the Institute saw to its renewal on two additional fronts, with the opening of its initial day nurseries (1971), and the setting up of a study center. The latter was to represent a center of excellence on issues related to infancy, thanks also to the decision taken by the Unicef IRC - backed up by the Italian Government - to locate within the "Spedale degli Innocenti" (Innocents Hospital) its international research center (1987). Then, it was the turn of the Tuscany Region that, with its laws nos. 45/90, 25/94 and, finally, 31/2000, invested on the Institute for the development of documentation and training activities supporting the social and educational policies addressing children and families.

This role was strengthened and extended even further when the Italian Government decided to entrust the Institute with the activities of the National Center of Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence, set up in pursuance of law no. 451/97, which also saw to the implementation and promotion of law no. 285/97. Since then, the Institute has been recognized as the national and European reference framework for the promotion of the culture of the rights of the child.

The Institute remains a public corporation, and its current set up provides for a Board of Directors appointed by the Tuscan Region, the Province and the Municipality of Florence, which proceeds to the appointment of a Chairperson.

From the experience in the services to the knowledge of children

Starting from the experience in managing services and in developing activities addressing children, families and institutions engaged in these sectors, the Institute has gained a specific expertise in getting to know the conditions of children and their needs and in determining the relative policies. The management of the services is characterized by a constant investment in the promotion of the educational innovation and qualification.

With reference to the educational services the Institute manages:

- three Day Nurseries
- a Center for Children and Parents, for playing and socialization activities addressing children of up to three years of age and their families.

Insofar as the reception services are concerned, the Institute manages:

- a Children's Home, a family-type temporary shelter for children of up to six years of age that are not recognized by or taken away from their families
- a "Mothers' Home", providing temporary shelter for pregnant mothers and mothers meeting with difficulties
- "The Swallows' Home", for mothers in the final period of their sheltered life.

Research and statistics

Since time immemorial, the Istituto degli Innocenti has been an institution that has engaged in and seen to the advance of the research on children. With the passing of time, in order to overcome the problems and emergencies connected with the reception of children, the ancient "Spedale" (Hospital) has experimented new puericultural and pediatric health care techniques and, in general, techniques supporting institutionalized children, playing often a leading role in the scientific debate in the matter and in the evolution of the very concept of child care.

Nowadays, its horizons have become wider and, since a number of years, acting as a partner of government bodies, as well as public and private organizations, the Institute has been carrying out an intense activity in the production of analyses, inquiries and

statistical data on the life conditions of children and the actual exercise of their rights, as well as on phenomena that, so far, have not been thoroughly considered or on problems connected with the actual operation of the processes to reform the child-care system.

To-date, the experience gained from its concrete attention to and direct contact with the living conditions of children, and not only those meeting with difficulties, still represents for the Institute a guideline for its operations that allows the research activity it carries out to be an effective support to the implementation and development of policies promoting and protecting the life conditions of children, contributing to the dissemination of adequate and reliable forms of knowledge and a greater awareness with respect to the issues that directly involve them.

With reference to this sector, the activity carried out by the Institute addresses primarily three contexts:

- research and inquiries
- statistics
- development of information systems and flows

The documentation activity and the Innocenti Library

The documentation activity carried out by the Institute purposes to support the policies addressing children and adolescents at a local, regional, national and international level, to promote the planning and design of measures and services in their favor, to contribute to the training of sectoral personnel through the knowledge and the analysis of information and aspects that characterize the condition of children and adolescents.

This activity addresses agencies within the state, regional and local administrations, services for children and adolescents, universities, study and research centers, and associations.

The documentary collection of the Institute specializes in the psychological, pedagogic, social, juridical and statistical themes related to childhood and adolescence.

Such documentation covers a variety of bibliographic, juridical, statistical, and film-related sectors, as well as projects and interventions in favor of children and adolescents.

Besides, there is also a variety of documentation typologies being treated: books, periodicals, articles, grey literature, VHS and DVD films, CD-ROMs, national and international regulations, statistical tables and projects.

The suitably catalogued documentation may be accessed by the public through the services offered by the Innocenti Library.

Promotion and training

The task of guaranteeing the exercise by children of their rights also entails a qualified action promoting and disseminating information on the initiatives and the activities carried out with and on behalf of children.

In its effort to attain this object, the Istituto degli Innocenti sets itself, at an international, national and regional level, as a person fully able to handle complex processes backing up the implementation of the government policies addressing children and adolescents.

Thanks to an experience gained in over ten years, enriched by the inclusion of this special sector of activity in an integrated system of functionalities and competences related also to other research and documentation contexts, the Institute provides technical, scientific and managerial support to public and private bodies to allow them to carry out complex processes in three major reference contexts: promotion, information and communication, training, regulation, evaluation and monitoring.

Cooperation arrangements

The Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence sees to the implementation of research, training, and documentation activities, as well as publishing initiatives in a cooperative effort with bodies, institutions and organizations at a local, regional, national and international level, in all matters related to childhood, adolescence and family policies.

The major current cooperative efforts relate to:

- · agreement with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, for the management of the activities of the National Center of Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence, in pursuance of Laws nos. 285/97 and 451/97. e 451/97
- · agreement with the Ministry for Equal Opportunities , for the realization of the draft Parliamentary report on the state of implementation of Law no. 269/98.
- · agreement with the Ministry of the Environment and the Protection of the Territory, for the implementation of the project of the Sustainable City for boys and girls.
- · agreement with the Commission for Intercountry Adoptions, for the implementation of the activities as laid down in Law no. 476/98.
- · outline agreement with I.R.C. - Unicef, for the cooperation in research, training and documentation activities related to children.
- · cooperation with I.R.C. - Unicef for the implementation of the project Children in Armed Conflict
- · the project ChildOnEurope, secretariat of the European network of the Child Monitoring Units, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies.
- · the cooperation with the Tuscany Region, in pursuance of the Regional Law no. 31/2000 for the management of the Regional Center of documentation on children and the Child Monitoring Unit.
- · the agreement with the Apulia Region, for the implementation of the research, training and documentation activity related to children, adolescents and families.
- · the agreement with the Florence Municipality, for the implementation of the research, training and documentation activity related to the Center for Placement in Foster Care.
- · various cooperation relationships with the Regions, for the implementation of training and consulting activities in the matter of educational and social policies for children and adolescents.
- · various cooperation relationships with Municipal and Provincial administrations for consulting activities in the matter of children, adolescents, and families.