

Generalist Youth Information Services in Italy in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Italy** which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997. Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“www.eryica.org” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centres**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

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ITALY

INTRODUCTION

The first youth information centre in Italy (“**Informagiovani**”, as they are often called) was established in Turin and began its activities in 1982. The approach adopted by Turin’s Informagiovani was largely inspired by the French approach to youth information which is very close, even geographically.

The years until 1986 when considerable developments took place saw the creation of a small number of other youth information centres: Milan in 1984, Verona and Forli in 1985.

1985 – International Youth Year

The International Youth Year in 1985 marked an important turning-point with regard to the development of Informagiovani in Italy. The final activity report adopted by the Italian Committee for International Youth Year had identified the following five areas for further action:

1. Information, guidance and counselling
2. Schooling and professional training
3. Entrance into the job market, employment and entrepreneurship
4. Health prevention measures against drug addiction
5. Culture, creativity, free-time and travel.

It also confirmed that there was the need for young people to be involved directly in the activities proposed for them and in the elaboration of the local youth policies

through the establishment of Youth Forums and Councils (“Forum e Consulte Giovanili”).

Development of the Centres

Since 1986 there has been a steady growth in the number of Informagiovani: 15 at the end of that year, 22 by the end of 1987, 61 in 1988, 97 in 1989, 136 in 1990, 168 in 1992 and 260 by the end of 1994. At present, there are **some 450 Informagiovani centres** operating in Italy: 50% of them in the North, 24% in the Central Regions and 26% in the South and on the Islands. During this period, youth information has seen an extraordinary development for a type of service which is not recognised nor financed on the basis of any national law or policy.

In the diverse experience of the Informagiovani centres, there are a number

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of common principles which increasingly have been codified. At the same time, there is a recognition that there are positive as well as negative elements in the diversity that exists. In recent years, the main sub-ject of debate has been the professional principles which guide the work of Informagiovani centres, in an attempt to establish and improve the quality of the services.

At present, the Italian Informagiovani dispose of the following important working documents:

1. The Informagiovani “Decalogue”
2. A set of “Quality Principles” approved by the 3rd National Conference of Informagiovani
3. A “Vademecum” for the creation of new youth information and counselling services
4. The “National Classification of Information” system used by all Informagiovani.

The Informagiovani “Decalogue”

In the absence of any existing criteria or universally accepted methods, the “Decalogue” of the Italian Informagiovani (see text on page 6) was prepared during 1986 as a sort of professional charter, which sought to provide at least some general guidelines for the services provided by the centres and for their evaluation. The “Decalogue”, which was adopted in November 1986, defines some important principles governing the work of the centres and indicates some national tasks in order to avoid an excessively local approach. The document can be said to have a historical importance because, for the first time in the field of youth policy in Italy, a national document has been produced which subsequently led to the establishment of a national co-ordinating structure authorised by a Ministerial order, and which was accepted as a text of

reference in the Ministry in question, the Ministry of the Interior.

Since then the Informagiovani have continued to discuss questions of standards and the quality of services. At the 3rd National Informagiovani Conference, which took place in Modena in 1993, they adopt-ed a set of “Quality Principles” designed to provide more detailed guidelines for ensuring the quality of the services provided by the centres.

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION SYSTEM

In 1987 a National Co-ordinating Structure of the Youth Information System (CNSIG) was officially established by the Ministry of the Interior, with the task of promoting and co-ordinating the development of Informagiovani in Italy. It was composed of representatives of the centres and other relevant bodies, and had a secretariat staffed by the Ministry of the Interior. At the 2nd National Informagiovani Conference, held in Palermo in 1990, the national co-ordinating structure was reorganised so that it was based on a system of regional representation. Since then, and until its dissolution at the end of 1995, CNSIG has been organised by the Regional Co-ordinating Structures which have elected representatives to the national structure.

The aim of the National and Regional Co-ordinating Structures was to encourage every region to adopt Regional Laws which would regulate and finance in a homo-geneous way the Informagiovani centres in their region, and at the same time contribute to promoting the development of an integrated national network. It was necessary that the arrangements for co-ordination take account of the compet-encies in the field of youth work at the national, regional and provincial level, as well as of the different realities and local demands.

TYPES OF YOUTH INFORMATION SERVICES

The 3rd National Informagiovani Conference (Modena, 1993), which reconfirmed the principles contained in the 1986 Decalogue, also identified the essential and distinctive characteristics of the following three types of service:

Informagiovani “Service Agencies”

The basic characteristics of the Informagiovani “Service Agency” model are the promotion, management and organisation of a network of Informagiovani centres in a given area, which function according to agreed operating standards and propose a common set of services. The network must be formalised on the basis of written agreements (operating protocol, contracts, etc.).

Such a network must include:

- at least three centres which co-operate
- the organisation of internal training programmes for the staff of the centres and for other services and centres which request training
- the production of information materials for the centres of the network in the following areas: studies and training, employment, health, culture, sport, leisure activities, youth rights, and youth exchanges.
- the maintenance of direct relations with bodies producing and/or organising information on various topics, and the development of a public relations operation whose aim is to promote collaboration and integration with the activities of other youth-related services.
- The development of a evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of different services, and of a system to record in each centre the number of users and the topics requested.

The training programmes must cover, inter alia:

- the process of searching for information
- the organisation of documentation
- the information / communication process with users.

The national “Service Agencies” are responsible for producing data-bases containing information concerning the national level, for the areas of information mentioned above, and including opportunities for training and exchanges at the international level.

The regional and provincial “Service Agencies”, which have access to the data-bases created by the national Service Agencies, are responsible for producing additional information concerning the region or province in which they are located, for the same areas of information.

The Service Agencies which prepare information tools may also deliver information directly to the public. In this case, they organise the activities mentioned above and also have the typical functions of Informagiovani centres mentioned below.

Informagiovani “Centres”

Informagiovani “Centres” develop their activities in the place (city, county or district) in which they are located. Their primary function is to meet the information needs of the local young people. As far as information materials are concerned, they can use the materials produced by the Service Agencies or materials which they produce themselves. Each centre develops research, documentation and communication activities related to its locality.

In their information systems the Centres cover the same topics as those mentioned above for the Service Agencies. Like them, they maintain a set of relationships

with, and collaborate with, other bodies and local services deal with youth matters. They keep a record of their users and of the kinds of request that they make, and regularly evaluate the services they provide, publishing a report on these matters at least once a year.

Informagiovani Centres are open to the public for an average of at least 15 hours a week distributed in a homogeneous way over each working day of the week.

In terms of organisation and technology they must be adequately equipped, so that they are able to respond efficiently to their users, in accordance with the requirements specified in the Decalogue.

Informagiovani “Points”

The Informagiovani “Points” generally develop similar activities to those of Informagiovani “Centres” but on a much more limited scale or in a smaller area or institution (e.g. social centre, cultural centre, library, school, etc.).

Their primary activity is to receive young people and to inform them. For the young people living in the different areas served by such “Points”, there are few activities available other than those organised by the Points. As the Points do not have the resources to search for information in a systematic way, they are usually supported by an Informagiovani Centre or a Service Agency which provides them with information materials. Where there is no Informagiovani Centre or Service Agency nearby, it is possible to create a network of Points which share the various tasks and mutually support each other.

Informagiovani Points must inform about at least one of the following areas of information: studies, training, employment, leisure activities, youth rights, or youth exchange. The opening hours must average at least 8 hours a week distributed over three days.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE USER AND INFORMAGIOVANI

A very important element of the Informagiovani information function is the differentiation in the depth of the information and, consequently, the way in which the information is transmitted to the user, which can involve advice and counselling functions.

In general, it can be said that there are three main approaches to the way in which information is transmitted to the users, as follows:

Self-service Information

The centres which use this approach concern themselves mainly with the construction of self-service information paths for the users, who take the material they need or make use of the equipment provided to search for specific information.

Assisted Information

In centres which adopt this approach, the focus is placed on the contact between the information worker and the user; often the information worker finds the requested information, makes it available to the user and generally explains it.

Mixed Solutions

Some centres adopt a combination of the two previous approaches (self-service, and assisted information), allowing the user to browse without a member of the staff intervening but with staff available for the moment when the user wants help or an explanation.

In some centres, importance is attached to the provision of specialised guidance or counselling for the user, especially on issues such as studies and employment.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

Nearly all of Informagiovani Centres have been established by the Municipality or, in some cases, by the Provincial Government, often as part of a larger project for young people which is called "Progetto Giovani" (Youth Project).

Most Informagiovani Centres are managed by employees of the Municipality; some are administered by co-operatives or associations which are recognised and receive financial assistance from public funds. In other cases (a minority), the Informagiovani Centres are managed directly by Voluntary Service Associations or by Youth Groups, especially in smaller areas.

Generally, for centres established by Municipalities, the main funding comes from the Municipality, as the centre is one of its youth services.

In recent years, following the adoption of Youth Laws by some regions, the Regional Governments have begun to assist Informagiovani centres financially. In such a case, usually, these funds are not allocated to the running of the centres, but are dedicated to the development of regional networks, and in particular to the training of staff, to information tools (databases, catalogues, guides, brochures), or to the organisation of information actions on specific themes (exchange and tourism, employment, professional training, voluntary work, etc.) aimed at all the youth-related services.

TYPICAL SERVICES IN INFORMAGIOVANI CENTRES

Even if the Informagiovani Centres are often very different from each other, they have a considerable number of common elements, so it is possible to describe what may be termed the typical services which will be found in a centre.

On entering the centre, there will certainly be a series of notice-boards with advertisements, which generally contain three types of information:

- a) posters and leaflets about cultural activities, training courses and other local events
- b) advertisements where young people are looking for something (a flatmate, other people to join in an activity), or offering/selling something (musical or other equipment)
- c) (not in all centres) offers for temporary or part-time jobs.

Not far away, there will be (except in an Informagiovani "Point") one or more members of the centre's staff ready to explain where things can be found, to help the user look for a specific piece of information or to respond to any question which the user may ask.

Half of the Informagiovani centres have at their disposal the Italian National Database for Young People or other local information systems. In some cases, the National Data-base can be consulted directly by the user.

On the walls, or in free-standing units, there are shelves of files containing documentation usually organised by area of information. These files, in most centres, constitute the basic information resource of the centre which enables it to respond to the range of questions on all topics which the users pose. In the larger centres, there are hundreds of these files, in the smaller ones there will be ten or so files containing the essential information on the topics which are in competence of the centre.

To complete the documentary material, there are usually various newspapers and information bulletins available, especially those which inform about job offers and public competitions.

In nearly all the centres, some booklets generally produced by the centres themselves are available on topics which are frequently demanded, such as: conscientious objection and alternative service, searching for work, summer holiday opportunities, etc.

There are also a number of particular services which will not be found in every centre but which will be provided by quite a few centres, such as selling the Italian Youth Hostel Association card, or the Youth Card which gives access to discounts on goods and services.

Finally, in many centres it is possible for the user to arrange individual interviews for counselling and guidance in a specific area, such as studies or vocational guidance.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

One of the elements which characterises Informagiovani Centres is the close relationship and co-operation which they have with other services of interest to young people; in some cases, one can say that the Centre is integrated with other such services. In a number of places the Centre operates within an integrated youth project, called "**Progetto Giovani**". In addition, the fact that the Centres provide information on a wide range of topics, and need to ensure that that information is accurate and up-to-date, requires them to develop close co-operation with the sources of that information. Accordingly, they work closely with services providing guidance about studies or careers, with bodies which promote young people's creativity, with welfare and social security agencies, as well as with bodies which organise information campaigns on a given issue specifically aimed at young people.

Informagiovani Centres, because they are considered to be qualified "observers" of

the needs of young people, are often called upon to contribute to the elaboration of projects and services aimed at young people.

Very often, in a locality where services for young people are scarce, it is the Informagiovani Centre which takes on the task of advising other services, or provides support directly to young people or to their associations.

THE INFORMAGIOVANI "DECALOGUE"

(Rome, November 1986)

1. Pre-eminent Information Function

The principal activity of the Informagiovani Centres is information. The criteria (for recognition as an Informagiovani Centre) should exclude all centres and agencies for which information is a secondary activity, or accessory to principal activity of the structure.

2. A Service Aimed Specifically at Young People

Young people are the primary target-group for the services of the Informagiovani Centres. Information centres which address themselves to the general public or to a specific social group (only for students, only for women, etc) should not be considered to be Informagiovani Centres.

3. A Global Approach to Information

Informagiovani Centres aim to provide information which meets the entire range of information needs of young people. Their information resources must cover all the principal topics which interest young people (studies, training, employment, health, free-time, sport, culture, travel, etc), offering a maximum of information and of choice. The Centres are, therefore, are *generalist* (they cover a wide range of topics, as opposed to specialised inform-

ation services in the field of careers advice

or health) and *pluralist* (they propose information coming from a wide variety of sources).

4. A Unique and Complementary Service

Informagiovani Centres are a unique form of information service, not least because they pay attention to the changing needs of their users. At the same time they have a role which is complementary to that of other services which operate in favour of the social and professional integration of young people.

5. Easy Access for All Young People

Informagiovani Centres are a social service open to all young people without distinction. The centres must avoid any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or social origin, religious or other belief, sexual preference, etc. They must not operate any physical, cultural or psychological barriers towards particular groups or persons (disabled, drug addicts), nor favour any particular category of person (students, workers, etc). For these reasons, Informagiovani Centres must have premises with easy access, a welcoming environment, extensive opening hours, the possibility of individual interviews and of obtaining information by letter; most information should be made available free of charge; discretion and anonymity should be guaranteed to all users.

6. Quality Information

The information provided by Informagiovani Centres must be of the highest quality. This means that the information must be relevant, up-to-date, accurate, pluralist in its sources, comprehensive, in a form which is intelligible for young people, and stored in

a systematic way so that it can be found easily.

7. A Service that Evolves to Meet New Needs

Informagiovani Centres through their services must aim to respond to the changing information needs of young people in a dynamic way, verifying continually that the range of information proposed corresponds to the questions asked. It is also important to review regularly the communication channels and methods used to distribute information, the content of information materials and tools developed by the Centres, and to rectify the lack of information in some areas. Inter alia, this requires that each Centre records the number of users and the subject of each enquiry, and develops a system for evaluating the level of satisfaction of the users.

8. Professional Staff

The issue of the staff of the Centres is capital, because it is they who ensure the quality and efficiency of the service, by implementing the previous three points. Each Informagiovani Centre must have an adequate number of workers to organise and deliver a service of high quality, and they must have received the professional training appropriate to their function in the centre, with the possibility to attend any necessary refresher courses. Attention needs to be paid to the presence of a core of personnel on long-term (or permanent) contracts, with the possibility of contributions from other kinds of collaborators (consultants, secondments from public or private structures, and volunteers).

9. Independence of the Informagiovani

Since the Informagiovani Centres provide an information service which has a high social content, it is important that they can operate in a context of financial and

managerial independence, which will enable them to maintain their operations, and to avoid being subjected to changing political and economic pressures.

10. National Co-ordination and European Co-operation

Informagiovani Centres belong to the Italian National Co-ordinating Structure of the Youth Information System (CNSIG), and (through CNSIG) they also belong to the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA). As such, the Centres have undertaken to adapt their methods in the light of indications expressed by these organisations. The Italian Co-ordinating Committee of Informagiovani is a part of the National Co-ordinating Structure of the Youth Information System, that is a part of the Ministry of the Interior.