

## Lessons from Italy: Child friendly cities

by *Vanessa Pallucchi*

*Director of Education, Legambiente, Rome, Italy.*

### **SUMMARY**

*Legambiente is one of the leading environmental organisations in Europe, with 110,000 members and regional offices in most provinces in Italy. Its main focus is to work on improving and protecting the quality of the physical environment. In addition, Legambiente works to improve the social environment, particularly for children, in urban and rural contexts. The organization works on many levels to improve the quality of childhood in Italy's cities, towns and villages.*

*Currently Legambiente is running an advocacy campaign on the topic of 'Le Città amiche dei Bambini' (Child friendly cities) to convince local governments to adopt its programme. The main components of this are:*

- *The establishment of a municipal council of children.*
- *Measures to promote the participation of children younger than 14 in Italy's cities.*
- *The implementation of services and instruments to encourage the participation of young people.*
- *The promotion of a child-friendly infrastructure.*
- *The organisation of activities with and for children.*
- *Another measure is to turn problems caused by children and adolescents into challenges for children and adolescents, whereby adult experts help to formulate and to implement the solutions that the children and young people have come to.*
- *Certain areas in the town are adopted by children and they take care of these in cooperation with local government departments.*

*Vanessa Pallucchi concluded her presentation with the following points:*

*The changes under way to prepare our societies to face the challenges of climate change provide, at the same time, windows of opportunity to make cities more child friendly. The opportunity exists to rethink our cities, large and small and to re-consider our levels of consumerism.*

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*This article is based on a verbal presentation given to the Quality of Childhood Group in the European Parliament in June 2010 and hosted by MEP Vittorio Prodi and MEP Karin Kadenbach. Notes taken during the presentation were formulated into the article below, which has been checked and approved by Vanessa Pallucchi.*

## Introduction

Legambiente is an organisation that was set up in Italy in the 1960s to protest against nuclear proliferation, but gradually it developed into an influential environmental advocacy group with a broad membership base. Today it has more than 110,000 members from all over Italy. Legambiente is set up slightly differently from organisations with similar aims, such as Greenpeace. The organisation asks for a monetary contribution from its members and, in addition, provides structures to enable members to engage in activities on local, regional and national levels. Legambiente is thus a professional advocacy group and a network organisation of tens of thousands of local environmental activists. These activists are adults as well as families, as Legambiente encourages its members who have children to engage in the activities as a family. The different generations all have fun and families have a chance to meet and engage in meaningful action.

Legambiente is also unique in the way it defines the environment. It works with a broad definition of the environment which includes nature, the physical environments in which the members live, and the social and pedagogical environment of Italy's schools and cities. Legambiente is organised on three levels: on the local level, the provincial level and the national level. It has some 370 employees. The organisation is unique in Europe as it addresses simultaneously the current environmental and social challenges of society.

## Legambiente is a non-violent association active in supporting and promoting democratic processes

A fundamental aspect of Legambiente is that it is a non-violent association active in promoting and supporting democratic processes, both in Italy and worldwide. The process of globalization has led to the inevitable consequence that Legambiente, traditionally involved in campaigns to take action with regard to issues on Italian territory, has to draw attention to issues with an international dimension. The organisation participates actively in a movement of many hundreds of NGOs around the world. The NGOs have priorities that differ but what they have in common is that they all use peaceful, non-violent and democratic means to achieve their goals.

Legambiente is one of the leading members of the European Environmental Bureau. Legambiente and its associates operate in the following fields:

- international cooperation,
- environmental protection,
- the defence of citizens' rights,
- full recognition of the dignity of labour,
- promoting alternative economic models which are more fair,
- forms of multi-ethnic coexistence and intercultural exchange,

- commitment to peace and advocacy against injustice.

## Legambiente's key principles and programmes

### 1. 'Think Globally, Act Locally':

We think that we can create a better environment for everyone on a global scale.

### 2. Scientific Environmentalism:

All of our actions and campaigns are based on accurate scientific data. We say 'no' to options that may be environmentally hazardous and at the same time we suggest practical and environmentally sound alternatives.

### 3. Legambiente's priorities:

- Problems arising from environmental and urban degradation
- Energy and the development of renewable energy sources
- The links between the economy and the environment.

### 4. Strong involvement in international action

In order to fight the inequity that exists in terms of access to resources we promote ethical trade through our campaign "Clima e povertà" (Climate and poverty). The campaign is so called because we focus on the link between climate change and the increase in poverty.

### 5. Educating people about environmental issues.

### 6. We take original and innovative approaches to the issues of the economy and employment.

We promote and develop a wide variety of production activities: including local goods, cultural heritage, technical innovation, and urban and land maintenance. All the activities improve the quality of the environment and make the businesses and activities more competitive. We are strongly involved in issues of nature conservation and in defending protected areas.

### 7. Parks and reserve areas must be the primary examples of how to run sustainable and balanced initiatives in the tourism and economic realms.

### 8. The Comitato Scientifico, Italy (Scientific Committee)

Legambiente's activities are supported by the Comitato Scientifico in Italy, which is made up of more than 200 scientists and technicians.

### 9. Istituto di Ricerche Ambiente Italia (The Research Institute for Italy's Environment)

This research institute publishes an annual report on the environmental conditions in Italy.

#### 10. Osservatorio su Ambiente e Legalità (The Observatory for Environment and Law)

The observatory collects data and information on the connections between environmental degradation that occurs as a result of illegal actions and approaches.

11. **Centri di Azione Giuridica (Legal Action Centres)** where people can report instances of deliberate exploitation of areas of land or of the environment.

12. **Centri di Educazione Ambientale (Environment Education Centres)** which promote sustainable development, educate pupils and train their teachers to safeguard the environment.

#### 13. Legambiente's National Campaigns

Among the most important activities of Legambiente are the national information and monitoring campaigns, which combine scientific analysis of environmental quality with public awareness and mobilization to protect the environment:

#### 14. Goletta Verde (The Green Schooner)

Legambiente owns a schooner and the crew on this boat monitor the quality of the sea water in the Mediterranean, off the Italian coast. Every year some 5000 samples of sea water are taken and analysed. In order to do this the boat sails about 10,000 km per year.

#### 15. Treno Verde (The Green Train)

This 'railway version' of the Goletta Verde (Green Schooner) was launched in 1988 and, since then, has monitored over 100 cities, collecting data on air and noise pollution;

#### 16. Mal'Aria (Sick Air Campaign)

Through this campaign, we try to raise awareness among municipalities to take the right courses of action in order to create a better environment (particularly in terms of improving air quality). People hang white sheets from their balconies and windows as a protest. After some days, the sheets grow grey, thus becoming indicators of the levels of air pollution.

#### 17. Salvalarte (Save the Art)

This campaign promotes the safeguarding of works of art. To date, specialists have analysed the condition of over 100 'forgotten' monuments, and have suggested solutions for restoring, protecting and saving them.

#### 18. Cento Strade per Giocare (A Hundred Streets in which to play)

Since 1995 we have nominated one day a year in which children can claim the streets to celebrate and play, thus clearing the streets of traffic and pollution for the occasion.

#### 19. Puliamo il Mondo (Clean up the World)

This well-known campaign takes place annually and is a day when volunteers clear the environment of empty bottles, garbage, litter and so on. In the year 2000 more than 400,000 people were involved in cleaning up more than 3,500 sites in 1,300 municipalities.

#### 20. Spiagge Pulite (Clean up the Beaches):

A day to clean up our beaches and to celebrate World Environment Day in Italy. Clean-Up the Med Sea Action, is a three-day programme to clean up the beaches in the Mediterranean Basin. 100 organizations from 20 countries are involved in this programme.

#### 21. Volontariambiente (Volunteers for the Environment)

Every summer, thousands of volunteers and children spend 'ecological' holidays taking care of and improving the environment.

#### 22. Legambiente's magazines:

Legambiente publishes three different magazines for its members:

- *La Nuova Ecologia* for adults (sent to all Legambiente members)
- *Jey* is for primary school pupils (5,000 copies are distributed to primary schools every two months)
- *Formazione Ambiente* for teachers.

#### Ecosystem Child

During the second half of the 1990s Legambiente decided to launch a special project to encourage the participation of children under 14 years of age in the Italian cities. They called this project Ecosistema Bambino (Ecosystem Child).

When we started this work, we were living through the golden years of policies for children:

- 1989 - The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 1991 - The Charter of Educating Cities (in accordance with the EU Summit Agreement in Barcelona) that recognized an educational role for the urban environment.
- 1994 - Charter of Aalborg, which provides a framework for local sustainable development and calls on local authorities to engage in Local Agenda 21 processes. Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development on 14 June 1992, is a comprehensive programme of action to be implemented "from now and into the twenty-first century" by governments, development agencies, United Nations organizations and independent sector groups in every area where human (economic) activity affects the environment.)
- 1991 - ratification by Italy of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 1997 - the Action Plan for the Child was approved by the Italian government. This saw the launch of Law 285 (Legge Turco). This law promotes the rights of children and adolescents. For the first time Act 285/97 offered tools to Italian local authorities which

enabled them to carry out actions to promote the rights, quality of life, growth, individual maturity, and socialization of children and adolescents.

It was the season for Councils of Children, Healthy Cities, and Cities for Children.

During this period, Legambiente launched the option for children to become members of the organization and some projects and initiatives were specifically dedicated to promoting the active citizenship of children. A few examples are:

- an environmental education programme called **Work in Progress** was established in 1995 to expand the concept of environmental education beyond the cognitive domain. Classes and groups of young people adopted and cared for the environment of the area: a fully educational experience that connected thinking, knowing and doing.
- **Festambiente Ragazzi** - Legambiente's national Environmental Festival for Children which includes wonderful games and experimental workshops about renewable energy, waste, and climate change. Festambiente Ragazzi is a citadel where children are the main characters and they can acquire new knowledge and have a good time together.
- **100 Strade per Giocare** (100 streets in which to play)
- 1998 - The establishment of the Recognition of Sustainable Cities for Children that made money available for urban sustainability initiatives.

The Ecosistema Bambino 2008 report is the 11th report by Legambiente on policies to promote the participation of children and young people under 14 in Italian cities. It is based on more than 10 years of research. It was established that a city that meets the needs of girls and boys, a real Child Friendly City, does not exist in Italy. But after ten years of Ecosistema Bambino we can at least imagine it. Aspects of good practice exist in each of the following regions and cities (although none of them include all the necessary elements). Our Child Friendly City would be in a region such as **Emilia Romagna**, where there are many quality services and pathways to encourage children to participate in the development of the area. The technical departments would be in **Turin** (Piemonte) as the city council has a good track record in creating and implementing policies for children. The best framework for cultural activities would be **Rome**: because of the quality of the cultural territory, driven by the city council's projects and all in all the large number of projects that have been put in place. (However, the current administration is not as friendly to these policies as previous governments have been.) The heart of our ideal city, finally, is **Caltanissetta, Sicily**. This city involves young people in legal education and active citizenship. This is surprising, since southern Italy does not usually provide good quality services for children.

### Enhancing the participation of children in Italian cities

During the past decades the following instruments were developed in Italy to enhance the participation of children in Italian cities:

#### The Municipal Council of Children: Democracy is learned

The tool that is most frequently used by administrators to ensure Italian children and teenagers' participation in democracy is the CCR (Consiglio Comunale dei Ragazzi), which are municipal councils of children.

This idea comes from France and has been widely adopted in Italy, often in a simplified form. Establishing a CCR without proper preparation and training of children, facilitators and politicians, is likely to create an imitation of the adult world, leaving the project exposed to failure. Yet, as Valter Baruzzi and Anna Baldoni said, "Democracy is learned". In Italy we have developed many good practices to teach children and young people about democracy. The objective is being achieved through a range of actions and instruments.

#### Children participate in the design of the city or parts of the city

Another popular tool is participatory design. Children work with experts to find solutions to a particular need or problem, and plan the implementation. In many cases children and young people really express their opinions but too often adults, usually in good faith, assume that they know what the children and young people are going to think and say. A very good approach is when children adopt, at times ideally and at times specifically, a certain section of their city (urban and green areas). The adoption of a specific area offers children and young people an opportunity to get to know themselves and to discover the concept of living in community.

The above mentioned tools are increasingly being used by governments even though they need to be updated. However, what is missing in Italian politics, including in local government, is the ability to keep pace with change. In Italy the role of raising children has been left entirely to the family, with school in second place, but the role of the land has been ignored. Those who take care of children have continued to do so without considering the social and cultural changes that have taken place in Italy. Children's dreams and needs have changed. For this reason we hope for a new era of activism in childhood policies. We want to invite governments, research organizations, citizens and associations to work together, to exchange expertise and knowledge in order to hand back to children the right to be protagonists and activists, playing an active role in shaping their own environment, learning from their environment, and learning to take responsibility for it.

### The relationship between children and the urban environment: it is alive, interactive and can be highly enriching

There is a relationship between the city or the region and the local community that lives there. This community has an identity, both culturally and with regards to the land. These two elements have always been at the core of Legambiente's advocacy policies. This important relationship has its roots in Italian culture and in its social organisation: the local community gives the urban space (streets, squares, buildings) an educational role. This can help children and young people acquire important competences such as social, emotional and relational skills as well as competences related to citizenship and space. For this reason we have always advocated the development of our cities as welcoming places, where the growth and development of the new generation is stimulated and not prevented due to innate hostile or alienating attributes.

### Translation of the Convention for the Rights of the Child into concrete actions for the Italian situation

This same reflection was also at the basis of the most innovative strategy for childhood that Italy outlined in 1997 with the Act 285: "Directives for promoting the rights of children and adolescents". Thanks to this law, a new project began which was called "Cities as friends of boys and girls". This project promotes the implementation of the convention for the rights and opportunities of children through a bottom up approach where children participate in the decision making process.

The first years of the implementation of the law also saw the financial engagement of the Government providing a stimulus for those local municipalities that were determined to implement real change. However, due to the recent economic downturn, this financial support has unfortunately disappeared.

In this period Legambiente encouraged local governments to take into account the needs, the rights and also the cultural potential of children. Through the following campaigns and reports, Legambiente has been monitoring and promoting the improvement of child related policies:

- Ecosistema bambino (Ecosystem child),
- Research into the quality of children's lives in our cities;
- 100 strade per giocare (100 streets to play, a campaign for the right to street play, and for a healthy urban environment);
- Le bande del cigno (The swan clubs), Legambiente clubs for members under 14 years of age.

### Legambiente offers two annual Prizes for the best environmental book for children

Legambiente puts up two annual prizes for the best environmental book for children:

- the first prize is for a scientific book, which is accessible to children.
- the second prize is for a fiction book.

### Ecosystem Child 2009: focus on peer learning among the most active Italian cities in the area of childhood policies

Ecosystem Child started out as a survey of municipalities. A questionnaire about implementing policies for children and organisational urban models was distributed along with a request for data on the quality of the urban environment, which was part of another survey called Urban Ecosystem. This latter report is a major publication which is widely used by governmental agencies, NGOs and the business sector. Our approach to monitoring has changed over time as, with the new 285 bill, local municipalities took more innovative and dynamic approaches to policies for children, including running pilots and participative projects, often as part of Agenda 21 processes.

However, over the last few years, this major push by local authorities has stopped, particularly due to the lack of financial support. This has resulted in fewer municipalities returning their data to us and reporting on only a few projects linked to childhood.

For this reason, from 2009 the survey has become a gathering of best practice approaches in the areas of the environment, childhood and adolescence. The results of the survey are as follows:

- The focus on the quality of childhood and adolescence is a cultural choice that only some local authorities choose to implement due to the fact that there are few national policies with specific budgets attached to drive this, as was the case with Law 285.
- Local authorities that devote financial resources and time to younger citizens do it with passion and belief and the projects are very well implemented and documented.

### Legambiente as a campaigning organisation in the field of childhood

Legambiente's priority is to conduct campaigns. We also do research, but it is always in preparation for a campaign or for political action. Often hundreds of thousands of people participate in our campaigns and political activities. Our activities linked to the subject of childhood are as follows:

- At present the Green Schooner project, mentioned previously, consists of two boats. The crew analyse the water quality out at sea and near the beaches. We do this in the early summer in order to achieve the greatest media impact.
- In September we run a nationwide campaign, which we call 'Clean up the World'. We work with volunteers and we clean up the litter in many places in Italy. An ever increasing number of children are involved in this campaign and through it we are able to teach them about 'active citizenship'.
- Action 'Stop the Fever'. Every year we send out a brochure on a certain environmental topic to all schools in Italy. This year the topic is climate change. By means of the brochure we try to educate the schools and the children about climate change and highlight what children and families themselves can do about it.
- In the autumn we will hold a conference in Urbino for the administrators of Italy's cities. At this conference we will present our report on the research we have completed with

regard to child friendly cities.

- In November we will run a project aimed at commuters to make them aware of their carbon footprint.
- In Italy some regions are under-populated. We run a project to encourage schools in big cities to adopt a village with a maximum of 5000 inhabitants. Through this project children from the bigger cities are brought into contact with the children from the smaller villages and they learn from each other's lifestyles.

### Concluding remarks

#### The Italian policy landscape: complexity and paradoxes

- If we look carefully at the learning performance of our students, we see that the environmental and family context accounts for 50% of their developmental achievements: a local environment that is better equipped for cultural and participative approaches produces more cultured citizens.
- A sustainable environment enables adults and young citizens to improve their mental and physical well being
- Apart from specific policies on childhood and adolescence, there is also the need for a healthier and more open physical environment in which children and young people can regularly meet and interact with their peer group and have opportunities to meet people from other generations
- With regard to this point a critical element appears from the survey: the best practices are very good experiences for children and their families, but they take place in specific places and circumstances. They are thus often not suitable for a full roll out across all the Italian cities.
- A paradox also emerged: cities such as Turin and Caltanissetta, with a strong engagement in policies for childhood and adolescence, have a low quality physical environment within each of the cities.

#### Climate change projects provide windows of opportunity to make our cities child friendly

The changes that are under way to make our societies ready to face the challenges of climate change provide, at the same time, windows of opportunity to make our cities more child friendly. The opportunity is there to rethink our cities, large and small, to re-consider our levels of consumerism, and along the way we may discover that our young generations, in their own time and way, already hold solutions for the future.

My proposal is that once a year we hold a Children's Day in the member states of the European Union. On this day the child will be the focus of attention. Legambiente has done a lot of groundwork for an occasion such as this and could play a supporting role.

The kind of activities that could occur on Children's Day are as follows:

- families will be given the chance to undertake activities that are uplifting and fun for all family members.
- it can be a day organised by the various organisations working for and with children, i.e. schools, youth organisations and municipal organisations.
- it can also be a day of reflection: What is the state of affairs regarding children and how can it be improved? Who can cooperate with whom? What can organisations do together to improve the well-being of all?
- what can administrators learn from scientists working in the field of childhood and vice versa? And what can the different scientific disciplines such as pedagogy, psychology, the science of learning, and so on, learn from one another?
- families can take part in projects with themes such as the city of the future, child friendly cities, sustainable cities, and so on.



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### Vanessa Pallucchi

Since 2008, Vanessa Pallucchi has been the National President of Legambiente School and Training and the Association of Legambiente Teachers and Educators. This role followed 8 years in the position of President of Legambiente, Umbria Region.

Prior to her work for Legambiente she graduated with a B.A in Philosophy and worked as a trainer in the field of green economy and the environment.

She has edited several environmental education publications for teachers and young people.