

HISTORIES OF EDUCATION AND REFORM:

TRADITIONS, TENSIONS AND TRANSITIONS

ABSTRACTS



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An Educational and Social 'Bottom-up' Reform. The History of the 'Asilo Ricci' in Macerata through its Archival and Monumental Heritage

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The years following the European Restoration were rather tumultuous from a socio-political point of view, especially in some countries, such as Italy, which began to cultivate the idea of realising the ideal of a nation. However, these years were indeed also characterised by the urgent need to achieve widespread education of the people, starting with childcare. Although there were different points of view on the subject, education was conceived as the main instrument to improve people's living conditions.

The 'Asilo Ricci' in Macerata was established within this context and represented the first infant school for poor children in the territories of the Papal State. The institute opened in 1841 thanks to the intervention of the Marquis Domenico Ricci, in a historical phase in which signs of the insurrectionary movements of 1831 were still present and the preparation of a revolutionary wave that would lead to national unity was becoming evident. Initially, the infant school began its activities with a small number of children, ranging from the age of 3 to 7-8 years. However, thanks to the interest of Ricci himself and other philanthropists, the school was soon able to be attended by about one hundred children. The institution formed part of a more highly articulated program of social regeneration, which – albeit animated by a markedly paternalistic stance – had the aim of promoting the emancipation of the populace.

Strengthened by these conditions, the initial educational program of the Macerata infant school – like other similar institutions founded in those years – aimed to combine elements of literacy and activities of introduction to work. Over the years the school was highly receptive with regard to new pedagogical approaches, initially adopting the educational methods of Aporti and, subsequently, those of *Fröbel* and Montessori. In addition, this institution took into consideration also the needs of the surrounding community, accepting female pupils at an early stage and establishing, at the beginning of the 20th century, a primary school next to the infant school.

The 'Asilo Ricci' has a long history, which extended until the end of 20th century. The old edifice in which Ricci's initiative was developed continues to bear witness to an important chapter in the history of the city, which still awaits a rigorous historical reconstruction. Inside the building commemorative plaques dedicated to various events and those individuals who contributed to the development of the institute remain intact, like pages of a book carved in marble and preserved for posterity. The research presented here intends to propose an analysis of the important monumental heritage of the 'Asilo Ricci', as an expression of the historical-educational heritage of the school, with the support of the rich archival documentation of the institute preserved in the State Archives of Macerata. In this direction, this work aims to reassert the importance of a particular *lieu de mémoire*, the significance of which may be seen as extending far beyond the history of the institute itself as it involves the dimensions of the culture and identity of a community.

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