



The History Scouting in Italy Characteristics and Difficulties of Desearching

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My contribution concerns my book on the history of Scouting in Italy (“Storia dello scautismo in Italia”), as well as general issues that emanate from it.

The book, which is now in its fourth edition (2006), was first published in 1973. Since the beginning, choices were made:

- A narration about all the forms of Scouting in the country (whether officially recognised or not): this choice involved a value judgement on what Scouting was and was not. The reference point was the values and Method that Baden-Powell proposed. The application of certain elements of the Scout method by other organisations (e.g., the Young Fascists) is mentioned as such, and not as being Scouting.
- In Italy, as in all countries that have several Scout associations, there is also a choice to be made concerning terminology, which is not at all the same in the various associations. While it is usual to describe each association using its own terminology, a choice had to be made – and justified – for the general sections of the narration.
- I spoke about “Scouting in Italy” and not “Italian Scouting”. This terminology aimed to highlight the unity of a world Movement that, naturally, takes shape in the various countries and national cultures.

A few considerations on sources

One cannot deplore enough the fragmentation and scattering of Scouting’s archives. Scouting, which is primarily about action, does not have a tradition of archiving. Often, documents (patrol or camp diaries, etc., or correspondence between Scout leaders) are not considered as historical documents worthy of being kept.

Moreover, Scouting becomes such a great part of some people's personalities that it sometimes diminishes their objectivity. How many "founders" of Scouting are there in such and such a country? This is why personal testimonies must often be checked and compared, both with other testimonies as well as with archived documents.

Through its specificity, numerous traces of Scouting are available in public archives, both private and ecclesiastical: however, they are not easy to find, in particular due to the variation in terminology (e.g., between "Eclaireur" and "Scout", or even "Boy Scout"), especially in the beginning.

One must also make an effort to ensure that Scouting's history is not only about the policies of different associations at national level. This is specially so in a country such as Italy where local specificities are important (but, I believe, in other countries as well). One must highlight the importance of local history, which has influenced Scouting's history much more than one might think. For example, in the history of Catholic Scouting, the attitude of local bishops has often had a determining effect: a particular bishop may talk about, or even bless, a Scout experience in his diocese that his homologue in a neighbouring diocese has banned.

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