

THE VOICE OF SURVIVORS

National Report on Interviews Results

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Context / Introduction

This report is part of the project “Support to adult survivors of child abuse and neglect” (SASCA, www.sasca.eu) financed by the European Commission, and led by Artemisia Association, in Italy and running in Italy, Greece, Ireland and Romania.

In 2015 with Artemisia's colleagues we came into contact with the affair of Il Forteto and we met some of the more than 80 children who were placed there by the Juvenile Court or by the Social Services. Together with these children, boys and girls today adults, we were confronted with the specific effects of a very serious form of maltreatment, the one in institutional context. What have happened was made been possible by the fact that children have been first inserted and then abandoned in these institutional residential context by those institutions that had intervened to protect them. The extreme complexity of the this story made us feel the need to raise our eyes and expand the comparison to other similar situations and to other countries. The Sasca Project was born from these in-depth needs which, in the last two years, saw us dealing with public authorities, universities, associations of victims of Italy, Ireland, Greece, Romania, on different experiences of child maltreatment in institutional residential contexts: in particular Il Forteto and I Celestini in Italy, the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, and the abuses occurred in Institutes in Greece and Romania. In each one of these cases the whole institutional system ignored the incident or was even collusive, or active actor.

The project is funded through the EC Justice Programme in line with its specific objectives to facilitate the effective access to justice for all victims of violence, including promotion and support, and compensation for the victims.

This report will analyze the results of the interviews realised with 33 survivors of child protection institutions in Italy

Our objectives are:

- To collect information on specific long term consequences of violence and the traumas suffered in child-protection system
- To understand the opinions of survivors on responsibilities and on the necessary changes in the residential care system, in order to better safeguard looked-after children
- To gather opinions on possible compensation for suffered abuse for adults out of care.
- Collect opinions and experiences regarding the possibility to get or not access to the justice system and to obtaining justice.

1. Recruitment

In order to get in touch with survivors, we used the snowball method by:

- activating professional contacts
- contact with associations and non-formal groups of survivors
- contact with local social services
- advertisement on Artemisia Facebook page #progettosasca, radio, distribution of project flyers
- interview proposal to people already known within psychotherapy
- word of mouth

However, this kind of method is slow and does not always bring upon a large number of candidate participants.

We have to say, it was difficult to find people available to tell their stories. There are a thousand of good reasons that these people have to be suspicious, not wanting to contribute to insufficient attempts of reflection of a system that they have known as dull, superficial, disinterested.

In Italy most of the interviews were possible because there was prior knowledge with the person, often built within a therapeutic path. Most of these interviews were done with the survivors of Il Forteto and of I Celestini. However, there are also individual experiences of institutional maltreatment that do not fall into these two great events and that refer mainly to religious institutions.

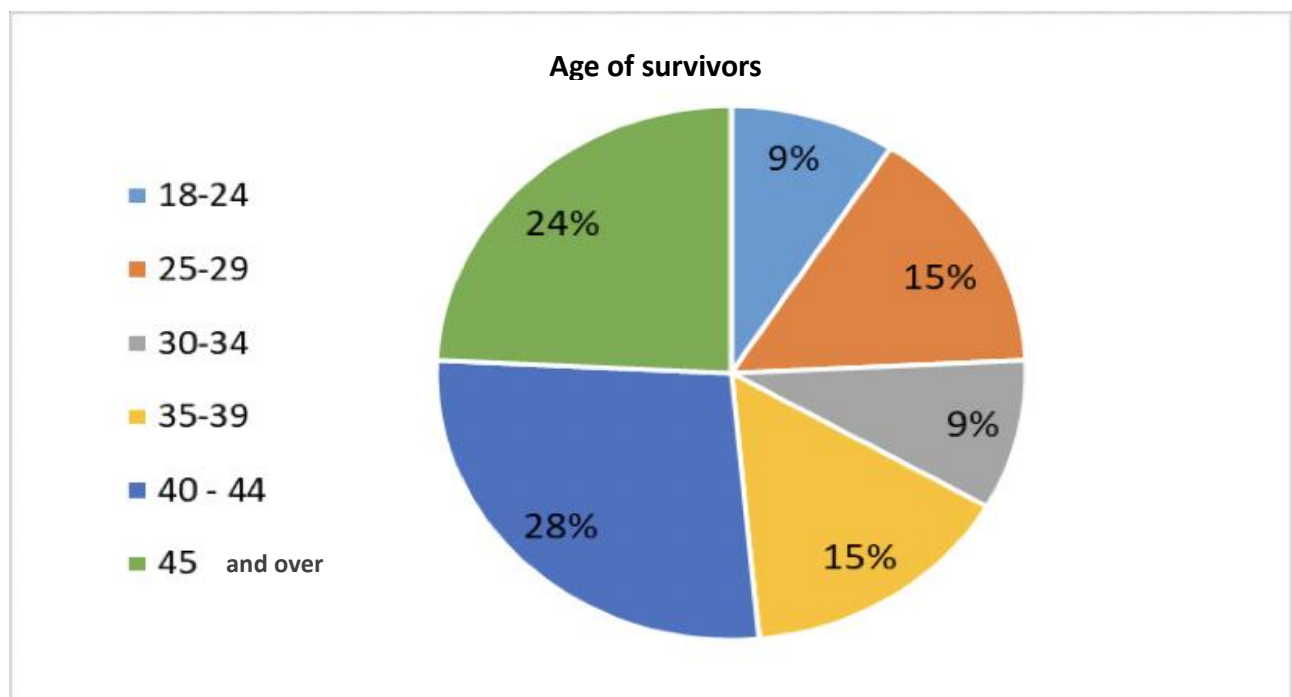
The survey procedure is consisted by a self-administrated questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire contains demographic data and scales which measure the physical effects of the trauma (somatization).

2. Brief focus on some characteristics of the survivors interviewed in Italy

Within the Sasca Project, the Artemisia Association managed to meet 33 survivors (men and women) of institutionalization processes, most of them, but not only, victims of Il Forteto. We also faced stories of subjects from other Italian regions and adults who had, in their background, ancient stories of violence in institutions, including some "Celestini", former children placed in an orphanage located in the Municipality of Prato and so nicknamed because they always wore a light blue (in Italian "celeste") apron.

However, there are also individual experiences of institutional maltreatment that do not fall into these two great events and that refer mainly to religious institutions.

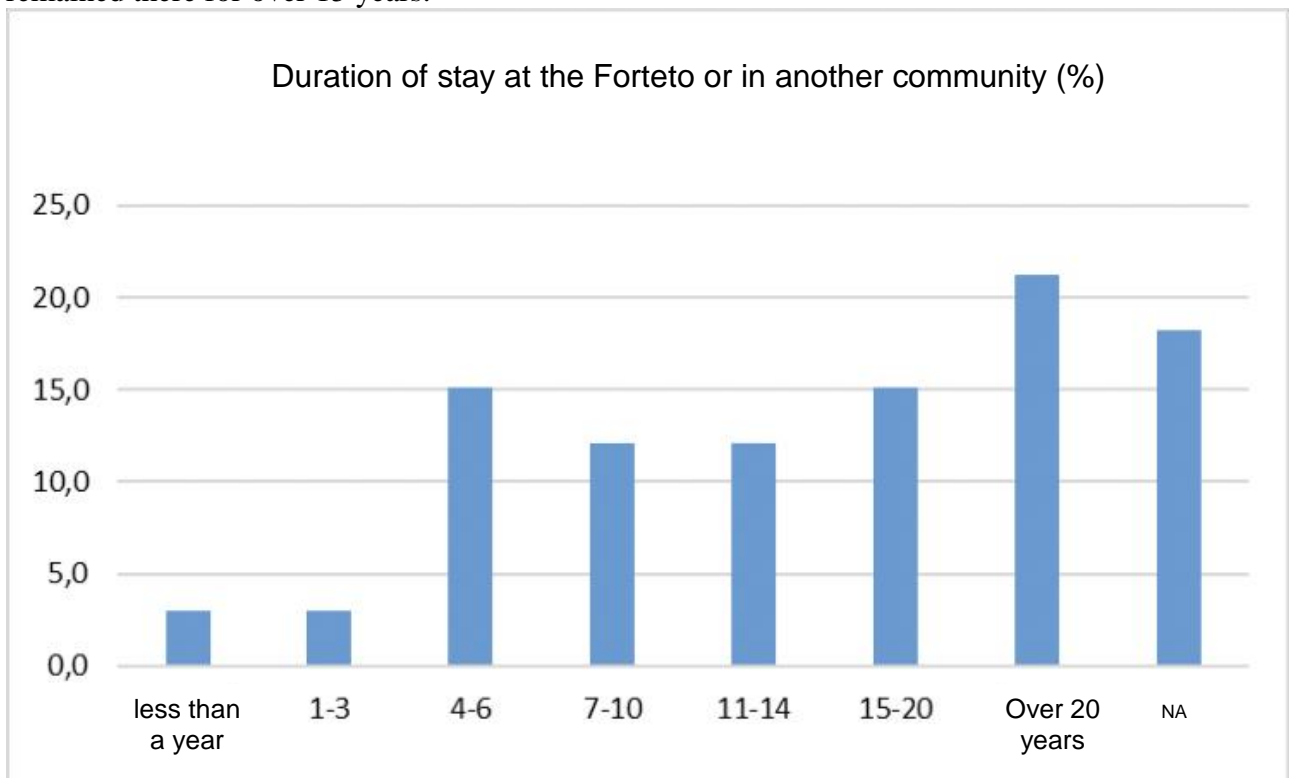
The people we meet have an average age of 42, a data conditioned by the presence of some witnesses who are more than sixty years old. 28% are aged between 40 and 44 years. Two thirds are men.



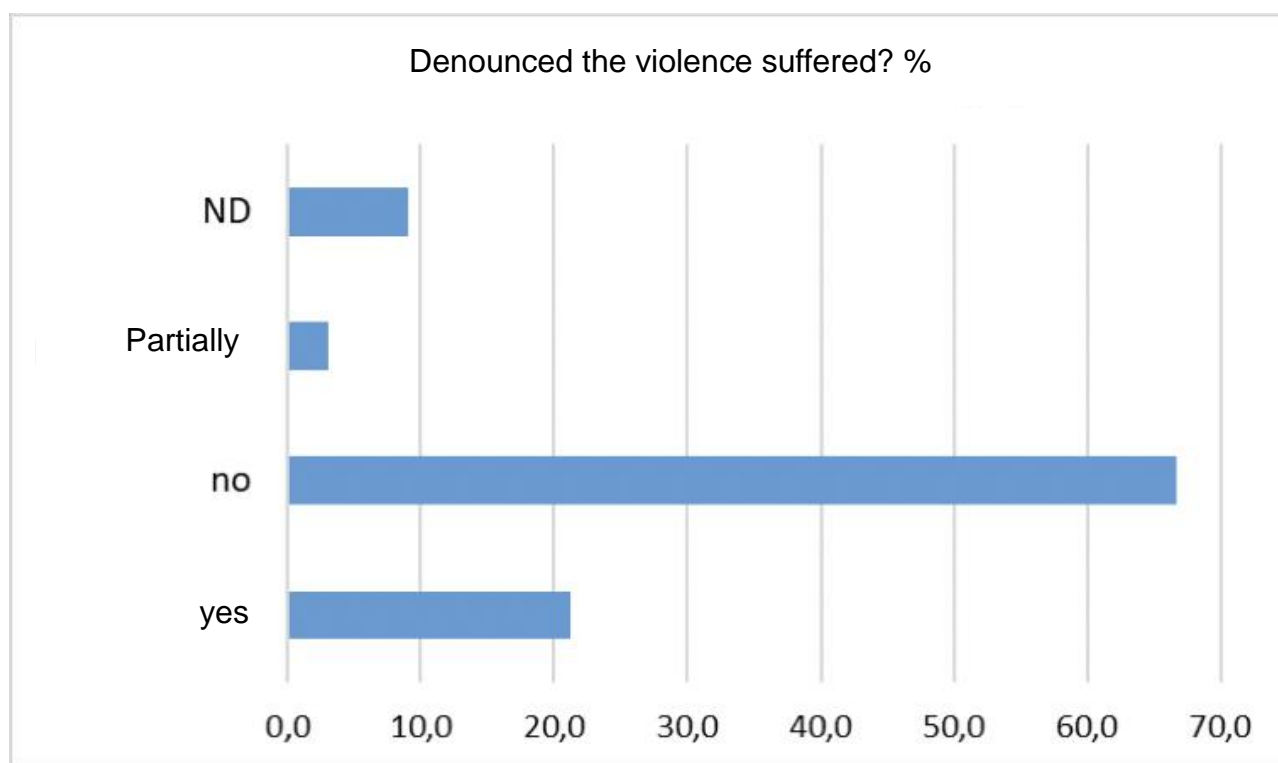
These former children entered into the institutionalization system when they were about 8 years old on average, however there are two peaks of age entering the institutions where they will suffer violence of all kinds: up to 6 years and between 11 and 14 years.



We use the term institutionalization, which at most people may seem inappropriate today, not only because most of the people interviewed entered the reception system before the law 149/01 that decisively determined the overcoming of the so-called "institutes", but above all because the term seems to us more than adequate because most of them were forgotten and physically and psychologically segregated in these places, as in the case of Il Forteto: 36% of the former children remained there for over 15 years.



Serious relational and material negligence, physical and psychological abuse, exploitation in work activities, sexual violence, institutional inattention by social services that, as it emerges from the stories, after the placement of the children in the institutions, in fact they disinterested and ignored the fate of these boys and girls. This responsibility of the system clearly emerges from the answers given by some interviewees to the specific question on the subjects to whom they attributed the greatest responsibility. Next to the direct authors of the abuses, the survivors involve operators and social services that should have monitored and supported the children: 75% of respondents indicate social services as the most responsible for what was suffered, 62.2% the juvenile judges. In the case of Il Forteto all the founding members and the adults are mentioned as they would have had to intervene to protect the children and to stop the mechanisms of the sect. In the vast majority of cases the violence suffered was not reported, only 7 respondents reported. Some of them realized only many years after that what happened to them was wrong, that it was a violence; many were afraid of the consequences and not to be believed; many others were not helped to understand that they could report.



The awareness of the gravity of the facts suffered is therefore often a slow and difficult conquest in adulthood, for this reason most of the survivors declare themselves against prescription, considered an institution that makes it impossible to seek for justice.

Most of the interviewees experienced a total institutionalization, they were in a place where personal potentials were humiliated, depleted and torn, producing a damage that many of them clearly perceive as a damage to their ability to build a life autonomous, productive and independent. It is not by chance, therefore, that the respondents identify as survivors' specific needs the support/compensation (reported by 53% of respondents who answered the specific question) and the help looking for a job or a home (40%); these concrete needs are also accompanied by the recognition of the need for specific psychological help (40%) for the re-elaboration of the traumas suffered. These are rights that are indicated by each with a different order of priority. If we look at the first choice, then, we see that the most heartfelt rights are economic support or compensation and psychological support. Secondly we find the house and third the work.

3. Thematic Analysis of Interview

We will reflect on what emerged from the semi-structured interviews with the survivors. We therefore choose to emphasize the voice and the perspective of those former boys and girls to whom the State, the protection system and the civil community itself, should have guaranteed protection. We begin a process of reflection that does not allow simplifications in any way.

3.1. Entry - daily life - abuses and maltreatment

The people interviewed, for the most part, report an initial positive impact with the community. In fact, they are often places that are objectively beautiful, certainly it is so in the case of Il Forteto. Some speak of a real fascination; fascination which, dramatically, seems also to unite the operators, being - it is to say - functional to a defensive movement that allows first of all the operator to escape the contact with pain. It is recurrent that, the communication by the social worker to the child, relative to the next insertion in the Community is accompanied by assurances regarding the pleasantness of the place: "you will go in beautiful place".

And here we already find the first traces of a distortion not only communicative, but also and above all relational: in the stories we've heard instead of supporting the child in the separation process from his family and in the unavoidable pain that this entails, or in the umpteenth change of structure, the social worker takes refuge in the logistical and aesthetic advantages that the new placement seems to bring with it, minimizing even the sharing of realistic information.

At first I felt like I had gone to heaven... I came from a boarding school where you did not have any reference figure... and at Il Forteto instead there were figures... parenting, the "mother" was sleeping with me, it was all a giving me things, and at least in the initial phase I seemed to be who knows where...

That day I was fascinated by this environment. He took us to see the whole company and then he took me to the dairy, he introduced me to my future parents; Then he accompanied me to the sheepfold because they also had animals: sheep, cows, horses, goats.

At about 4.30... the Social Worker asked me: "but what do you want to do, do you want to go home or do you want to stay here for a week?". And I said I wanted to stay without even thinking twice... But then I have never seen the Social Worker again. I have not seen anyone anymore.

They tried to show me Il Forteto as a farm with animals... I have always been passionate about horses and there were the horses there - The first day I was all the time at the stable... It was presented to me like a beautiful farm, where I would have been for a while. [...] I had no idea that I had to live with 100 people. They haven't told me this thing.

She told me: "Let's go to a place where there are other guys" and at first I trusted her. Although basically the social worker has not gone on. She told me "take some things, make the bag". We went to the bedroom to pack. It was a quarter of an hour, then we left... I remember we went to get my brother. I felt this solitude inside for this separation

After the fascination of the first days, the substance of everyday reality was not slow to reveal itself. The descriptions of the environments, the rigid routines and rules of everyday life, the absence of spaces and personal objects, the anonymous and uniform clothing, make up the typical picture of totalizing institutions, often hidden from the inattentive looks of external professionals and of entire villages.

Significant of a coercive reality only superficially hidden, the story of a former Celestino that

emphasizes how it was not even possible to leave the borders of the college because it was all fenced by barbed wire, covered by the laurel leaves.

The comparison with prisons or military camps occurs in interviews in different countries. The rigidity of the rules, the austerity, the absence of freedom and personal spaces are underlined.

Many of the interviewees describe that gradually, after entering the community, the level of control by the system on the individual, the consequent disorientation and, at the same time, the perception of their own invisibility, are raised.

The days are strictly all the same, marked by the same rhythms and the same activities, they are indistinguishable from one another. The rooms are identical to each other, or they are dormitories, there are no toys or private spaces, everything is shared.

Even the clothing is anonymous and uniform. Celestines even take the name from that apron that makes them so similar to each other. At Forteto everyone's clothes, washed in one big laundry, are recognizable only for a number or a letter sewn inside.

Thus it begins for the child the slow and progressive process of depersonalization, of destruction of individual identity. The impossibility of possessing in an exclusive way even trivial objects of common use, or of affective value, occurs in all the interviews. The absence of personal and private spaces. The taking away of gifts, sweets, and hygiene products that were brought to children by family members. And, of course, also the money.

I do not remember a toy that was mine. I remember that when I arrived I had a doll, Priscilla. I had box games but then they have become everyone's, even those who brought my parents. I do not remember a single toy that I loved, that was mine. When you say you had something of your own, you did not have it. If you had to, you had to try to hide it. (Lara)

I came from a small family, where I had my autonomy... You arrive there and there is none of this and immediately you feel deprived of any moment on your own... there you could not even be on the bed to hear the music, absolutely not... I used to write my diary every day and I had to stop immediately.

My mother brought gifts both to me and to my brother, but I remember especially once that they gave us two identical remote controlled cars, and both the two remote controls did not work and they told us "did you see what a crap they gave you?" and they threw everything into the fire.

If you asked me to describe my room, I would ask you: which one? And I would reply that I do not remember them all. There has never been an important room for me and with these constant changes of rooms I did not feel I had one of my own.

Often it is the outdoor spaces, the large surrounding parks or the outer concrete square, which are remembered as places of leisure and entertainment, almost breaks of freedom.

It recurs, also in different ways, the demonization of the external world, the extreme limitation and control of the contacts outside the community.

Sports activities are rare or are often the same for a large group of children, health care is neglected and provided only by trusted doctors. All Italian respondents tell us that the emergency number 118 has never been called, despite the numerous and even serious accidents that have occurred over the years. Being sick, having episodes of vomiting or enuresis is reported by several interviewees as a pretext for being beaten or derided/humiliated.

Even in cases where the school is external to the Institution and children have the opportunity to interact with other children, they often say they felt stigmatized by their classmates and teachers. Furthermore, school attendance is often interrupted as soon as the obligation is fulfilled.

In the case of Il Forteto it is important to underline, even without entering into the specificity of the story, that after the first twenty years, also following the sentence of the Court of Strasbourg and the first internal rebellions, the very rigid rules are softened, as well as the restrictions and control over the body, food, clothing, and closure on the outside. We are witnessing a strategic opening to meet the most material needs of the new generations (from the bike, to the play station, to the sports and the disco) which, however, does not imply any revision of the functioning of the system and internal relational dynamics. These last ones remain seriously maltreating and abusive. We underline it because it is important to remember that when we talk about institutional maltreatment we talk about facts and behaviors that can occur even without evident distortions and that, in no way, we do speak of events that are distant in time.

Again... In the stories we heard from the survivors the communications with the outside world are in various ways hindered, controlled, filtered. At Il Forteto the phone is initially used only in handsfree mode. Cars and scooters are shared and having the keys means saying where are you going. Letters from the family of origin are hidden from the recipient and visits are obstructed. In the history of Il Forteto it is recurrent the fact that, after the exit, the former children discovered that the families of origin had not abandoned them, nor renounced to maintain contacts, but they had been rejected and sent away from the members of the sect.

The Celestines remember that one of the nuns wrote on the blackboard a letter of answer to the families unique for everyone, and they had to copy, against their will, everything she wanted, to let the family know that they were fine even if it was not true...

Relationships with the families of origin, in the case of Il Forteto, were also intentionally destroyed by false accusations of sexual abuse. Visits were rare and always in the presence of some adults who before and after exercised a strong psychological pressure on children.

Our parents came to visit us and when they came, the adults of the community watched us, it happened a lot of times, they watched us and wandered around us. And they heard what I was saying to my mother and brought him back to Rodolfo, and if he did not like it he would beat you...

It is frequent that after the release the survivors found out that their families had not given up on keeping in touch, but had been in various ways rejected and dismissed. Furthermore, at Il Forteto the relationships with the families of origin were intentionally destroyed even by false accusations of sexual abuse.

The strategy, both in the case of I Celestini, and in that of Il Forteto, changes radically when the outsiders are important personalities, or social services operators. In this case, in fact, the visits are encouraged, incentivized and prepared with care, almost like a theater show.

"We got dressed with the new clean and ironed apron, shiny sandals, to appear, to the many who came to visit the institute, healthy and beautiful"

The impression that I had was that we were in jail, bound, you could not escape, you were super-controlled. Then there were all the representative visits, of personalities... judges, social workers, politicians came to Il Forteto, but you showed them the beautiful part, the whole company. The visits were prepared... The sacred rooms were the most beautiful living rooms of the manor, there were ancient frescoes on the walls and for this you called them the "sacred rooms"... ... they were used and arranged on purpose as rooms of representation. Basically you always made them see a certain Forteto, not what was happening.

The theme of control - of single individualities, of the outside, of the affective and relational world

of each person - follows every aspect of life in these communities. In our interviews we see with the eyes of the children the internal world of the total institutions described by Goffman (1961) where everything is marked by the fear of authority and the will of the adult, which often leaves children at the mercy of unprepared educators, or in turn they are plagiarized / conditioned by the system. The assumption of an individual identity is hindered by a system of privileges, obedience and fear of punishment. Yet, paradoxically, Il Forteto proposed itself until 2011 as a pedagogical alternative of excellence to the totalizing experiences of the past.

The control, both in Italian and foreign interviews, is also exercised through the exploitation of children left to do jobs of various kinds, sometimes subjected to older children. The cleaning of the rooms, the bathrooms, the work in the fields, in the dairy. They become instruments of control, even the humiliating, physically and psychologically exhausting punishments.

Let's think about the practice of clarification at Il Forteto, real public interrogations that could last for whole days; the chosen victim was tormented, often also recurring to physical abuse that could take the form of real beatings, until the victim admitted that yes, in fact, those fantasies, always of a sexual nature, and those memories were lurking in his/her mind. Control extended to thoughts.

We find similar echoes in the evening public confession to which the Celestines were forced. Whoever had told the lies that day had to raise the hand. And then it was asked to the nuns and to the other children if any of the liars of the day had not revealed themselves. And the equal, the scared friend, often became an accomplice of the abuser. But many also tell us about the agreements between friends to let the clarification terminate soon, agreeing and saying what the adult wanted to hear.

Furthermore, all of them tell of serious physical violence and psychological abuse that have been repeated over the years, many even of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse began more or less immediately... There was this approach on his part... the vast majority of the times that I was put in punishment he arrived and freed me from the punishment, the savior. He had created this story where he proposed himself as the one who took me away from punishment knowing my problems, my things... Then he invited me in his car to go for a ride and slowly came to put his hand on the genitals, saying "You like it, I know that you like it"...

They kept her locked in her room for ten days and told us that she was in punishment... but it was to make the bruises on her disappear: I remember that he had put her at the window, there were the the shutters of the windows and he beat them on her face. They kept her in her room for ten days. They told us that she was in her room because she had been a fool, that she was a slut and had fantasies... Another episode that I remember was when they put a girl with down syndrome to the kneading trough naked, all naked, telling that she was naughty.

3.2. THE REVELATION: focus on difficulty and aid

The interviews confirm that even with respect to the crucial issue of revelation, being abused in institutional settings is an important factor of gravity and complexity. How can you tell and to whom, the maltreatment and abuse that you suffer in a place that should protect and defend you?

We are facing a gigantic scam, a bombardment of confusing, contradictory and destabilizing messages, in which the typical power imbalance that always characterizes the relationship between mistreated / abused minor and the abusive adult is elevated at its finest, where the unveiling and the revelation are even more difficult, for the abused minors it is almost impossible to think they could be believed, or to ask for help. There is no adult to whom they can look at. No one sees, no one understands. There is no alternative relationship to refer to, in order to find the strength to tell what

happens in the dysfunctional, but emotionally significant relationships that they have.

And the frame of all this is a paradoxical communication, on the verge of perversion: "I move you away from your family - with all that I know it involves - to protect you; and to do so I put you in a new and often more seriously maltreatment context".

All that remains to the small victims is to think that what happens is right, that it should make sense if nobody protects. The thought of not being worthy of anything else, of not being worthy of love, is combined with the conviction that what happens is deserved.

To strengthen the pervasive experience of impotence and the perception of not being credible, contributes the external credit of the communities and the frequent visits of the exteriors, who never saw anything.

"First I've been beaten by my parents and then by the community leader... I was a little bastard"

"Inside me there was that feeling that they were too big to be able to tell someone what I could suffer"

"I always hoped someone would notice something... There were so many people coming to Il Forteto, I always hoped..."

There are, however, attempts to tell.

At school, it seemed that the teachers did not notice. Yes, even there I hoped: one year a boy had escaped, they looked for him, and it happened several times. But they never thought that maybe it was not good there...

One day this boy in the classroom started saying what this priest was doing, and the teacher, instead of investigating if the problem existed, turned off the discussion by saying "but what do you say? do you think these are speeches to do? And at that moment I thought "come on now this thing will come out and finally I expose myself", but I saw that instead the teacher has turned off everything and I saw disappear the only hope I had. the teacher silenced him right away. What the fuck, the only person you talk to makes you shut up, who do I go to?!"

References to escapes are frequent: the escapes up the cliffs of Il Forteto, interrupted by the desperate awareness of not knowing where to go or of being reached and taken back in the community. The escapes of the Celestines, which follow each other, repeated, in groups, told by the newspapers but still insufficient to move the attention and intervention of the civil and professional community.

With respect to the enormous difficulty of revealing the abuses and maltreatments that one underwent or witnessed every day, the survivors clearly tell us about the powerful experiences that have prevented the revelation for years, for decades: fear; shame; sense of guilt; impotence. Fear in particular is paralyzing.

I was always afraid to talk, to tell. I was afraid. I felt guilty. It's hard to even explain, but I also felt guilty about what I could say and so I avoided talking. I realized I was not well, but I felt guilty for not feeling good. Talking was like hurting the place where I grew up, the people who loved me.

I was growing up not like any other teenager, but rather slowly, like a child who grows every year only of half a year, always shy, frightened. You sleep afraid, you walk afraid, you eat and are afraid. You have always fear.

The shame is constantly strengthened from the outside "You are like your mother!", but to this is added the shame of the victim, of those who suffer, the shame of which Primo Levi speaks saying that "the fair feels shame in front of the guilt committed by others and the remorse bends him that exists, that has existed, that has been irrevocably introduced into the world of things that exist, and that his goodwill has been nothing or poor and has not been worth in defense". Shame and guilt very often for not being able to react.

Telling also means exposing oneself to the risk of "being pitied or making pity". We find this experience again today, in the complicated formulation of a request for help.

We hear in the words of those former children, how deep was the sense of loneliness, insecurity, how totalizing the loss of trust in relationships, and how pervasive the intensity of anger.

"I have really set aside trust, even that one towards myself..."

We can easily understand how devastating can be, for some of them, the intensity of anger. This anger is a consequence of what they have suffered and covers countless denigratory cues against oneself, an impotence so painful as to be intolerable, one's unforgivable fear.

"Sometimes I am so full of rage and the worst thing is that I do not even know against who..."

It was a common opinion that at Il Forteto, as at the Institute of Santa Maria Vergine Assunta in cielo and in many others, were placed children from the most desperate situations, the most difficult to recover; so among them inevitably it insinuated the thought, which becomes a conviction and that is rooted in the image of oneself, that their credibility, faced with that of such a prestigious organization, is nothing.

And you go to report such a thing and you have to live with that person there, will they believe him who is 40-50 years or will they believe you that are 12 years old; then you have to live with him, are you sure they'll expel him and send him away?

Referring to Il Forteto, it emerges from the interviews another specific difficulty with respect to the revelation, which is valuable for starting to reason on the issue of the protection of children who grow up within sects. Il Forteto has the characteristics of a real sect, founded by some who at least initially adhered to it, and grew up forcing the minors who were inserted there, or the very few who were born there to follow the rules of the community.

To reinforce the capacity for concealment, the system finds new levers even among the former children entrusted, in the meantime grown up inside, many of which in order to survive adapted with time to its functioning, and are convinced, dissociated from their emotional experiences, of the rightness of the reality they are living. The only one, however, that they know.

"Then I spent a period of pure conviction, I thought I was doing the right thing... I'm in the right place... I no longer felt the mistrust and fear I felt as a child. At one moment I adapted. I thought I had to... I thought I was wrong, I thought it was not right the way I was..."

I never saw that there could be an alternative, so I adapted more. But in this adaptation I also protected myself.

For many of them, the urge to start having a different perspective came with the opportunity to have **more contact with the outside**; an occasion that often arrives with the achievement of late adolescence, or early adulthood. Confronting, sometimes for the first time, with a reality or with another voice, sheds new light on the life within the community, and the process of normalization that had been defensively consolidated over the years, cracks. Or again, it is precisely the chain of

custody typical of Il Forteto that leads to the questioning of the status quo: former minors, who have become adults, are in their turn entrusted with children. For some them, it is precisely the will to remove from the system and to protect the child they have in custody, to represent the breaking point.

“... My foster woman raised me, I had to raise my daughter and she would raise another, but she too would also have worked, she would have suffered all that I suffered and it would have been a never ending wheel. I did not want that she should have to work and live there. They had already said that after the eighth grade she would not have gone to high school... Until some time ago I always believed that I did so many things wrong but at least I had made a good one, I was able to get her out.”

More generally, for almost all the interviewed survivors, the revelation has been a long and tiring process that has matured almost always once they were out of the community, this means in adulthood. An important incentive is also **the relationship among equal**; some survivors tell us that the comparison with peers, who were sharing the same experience, from a certain point onwards was very important, not only to receive the support needed to survive, but also to become aware and take courage.

Hence, as the work on trauma teaches us, the most significant relationships are the most powerful damage agent, and the significant relationships have the most powerful reparative potential.

3.3. RESPONSIBILITY

In the situations of institutional maltreatment that we have investigated, the issue of responsibilities, and consequently that one of prevention, are central. And the words we heard in the interviews, and that we listen together again, are an important occasion, for each of us, to question ourselves about our work, about the meaning of our professional actions.

We asked the respondents to tell us who they consider responsible for what happened, if possible in descending order with respect to the severity of the responsibility.

The majority of the respondents identify the greater responsibilities in those who first removed them from their family of origin, and then placed and abandoned them in the residential structure: social workers and judges. Most of the times, the individual authors of the violences are mentioned only after. Psychologists and natural parents are also nominated. In the specific case of Il Forteto many of the respondents also mention all the adult founding members, and some of them mention even the children who became adults within it, since they would have had to intervene to protect them from the mechanisms of the sect and interrupt them.

It is easy to understand how the theme of the responsibilities aroused in the survivors particularly intense waves of anger, and sometimes of disbelief.

The feeling that runs along the interviews in all the different countries is the sense of corruption, superficiality and indifference from the system, which did not want to see and understand.

I do not even feel anger, I feel disgust, because I think it is washing their hands and not give a shit of each other's ass. A negligence of the magistrates and of the Social Services that followed the minors in custody at Il Forteto, treated so lightly... They made decisions based on friendship. These were the mistakes that led them, the members of Il Forteto, to be so powerful.

Social workers... They took us, they put us there... we were granted as if we were goods to be unloaded from a truck...

The first responsibility, the biggest one, I attribute it to the members who were there from the beginning, those who allowed to continue the maltreatment. Then there are also the missed checks of the Social Services. But first the adults who were there at the first conviction, even those close to me

The judges, the social workers... They were dazzled seeing only the appearance without ever really seeing what was the reality and, when it comes to minors, they must not have their eyes dazzled by appearances but must use the heart and the brain, first of all. Why, I ask myself why? I condemn everyone... the Judge and the social workers and then I condemn all of Il Forteto, all and everybody except the children.

The first responsible is the Juvenile Court, because when a minor is sent to a structure, it is first of all necessary to make sure that this structure has the necessary credentials to be able to bring this child to adulthood or bring him/her closer to his/her family. Then of course the Il Forteto sect did the rest.

Even those who came out of Il Forteto are all to be condemned from the first to the last, for me they are all guilty, because the silence is even worse. Even those people who have been silent for fear or for any other reason are to be condemned, maybe less than one who has made an abuse, but they are all guilty as far as I'm concerned. Including my foster parents, I gave them my personal conviction, as far as I am concerned. They are all guilty. And many are also victims. Many are also victims in being guilty.

In the interviews it recurs, dramatic, the theme of the coverages, of the collusions. This last aspect is very present even among the survivors of religious institutes; the precise and conscious will of the Church, and of its important exponents, to conceal the facts is repeatedly underlined, and it seems in fact to find an objective confirmation in the repeated and late scandals relating to sexual abuse in ecclesiastical circles. More people tell us about these events of having suffered threats even years later.

Many times people tell us "Why did not you say it before?" Look at the facts of today and give yourself an answer: even now many do not believe us, they continue to defend... Imagine before. Too many hookups.

In one of the interviews, it is explicitly stated that former children who have had such experiences should be qualified as "system victims". Also the title of this day refers immediately to the system responsibilities; but we can not deny that the assumption of responsibility on the part of the complex of services and institutions is always extremely difficult. We seem to be able to affirm that today's attention, and the interest it has aroused, are the first step in a great challenge, of which it is essential to be able to share the meaning.

The questionnaires we have given to the operators, to which we make a brief reference, also testify how much the road is tortuous. In the scale of responsibility attributed to the facts, the operators place in first place, in 63% of the cases, the manager of the Residential Community, while the public protection system assumes relevance, rather than as responsible, more in the task of assisting the victims.

In the case of institutional maltreatment, in the cases we are talking about, the operators - even when they have not been personally involved - through the institutions they are part of - have made the violence, not only permissible but even possible, becoming at some level actors consciously or guilty distracted or inadequate. To see therefore the institutional maltreatment implies necessarily to question themselves, their own methodological tools, their own professional practices, to open themselves to the concrete possibility of having been able - at least - to commit serious mistakes.

3.4. PREVENTION

The difficulty in recognizing and working constructively on professional responsibilities is inevitably a major limitation in the possibility to make prevention.

Survivors are very proactive in indicating possible strategies and tools for the prevention of institutional maltreatment. Practically they all agree in identifying one of the crucial factors to prevent maltreatments, there should be a continuous relationship with an external operator, almost always identified in their own social worker. The perception of the survivors is that once the placement has taken place, the "problem" is solved, the social worker does not care about how the insertion proceeds and how the child is doing, and disappears along with his/her mandate. Or sometimes the social workers alternate, one after the other, strangers and not attentive, every time.

Another recurrent and central aspect is that visits, observations, and ratings never have the character of confidentiality, since the adults belonging to the community are always present. And this also happens in the rarer, but not less significant cases, in which the children have been involved in counseling, psychological paths, listenings with juvenile judges, more regular visits with social workers...

The most important protective factor, compared to the risk of institutional maltreatment, seems instead to be the extreme personalization of the intervention, the professional rigor that does not delegate the evaluation process to others, though known and esteemed, and the existence of a real relationship between those who protect and those who must be protected. For this reason they are perceived as necessary and indispensable, to build a relationship of knowledge and trust, regular and continuous individual meetings with their own social worker or with other professional figures outside the community, such as the doctor or the psychologist. Survivors almost always tell of not having felt seen or heard. Prevention passes from the ability to construct interventions in which children are protagonists and not just recipients, and from the possibility that children can be made more active and aware of their rights through an adequate information and authentic listening.

"In my opinion it should work differently... Not just papers, not just documents, but having the opportunity to talk with the child, with the parents, to investigate, to go into the specific... We are not manuals, procedures..."

"They should use different methods when they do community check-ups. Often when they come they don't even talk to the children, they check if there's food in the fridge, if there are adequate clothes... and that's all. I remember the questions "So how was your day? Are you fine, yes? Great then" My social worker never asked me how I felt, or asked me to really tell something... He should have tried to make me talk, but he was not curious not even a little!"

"... it is necessary to send, within the structures, operators that are well informed... who still manage to keep a very detached professional role (by the managers of the structure). It is necessary to try to make as many visits as possible, because I have seen so few, and do not warn before when there are going to be visits, because inside the structure it was very well known when social workers came, so you knew very well how to create skits... The bedroom was personalized while until the day before it was a 5-6 people bedroom..."

Almost all the survivors underline the indispensable need of time, to devote to the single child. It happens instead that the operators find themselves working in solitude, with a disproportionate workload, committed to face continuous emergencies in a situation of progressive contraction of the resources and of the tools at their disposal. It is easy to understand how all this, together with the structural deficiency of our system of services, constitutes a fertile ground for the occurrence of professional mistakes, for the repetition of similar stories...

3.5. JUSTICE - COMPENSATION - SPECIFIC RIGHTS

Another central issue: none of the interviewed survivors believe they have had justice for what they suffered. Among those who give this answer there are those who refer to events that have not been subject of collective revelations and investigations and who instead, as in the case of Il Forteto and I Celestini, has experienced institutional maltreatments that have been the focus of important judicial proceedings. The widespread and transversal experience of injustice does not change. This happens for a variety of reasons.

Justice? I do not think I could ever have it in the sense that all the things I've experienced are things that... it's like someone took my arm, a hand, an ear, a foot and justice would mean going back and getting them back, instead it is not like that.

We will never be even

Justice is for me is when one pays till the end.

Life is one, it's impossible to go back, it is not recoverable... There is no justice. They took away my childhood, my innocence... There is no justice

Hence: the disproportion by default of the sanction with respect to the severity and pervasiveness of the damage caused. A damage that is measured not only in terms of suffering and pain, but also in years, in decades taken away, in potentiality robbed and not expressed. A deviation sometimes not recoverable, or not in full, of what could be the path of life, a depletion that could also affect, as some underline, the successive generations. And the thought that the institutions, the State, have been co-responsible for this damage, makes it even more difficult to bear.

A decisive role in making the “having justice” scarcely possible, is attributed by everybody to a legal institution that, in crimes and in situations of this type, appears particularly odious: the prescription. Each of the interviewed survivors, states without hesitation that it should not exist.

(Prescription) is a big bullshit, I'm sorry to say but... I think it should exist only for much less serious crimes... Because prescription does not exist. My panic attacks are not in prescription. My nightmares are not prescribed. Here we talk about lives, we do not talk about a film. These are real lives.

“Prescription is bullshit. It is not easy to face an abuse... One can go to report it the next day or, as it happened to me, can go after 10 years... Prescription is to turn your back to people and on the other side is to put it in your ass. It does not make sense, it does not have a logical thread.”

“We do not all have the courage to report immediately, we must create a strong inner courage... Telling is a hard thing, pulling out memories hurts... and then you find yourself at the end that had the courage to told the facts, but you do not have the sense of justice because justice itself does not give you the opportunity to redeem...”

In the Forteto trial, as in many other similar, prescription, on one hand, has prevented many victims from being admitted to the trial as civil parties, and on the other, has allowed many defendants, even of the highest level, to exit the judgment with slight punishments, or with no punishment at all to be served. To date, nobody is in jail.

Justice, moreover, does not recognize the institutional maltreatment as a crime in any of the SASCA project partner countries, nor in the International Conventions, because the qualification is always personal and it only identifies an individual responsibility, never a system responsibility.

Then there is another important issue. We know well that trials sometimes depict only partial responsibilities, but for the victims the distinction between judicial truth and historical truth is understandably very difficult to accept and tolerate, even more so in the case of victims of institutional maltreatment, who have already experienced painfully the lack of responsiveness of the system.

We have already highlighted the reluctance of the system to recognize its responsibilities and deficiencies, even professional, in a context in which professional associations and professional communities are too often absent from the reflection on the failure of the interventions and incapable, or perhaps resistant, to respond to the the need to implement the issue of professional responsibility and the clear need for monitoring and sanctions. This makes even more difficult, for victims, to obtain the justice they want.

“In the idea of justice that I have, if one has to pay for the mistakes he has made, then the State must also pay for the mistakes it has made!”

“It is an outrage that many of those who have committed violence or who have permitted it, known by hundreds of children and professionals, many of them also with coordination or management functions in various health and legal sectors, still work in the child protection system.”

Recognition of the omissive and fraudulent responsibilities of individual professionals occurs in interviews at international level as one of the main ways to obtain justice and moral compensation, as well as obvious and basic element of prevention: like dismissals, professional sanctions, fines, criminal liabilities.

The news that the Justice and Social Affairs Commissions of the Italian House of Representatives voted unanimously for the establishment of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the Forteto case goes in this direction. We hope that this is an opportunity to explore how this story has been built on a pile of complicity, connivance and lies, which in part still persist today. It should be remembered that there are illustrious professionals from the Florentine area involved, even though their actions are criminally non-relevant, or not prosecuted because they have been prescribed, who have continued to hold their positions, without any repercussions on their careers, without any conscious and explicit processing of what happened.

This sense of perceived injustice leads us, in the cases of institutional maltreatment, to affirm the need to adopt a different perspective - **transitional justice - which consists of judicial but also non-judicial measures** - which allows us to think in terms of the survivors' specific rights and forms of compensation, and it is an important leap.

In this regard, a significant majority of interviewed believe that victims of institutional maltreatment have the right to access extraordinary forms of support: from therapeutic pathways, to support in finding a home and a work, to facilitated access to services.

Providing material needs and facilitating access to social reintegration services is another of the most cited forms of compensation. Among the many who decline a series of compensatory measures, we find several that also indicate support in everyday life:

Not knowing how to pay a bill, a lease, a car... Then you believe to everyone, just like a person who sees the world for the first time; I would have needed a practical support because I was at risk. I was groping. I looked at others. If I had someone to help me I would not have made a loan...

‘We who have been there we all came out as adult with nothing and without even knowing how to

pay a bill...'

'I still have difficulty with all that is bureaucratic, really a big difficulty and it is twenty years now that I have come out from Il Forteto... ...I find myself displaced in front of so many things, bureaucracy in the first place... on the links with people... understand if a person is a friend or is not a friend, I am mistrustful of the world.'

We must not forget that the survivors have lived very long periods, often isolated and far from everything else, and they find themselves in the need to acquire what, for most people, are trivial, but necessary skills to survive in everyday life.

I had just come out, I did not know the money, I did not know public transport, I did not know how to ride a bike and almost not even on foot.

Many speak of the importance of moral compensation, which comes from greater attention from both the media, institutions and civil society to the issue of institutional maltreatment and raising awareness of the needs and rights of survivors.

Some say they do not need compensation, or to have been compensated in some way by the fact that they have become a better person than those to whom they had been entrusted; because they made it through, with their own strength and resources.

Many also point out that in their experience they were not really able to have access to justice. Some, for example, who have laboriously come out from Il Forteto as young adults have told us that they have talked to professionals of various kinds, telling them about the reality they had lived. Likewise, some survivors of institutional maltreatment in religious institutes say they have sought, after a long time, confrontation and comfort from priests, but finding only minimizing answers, or aimed at archiving the facts.

None of them met someone who put them in a position to exercise their rights, to help them understand that what they had suffered was a crime that could be reported to the police.

The interviews also give us the task of structuring a listening and orientation available immediately for the victims of institutional maltreatment, which joins the all-political challenge of being able to recognize and concretely decline the specific rights of these survivors. The Irish experience told in the afternoon and the round table debate will develop this theme.

I never made a clear complaint because I did not know how to do it, not because I did not want to report it... I have been talking to many people, I have testified some things but no one has ever asked me anything and I have never given the answers to questions that have not been asked. Surely if they had helped me to understand, most likely I would have also made a complaint.

I did not have the courage because of my tender age, for fear of not being believed, for the thought of the nuisance I was going to face, how much money do I have to spend to defend myself if they then give me wrong? Are they going to believe me?... if I had known that there were associations that protects you, I would have also taken courage.

Conclusion

It must make us reflect a lot, that the survivors indicate in their close relationships the most important source of help in dealing with and managing the painful story of which they were protagonists in spite of themselves: friends, their partner, their children. In none of the answers there is a trace of the institutions. Several of the survivors of the Forteto story also indicate in the Oltre Regional project as a precious support, in particular with reference to the psychological

support pathways; but they can not fail to point out, at the same time, that this form of help arrived with much delay compared to the evolution of the affair and of their own lives and, for almost all of them, many years after their departure from Forteto. In the moment of greatest difficulty, therefore, they tell of having found themselves again in an institutional void.

We have heard many voices together. Voices, stories, memories, which must remain as a warning.

I think that you should study less on the books and instead learn the profession talking with the grown up victims, because the experience of a victim, due to the choices made by others, is not explained in the books. Only by listening one can really understand. And then I would like to tell you that those who choose to do this work must do it with heart and passion and should not be afraid to report, if one thinks that something is wrong. Yes, you should organize training courses with victims, it is the best way to learn and understand the consequences of connivances or fear.

In this work, especially in our and our colleagues case, alongside the children and girls, today adults, that our State has put into Il Forteto, we have been privileged witnesses of incredible forms of resilience.

The fact that the survivors wanted and have been able to put their stories and their opinions at our disposal, so that what they have experienced and the suffering that has emerged can serve to someone else, is an act not to be taken for granted, is an act of great courage and generosity, of which we want to publicly thank them. It is up to us to collect it not only to nourish the outrage, or even the "pity", but on the contrary to affirm our commitment and responsibility.

As professionals, we accompany these former children in their trauma-setting processes, and we let them accompany us in recognizing and assuming the responsibility of the system, knowing that this, like the recognition of their rights, can not be left on their shoulders because, as Alan Sroufe says, "As members of society we share a responsibility for the quality of care available to all children. If the responsibility of the child's well-being does not lie in its innate characteristics, then it is ours".