

Mission and method



The evolution of crimes (from micro to transnational) is increasing the role of judicial institutions in safeguarding the security of citizens. The quality and efficiency of judiciaries and of the services they deliver are key factors in economic development. Courts and justice systems are therefore playing a crucial role for the wellbeing of citizens and of communities. Nevertheless, the legal disciplines have disregarded the empirical study of the operational functioning of courts. As a consequence, there is a gap of knowledge on the subject and a shortage of capacity that requires a strong research endeavour and the development of specific professional skills.

The National Research Council (CNR) created IRSIG in 1992. The idea stemmed from the research activity carried out by Prof Giuseppe Di Federico (Director of the Institute until 2007) since 1964 and further developed after 1981 through two concrete initiatives: the establishment of the Research Center on Judicial Studies (CeSROG) at the Department of Political Science of the University of Bologna, and the appointment of several full professors' positions in "Organisation and judicial behaviour" and "Comparative judicial systems" and "Italian Judicial system" at the University of Bologna. Since its foundation, IRSIG-CNR has, therefore, carried out researches taking advantage of the relevant body of knowledge already developed, as well as on pre-existing professional skills. Since 1992, thanks to several full time researches working at the IRSIG, such research endeavour has been conducted on a more systematic and effective base.

In contrast with the formalistic approach to the study of legal institutions, the research activities are not confined to merely studying the body of norms that formally define and regulate the structure and functioning of judicial systems. They are primarily directed at analysing and evaluating the actual working and performance of the various components of those systems, such as: courts, prosecutors' offices, Ministries of justice, judicial councils, defence lawyers' offices, institutions for the recruitment, training and continuing education of judicial personnel, court organization and management, information and communication technologies in the judicial administration.

Over the time, the researches have dealt with issues relevant from an operational and theoretical perspective, such as the peculiar institutional position of judiciaries in democratic regimes and the understanding of their evolution dynamics. The research has identified key structural and institutional variables affecting the governance of judicial systems and their paths

of innovation. Research findings on ICT have contributed to the development of the concept of “cultivation” for the design and deployment of information systems in highly institutionalized organisations. Public management concepts and techniques have been introduced for the first time ever in the Italian justice system. Studies on the “paradigm” of restorative justice show how its innovative tools, such as victim-offender mediation, can reduce both rates of recidivism and the costs of criminal justice, reshaping court procedures and the concept of justice itself.

IRSIG-CNR has now a solid scientific reputation and is internationally acknowledged as a leading institution for the study of judiciaries in Europe. This has been possible also thanks to the collaboration with the Research Center for Judicial Study of the University of Bologna, and with a growing number of academics from Europe, America, and Australia who ask to spend time as visiting fellows at the Institute. Since its foundation and until 2009 more than one hundred scholars and practitioners coming from other European countries and more than twenty coming from non European countries have collaborated to researches promoted and coordinated by IRSIG-CNR.

Technical assistance and training programs have been conducted in collaboration with various agencies engaged in the administration of justice in Italy, in other European countries and also with international organizations that promote or finance programs of judicial reforms: the Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) of the Council of Europe, the 'United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the 'United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Open Society, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).