

Countering Declining Readership and Bookstore Closures in Italy

Roberta Cutillo (February 06, 2020)



A new law to promote reading and the publishing industry - which is going through hard times in Italy - was just approved by the Senate. It consists of several points, one of which involves the appointment of an annual Italian Book Capital.

The Italian Senate passed a new law in an attempt to counter declining readership and its negative effects on the country's publishing industry. The law consists of several points, all aimed at supporting small bookstores and publishing houses and encouraging Italians to read more.

One of these points is the implementation of an annual Italian Book Capital, following the model of the World Book Capital, an initiative launched in 2001 by UNESCO, which recognizes a city that has excelled in the promotion books and reading.

To participate in the selection of the Italian Book Capital, cities will have to submit their project proposals to the Council of Ministers. Each year, the winner will receive 500.000 euros in funding for



the realization of its project.

The “reading law” also consists of a national reading promotion plan: each 3 years, the Ministry of Culture will adopt a national action plan, financed by 4.350.000 euro annually and coordinated by the Center for Books and Reading.

Another point consists in the incrementation by 3.250.000 euro of the bookstore tax credit introduced two years ago, which has already helped to support about 1500 bookselling activities. Additionally, discounts on booksales will be capped at 5% as a way of supporting smaller bookselling businesses. There will also be an official register of “Quality Bookstores” recognized by the Ministry of Culture.

And to encourage readership, a 100 euro “culture card” will be allocated to economically disadvantaged families to allow them to purchase books. Furthermore, a fund of one million euro will be allocated to the formation of school library personnel. The law will also simplify the process of donating books that no longer qualify for retail due to imperfections, alterations, or damages.

An articulated law, which tries to tackle the issue from multiple perspectives in order to counteract a complex cultural phenomenon. Though it is tempting to identify specific factors to blame for why Italians are reading less and less books and why bookstores are going out of business - short attention spans and Amazon are some of the most cited culprits, - the truth is that, as with most cultural trends, the issue is multifaceted and must be addressed as such.

“The approval of the law is an important step forward,” commented culture minister Dario Franceschini, “it isn’t the last stop, now we all have to work on a law for the publishing industry, which will support the book sector as a whole.”

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