

## Il ritorno

A conversation between  
Louis Tallarini\* & Anthony J. Tamburri\*\*

**A. Tamburri:** For Virgil's Aeneas, Italy was the "land of our return"—the place his ancestor Darmanus left generations earlier. How would you describe your return to Italy, when you went there to receive the "Filippo Mazzei" award and you visited the towns of Lacedonia and Calitri for the first time?

**L. Tallarini:** That trip was three years ago. The award ceremony organizers called me to find out where my Italian family was from, but I did not have much information to give them. Being a third-generation Italian American, I lost some of my historical background. Luckily, they managed to find my mother's first and second cousins in Lacedonia and Calitri. At the award ceremony, which was held in Bonito, in the Province of Avellino, I met members of both families: the Panico family from Lacedonia and the Rainone family from Calitri. It was a very moving reunion. Over the next few days, they gave me a tour not only of the towns but also of my family's birthplaces, like the house where my grandfather was born in Lacedonia and the little cave-like construction on a mountainside near Calitri where my grandmother was born. There was an incredible view there—no wonder why they call Calitri the "Positano of Avellino". I also visited the ruins of the castle of Gesualdo near where my great-grandfather had his butcher shop. It is still there.

**AT:** When I visited my grandparents' hometown for the first time (and I am getting to the main topic of this print edition of i-Italy.org), I could see that the focal point of the village was the piazza, the square where everything took place. I was truly marveled by this. I wonder if you had the same experience.

**LT:** Yes, in both Lacedonia and Calitri there is a main "piazza" where concerts and social gatherings are held. Everyone goes to spend the evening there.

**AT:** In Stamford, Connecticut, we had some place like a piazza. There was an area where our grandparents used to hang out in the warm weather and they would speak some form of Italian. It was not standard Italian; it was mainly dialect mixed with English. Did you have this in New Rochelle?

**LT:** Yes, I recall this form of English. We called it "Pidgin English". That was the language spoken in the so-called "Dutch ghetto" where people gathered on their neighbors' doorsteps to spend time together.

**AT:** This brings us to the question of the Italian language. I remember that when I was younger I used to buy the "Progresso" Italian-American newspaper for my grandfather. When I tried to read it I could recognize maybe five words on each page. My situation was not uncommon. Your dedication to the cause of preserving the study of the Italian language in the United States has been remarkable. I was among those who asked you to discuss possible scholarships to send high school teachers to Italy. Instead, and to our great benefit, you ended up doing much more.

\* President of the Columbus Citizens Foundation

\*\*Dean, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, Queens College, CUNY

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# It Takes

# Our First Year

# a Piazza



"Columbus Circle" by L.F.

**In Italy the square (the "piazza") is the living center of any town or village - physical or virtual, local or global. Everything takes place in the piazza: culture and politics, art, and the market ...**

**i-Italy** is 1 year old. We launched it in October 2007 in an incredibly packed conference hall offered by the Graduate School of Journalism of the City University of New York. We were then part of an international project funded by the Italian Government and directed by the Sapienza University of Rome. Our goal was to create the first online community and information network dedicated to Italian and Italian American affairs. It was a fascinating experience, thanks especially to our partners and supporting institutions, in particular *America Oggi*, the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY), and the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò of NYU.

The backing of the Consulate General of Italy in New York has been also essential. An entire section of our magazine ("Italy in New York") is managed in collaboration with them. The Consul General Francesco Maria Talò has even started a "blog" on i-Italy (called "Sistema Italia"). Such institutional support is by no means common, and we take it as a genuine appreciation of our work and passion.

One year later, that seminal project is ended, as well as the Italian government fundings – but we have grown more ambitious, and we are still around. We know that we are on the right track. We have incorporated a not-for-profit organization (*The Italian American Digital Project, Inc.*) to take care of the organizational and fund-raising activities of i-Italy. We are on our own now and need the support of all of you!

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by Letizia Airos Soria

## Linking the Diaspora Culturally

Interview with Franco Frattini,  
Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs

*i-Italy* recently interviewed Franco Frattini, the Italian Foreign Affairs Minister. We discussed his vision of promoting Italy's "cultural piazza" abroad, a place where Italians meet and communicate with those who are attracted to Italy's multifaceted cultural experience. We also discussed the importance of networking and, therefore, the role of modern technology in helping the diverse realities of the Italian diaspora communicate with each other. The result of this interview is an accurate reflection on that "Piazza Italiana", both physical and virtual, that the Italian Foreign Ministry is helping to create worldwide.

**Even though we are talking about culture, we would still briefly like to touch on a political topic. In your opinion, how important is culture for politics, particularly foreign policy? In this sense, how useful are cultural exchanges?**

If nothing else, politics is culture because it is born out of humanity's need for culture. Keeping this in mind, I feel that it is important for those who participate in the political realm to keep it from disintegrating into a form of power that betrays the most admirable as well as the most authentic intentions.

Regarding foreign policy, through its features of inclusivity and impartiality, culture is a formidable instrument that allows the meeting of diverse, sometimes very different, cultures and humanities that can even be in conflict with one another.

In the international field, I often hear discussions of "soft diplomacy" that leave out important cultural characteristics. In Italy, it cannot be emphasized enough that culture needs to become an even greater developmental instrument, together with the overall promotion of Italy throughout the world.

**Promoting Italian culture abroad can also be a powerful way to promote our country. What is the Foreign Ministry doing to promote Italy in the world? Have you met with any difficulties?**

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**In this issue:** Letizia Airos Soria, Piero Bassetti, Stefano Benni, Ottorino Cappelli, Lucio Caputo, Peter Carravetta, Franco Frattini, Judith Harris, Amara Lakhous, Silvana Mangione, Marina Melchionda, Renato Miracco, Berardo Paradiso, Rodrigo Praino, Roberta Iannacito-Provenzano, Riccardo Strano, Louis Tallarini, Francesco Maria Talò, Anthony J. Tamburri, Paolo Timoni, Alfredo Valentini, Jana Vizmmuller-Zocco

## Interview with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs— from page 1

Promoting Italian culture means promoting not only Italy's image in the world, but also Italy's entrepreneurship. This was already the main characteristic of my former duties in this Ministry under President Berlusconi, to whom we owe the new direction of Italian diplomacy in service of the country's development. I support this new direction so strongly, as you know, that I kept the Foreign Ministry's responsibility for cultural promotion under my direct supervision.

There are difficulties in this mission but, for the most part, they are relative to the particular and difficult economic times that the Western world, including Italy, is undergoing. A strong relationship between culture and development is vital, not just to the key players in the market. Cultural promotion is always in need of more private resources.

**On July 31, you signed with Sandro Bondi, the Italian Minister of Culture, the Memorandum of Agreement for the overseas promotion of Italian language and culture. Could you please explain to us what this is?**

Minister Bondi and I are on the same political and cultural wavelength. Our perspectives are so well intertwined that they led us to sign an agreement between our two ministries that is, perhaps, the first of its kind. Without a doubt, it is necessary to give an increased unity and efficacy to Italy's cultural policy. The memorandum is actually rather simple; on a monthly basis, the general directors of both ministries will meet to decide on common ways to promote Italian culture worldwide. The Ministry of Culture will follow its vocation as cultural producer; likewise, the Foreign Ministry will follow its vocation as diffuser of culture across the consular network, the embassies, and cultural institutes. The ultimate goal of this partnership is that of providing these activities with better coordination, which will allow us to optimize the network of Italian institutions abroad as an instrument of "cultural diplomacy"—the backbone of Italian foreign policy—also through the use of innovative methods and technologies. The collaboration between the two ministries aims to plan common strategies involving other central and public administrations as well as the private sector in carrying out initiatives and in developing, finally, a combined communication plan.

**i-Italy is a network that unites Italian Americans, Italians, and Americans, through the use of the Internet. We are helping to realize the long-dreamt flow of information between these groups. We hope to contribute to a coming together of Italy and the Italian diaspora, both past and present. At the same time, we try to talk to Americans, who love our country, but are often misinformed and think of the Italy of yesterday. We cannot afford to lose the historic legacy of Italian emigration, nor can we lose the resources of the prestigious Italy of today, which is still somewhat unknown. What is the Foreign Ministry doing to promote this "new" Italy on an international scale?**

With the advent of new technologies, such as the Internet, we have the power to democratically redistribute the way information and knowledge are accessed. In 2000, I undersigned a law that focused on public communication; this shows, I think, how much I believe in communication, in new technologies as a means to maintain transparency in public administration and help human beings across the planet to unite. The Internet and the World Wide Web are a welcome addition to today's society.

Sure, things get more delicate when you must represent the complex reality of an entire nation and its changes over the course of history. The Internet gives us immediate access to timely information but it also makes communication timeless and even splits time into fragments that can be reassembled according to the user's whims.

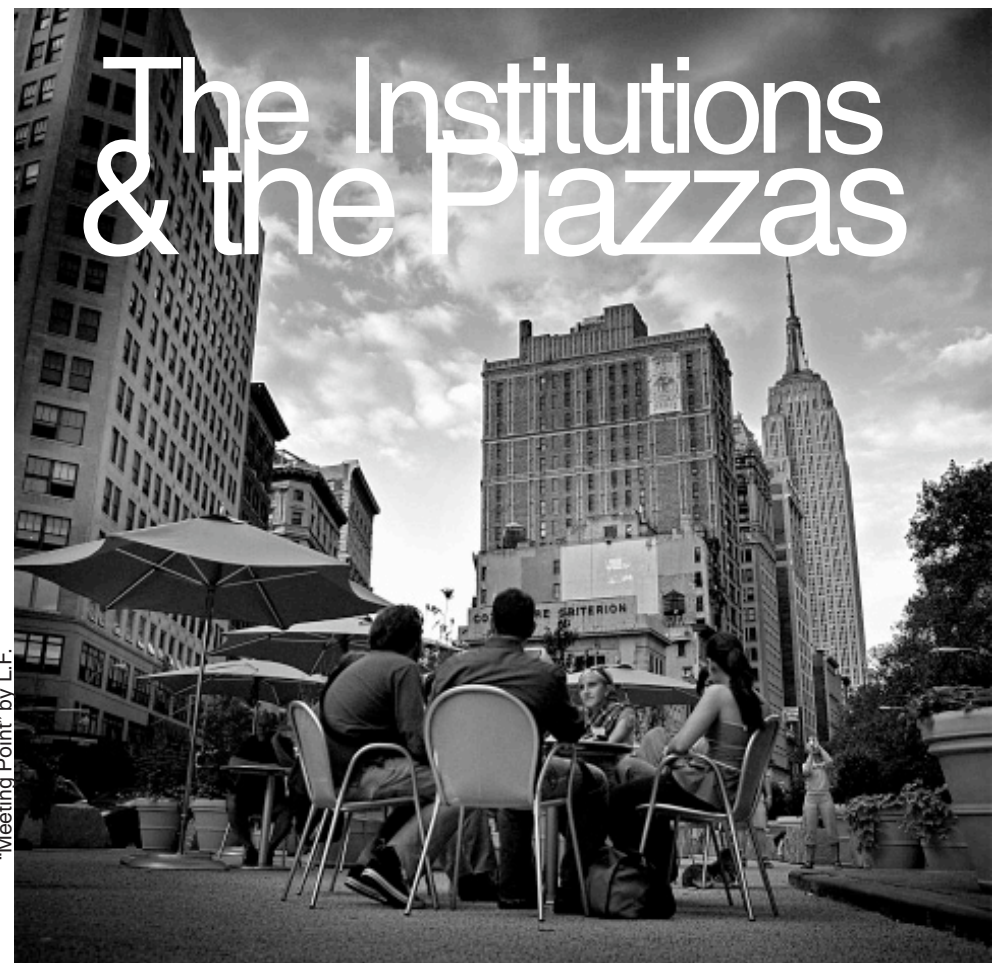
The past and the present communicate in this sphere and in some cases can even negate each other. Today, sometimes truth and information do not coincide, and mass media often risk stripping down the news according to their ideas. Thus, when you try to tell the history of a nation, it often becomes difficult to preserve the memory while, at the same time, avoiding stereotypes. For instance, I believe that the whole world recognizes Italy's place at the forefront of music and art, but few people know of Italy's scientific, technological, and industrial excellence. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs intends to promote these characteristics through specific programs. As I said before, the network of Cultural Institutes, of embassies, of consulates, and of Italian schools abroad need to join this new mission: to promote the 'new' Italy without letting the 'old' Italy fall into oblivion. The new Italy is the direct consequence of the old, after all.

**Would you also allow us a personal question? What rapport do you have with the United States, with the American lifestyle and culture in general? Is there something that we should learn? What did you learn?**

I love the United States; I appreciate many aspects of the American lifestyle. Most of all, I have a profound respect for what the United States represents in the eyes of the world. The United States is the country that gave freedom something a meaning that goes way beyond its philosophic concept. The United States is the only country that wrote in its Constitution that every citizen has a right to happiness. The idea of liberty is the American Creed. It appeared in the Declaration of Independence as a natural right and then it reappeared a few years later as a national symbol on the first coins minted by Congress. In 1886, the Statue of Liberty was inaugurated in New York Harbor and it has become an international symbol. Now that Europe has been freed from Nazism and Fascism and the Cold War has ended, the ideal of freedom for the American people has become a symbol of their collective conscience and even a symbol of the United States' mission as keeper of the free world. This is what we all should learn from the United States. It disappoints me that sometimes Europeans forget this or pretend to forget it.

**Our readers are Italian, Italian American, and also American, and scattered throughout the United States. They have in common a great love for our country and are, in a certain sense, the bearers of "italicity". Do you have a message for them?**

My biggest wish is that this love coincided with an attachment to the Italian language. By preserving our language, by passing it down through the generations, we guarantee the preservation of our sensitivity, of our thought processes, our creativity, and our talent for life—everything that has made Italy unique in the world.



"Meeting Point" by L.F.

# The Institutions & the Piazzas

by Francesco Maria Talò\*

The concept of the *piazza* has always been deep-rooted in Italian culture—it reaches all the way back to the Ancient Roman forum and it still is a distinguishing characteristic of Italian cities and towns.

Since my arrival in New York, it has been my job to make the Italian Consulate into the city's Italian *piazza*. This *piazza* is not limited to the physical location of the Consulate; the virtual aspect of it is also important, since it is a far-reaching link among all Italians and Italian-Americans. It is even more vital to all those who are or would like to become interested in Italy.

In this way, we unite two distinct aspects into one common purpose: that of seeing each other and being together and that of reaching those who are farthest away. We are trying to accomplish this dual purpose through a series of initiatives designed to bring the Consulate to all of the neighborhoods of New York City as well as to the states of New York and Connecticut.

To do this, it is necessary to use technology. We not only want to optimize the official website of the Consulate, we also believe that it is important to link ourselves to other websites. Indeed we are entering a new dimension where there are many *piazzas* that intermingle with each other and multiply. We intend to participate in this communication revolution because it provides the tools that allow us to perform our

traditional duties even better. Diplomacy and the consular functions, in fact, are by their own nature ways to unite people and foster the creation of meeting places.

In the spirit of the 'net and of the new so-called "web 2.0" – the new interactive, multimedia, user-driven web of today – we have supported the creation and the development of i-Italy, a virtual *piazza* with which we have launched a series of common initiatives. One of these is the absorption and strengthening within i-Italy of another site that the Consulate used to manage, "Italy in New York." We now have an entire section of i-Italy called "Italy in New York" that is available to all organizations and institutions who wish to promote their initiatives and events to a broader public. This information exchange is a vital aspect of the website.

But exchanging information also means exchanging ideas, demonstrating the importance of dialogue. This, too, is a characteristic of the *piazza* that is best expressed through the introduction of electronic "neighborhoods," such as blogs and forums. We were very happy this past summer to collaborate with i-Italy in launching a new interactive blog, "Sistema Italia."

A *system* is also a network, and thus a kind of a *piazza* because it offers a vision of harmony and togetherness. This is how "Sistema Italia" was born; it is a place where people can dialogue and where

members of the Italian community can present ideas and exchange opinions.

This is another expression of one of the *piazza's* essential characteristics—it is the location of the marketplace, where merchandise is exchanged. And, taking this a step further, we can say that ideas are exchanged in the *piazza*, as well. If the exchange of merchandise for money is an equal exchange, the exchange of ideas, as someone suggested, is an exchange that enriches everyone. This is a win-win situation, for if I give an idea to you and you give one to me, we both have two ideas. This is our goal, after all: to share ideas and opinions.

I believe that it is important for public institutions to participate in this kind of dialogue, even by means of technology. I can say that a great deal of my daily work consists of creating contacts and making connections—and I have dozens of meetings every day that allow me to unite people in this way.

We don't have many financial resources. Unfortunately, we don't even have much in terms of human resources, but we put all of our energy into uniting others in such a way that a system of contacts is created from which everyone can benefit.

The spirit of our work is making the Italian Consulate General of New York into an even larger *piazza* for all Italians, Italian-Americans, and all those who love Italy.

\* *Consul General of Italy in NY*

# 'Italicity'

## A Free and Open Community

by Piero Bassetti\*

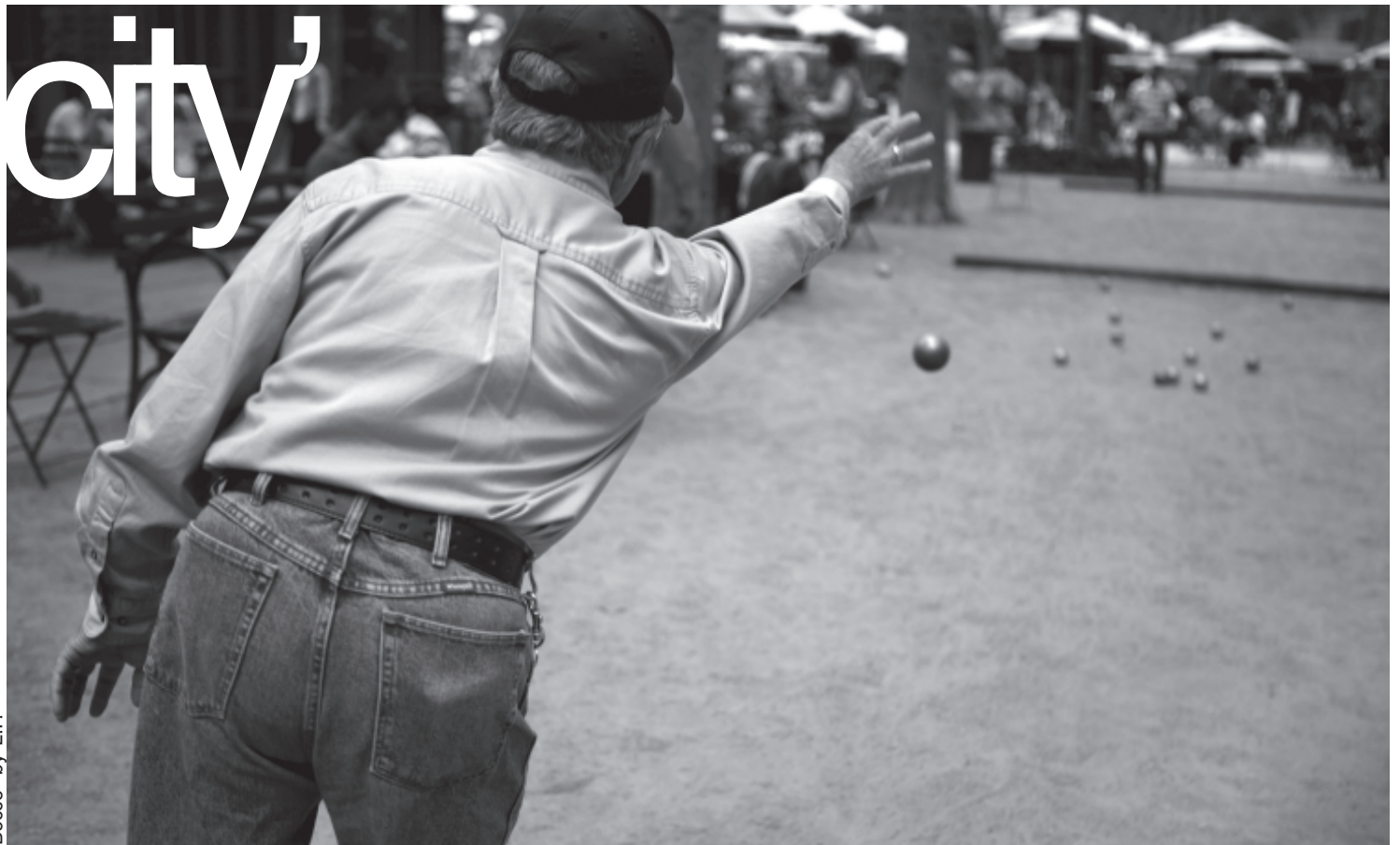
About 15 years ago, I coined the word *italicità* or "italicity" based on the idea of a virtual meeting place, a new kind of piazza, where the 200-250 million people of Italic origin (Italians, Swiss, Dalmatians, descendents of Italians, Italophiles...) throughout the world could meet in a place that transcends formal boundaries and legal barriers. Italicity can be compared to a commonwealth of cultures, experiences, and ideals—a community that seeks to unite all those who have 'Italic' roots.

The Italic community itself has several key characteristics: a millenary culture, a way of life marked by quality, and a special taste for uniqueness. But, in addition to these qualities, there are also certain characteristics that can mirror some Italian defects. For example, there is a cosmopolitanism that is far from Italian provincialism; there is more internal unity, which was learned by peoples that are less factious than we are; and there is a familiarity with societies and institutions that have an older and more penetrating liberal and democratic tradition, such as the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Great Britain, or France.

There have always been *Italici*. It can be said that Marco Polo, the explorer who united two distinct and far apart civilizations, was the first Italic. Throughout history, many other "proto-Italici" left their homelands to establish themselves in other parts of the world. Just like those who came to Italy or Italian Switzerland attracted by art and culture, these people should also be considered the predecessors of the current *Italici*. Goethe, who wrote his famous Italian Journey, was certainly a predecessor of the current *Italici*.

Today, italicity is made up of many components throughout the world that form a network. The scope of this network is not to revolve around Italy; rather, it is that of interacting with one another in the best and most direct way possible. The *Italici* of Buenos Aires can communicate, express opinions, and do business with the *Italici* of New York who can do the same thing with the *Italici* of Sydney.

Like all free and open communities, italicity offers many opportunities as well as the invaluable bonus of a shared identity, especially during this time of globalization when many traditional values are cast by the wayside. It is important to emphasize that the Italic identity is not an act of disloyalty toward the person's country of residence but, instead, it is the key to belonging to a rich and complex value system. The Italic "piazza" is not a place of nationalistic claims; instead it is a place that promotes the togetherness of those who share a common matrix in their life experience (who can also hold the richness of regional communities and the vitality of dialects).



"Bocce" by L.F.

To consider an additional membership, that of Italic, belongs more to the act of conversion rather than secessions as it is neither exclusive nor excluding. The *Italici* are favored by their large diaspora, which is present in every corner of the earth. This diaspora knew how to gain the respect and often the admiration of its various new homelands. Italian emigration is no longer a humble migration in search of food. Today, the Italic business and cultural community is recognized everywhere and the Internet seems to be the ideal way to link these communities. In this postmodern world, where technology has leveled the dimensions of time and space, the Italic "piazza" cannot avoid coinciding with the various aspects of the web. The Internet is the best way to reach other people. In fact, the web can both speak

to and give voice to a diverse audience by surpassing geographic location as well as national, linguistic, and professional boundaries.

Nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance to remember that although the Italic union is attainable, it has nothing to do with an exclusive membership; it has to be gained through a gradual development of consciousness that is not in contrast with the rights and duties of citizens born and raised on American, Argentine, or Australian soil. To feel Italic is not in conflict with feeling Italian, Swiss-Italian, Italian-American, etc.; on the contrary. In fact, one of the first results of the new "glo-cal" experience (belonging to a shared community with a global dimension, but still expressing it through its local components) is the ability to

simultaneously belong to separate, distinct cultures.

It can be said that there is an Italic piazza (Italy-city) wherever and whenever an Italic enters into relationship with another Italic. While the Italic piazza doesn't coincide with that of the ideal Renaissance City nor with De Chirico's metaphysical one, the Italic piazza does indeed see, in both, its own cultural ascendance. *Italici* live by the values that have been distilled and consolidated throughout centuries of *civitas italica*. These values are not just shared and shareable values; they are the springboard for new belongings and additional togetherness that at the moment are not completely imaginable. The Italic piazza will be the catalyst of future political alchemy.

\*President of "Globus et Locus"

### A conversation between Anthony J. Tamburri & Louis Tallarini

from page 1

**LT:** At the Columbus Foundation, we know that language is the foundation of every culture. Italian was not encouraged after World War II amongst the early Italian immigrants. They were focused on Americanizing their children. The formal teaching of the Italian language as seen in the Italian schools was not a part of American schools. Looking back, this is sad. Now, people of my generation are middle-aged and getting older and lack the skills in the Italian language necessary to spread our culture into America's future. That is why, Anthony, when you brought this mission to me, to the Columbus Foundation's leadership we recognized how important it is to promote the Italian language as a building block of our culture.

**AT:** And now we have the Italian Language Foundation.

**LT:** Yes, I am happy that I could support the effort for the Italian language teaching, both on an administrative and on a financial level. But, we need everybody's efforts so we can continue. Teachers, administrators, and leaders of various organizations are indeed welcome to step forward and send donations to us through the foundation's website (<http://italianlanguagefoundation.org/>). This will help us in our effort of promoting Italian language programs in the United States.

**AT:** Let's turn to Italian-American youth. You are the president of an organization that gives out millions of dollars every year in scholarships. I know that recently the Columbus Foundation put emphasis on language as being part of the criteria for some of the scholarships. How has the Internet, in your opinion, changed the youngest generations' approach to Italy, Italian, and Italian-American culture?

**LT:** I think that it is kind of eye-opening that Italian language courses at the A.P. level have only existed since 2006. We realized that we never had an Italian requirement in any of the scholarships we granted. We have 58 high schools that we gave scholarships to last year; only some of them teach Italian at the A.P. level. Some of these high schools do not offer Italian courses at all. From now on, knowledge of Italian will be a stipulation for scholarships given at the high school level.

As far as the Internet is concerned, I can say that I was one of those who spearheaded the effort to create the new website for the Italian Language Foundation. Also, working with my 14-year-old son Matthew helped me to realize that the resources available on the web to study Italian are just incredible.

**AT:** Let's close with the idea of the Columbus Citizen Foundation as a "piazza", as a meeting place.

**LT:** I do believe that the Foundation is a piazza. First of all, we are a centralized source of information for Columbus Day celebrations, the largest event in honor of Italian culture in the world. The parade, the exhibitions at Grand Central Terminal, the gala, and the memorial service at Columbus Circle...it takes a year to organize these events. Our building has also become the center of an international exchange of ideas within the Italian-American community, just like a piazza.

# Meeting Italian Art Abroad

by Renato Miracco\*

How is an Italian piazza different from an American piazza? What is the idea behind the invention of the Italian piazza and how did it develop? And how is it perceived by foreigners? If we do not reflect on this we cannot move forward and propose new piazzas, both physical and virtual.

The Italian piazza was born at the same time as history and society. People would meet in an historic public place to socialize. Now this has fallen out of favor. Today we do get together via the Internet, but increasingly less in historic and public spaces. Perhaps the only open place where we continue to meet is in the café, and only occasionally. The Internet and the café have become our versions of the contemporary piazza. I invite us all to reflect on this, before making a few points about the cultural piazza that I am helping to create here in New York thanks to my role as the director of the Italian Cultural Institute (ICI).

The exhibition that I curated at the Met on Giorgio Morandi was a great success and was transformed into a true piazza where the best of Italian art was on display.

As the Director of the ICI and the exhibition's curator, I tried to look at the Met as a new piazza in New York City to present Italian art. And my hope is that there will be many more of these piazzas as I continue my work as the Director of the ICI.

What does it mean to bring an exhibition of Morandi's work here? First and foremost, it means to disseminate and display - in piazza - the excellence of Italian culture. Italian culture in the United States is generally seen as the province of the "old masters" and rarely includes contemporary art. It will suffice to recall the exhibit of Fontana's work which took place two years ago; at first, the exhibit was seen almost as suspect, but it then gathered success and went on to become a true symbol of contemporary Italian culture.

All of this is thanks to the growing synergy between the ICI, which I have the privilege to direct, and the Consulate. The success of the Morandi exhibit can also be attributed to the program "Sundays at the Met" which provides art lectures to the public. I was asked to give 27 curatorial talks, and by doing so, spotlight Italian art. Specific gatherings like these are fundamental in the strategy to publicize our culture here.

In order to broaden the Italian cultural piazza, it is also important to complete the project of creating a much-anticipated exhibit space of Italian art in New York. The ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Cultural Heritage have expressed great support for this project. This space will represent the "connection hub" between Italy's culture and Italian culture abroad. It will be a new media piazza which will join and connect other piazzas. It is only in this way that will we succeed in mapping the past and the present.

It is important to give the ICI a new image, both from a physical point of view (I will seek to restore several floors of the Institute, transforming them into new exhibition spaces) and metaphorically: a new sense of *italianità* is needed, one that is more expansive and ambitious. It is necessary to plan a new institutional identity for the ICI here in order to broaden and disseminate the "architecture" of Italian culture within a piazza that is increasingly broader and far-reaching.

\*Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in New York



"Free Hugs" by L.F.

## Politics & the Piazza

by Judith Harris\*

The late British classicist Henry Kitto held that the ancients had little formal democracy, but that their meeting to argue out their problems at the *stoa* in Athens or a forum in Rome was essentially democratic, whereas the modern British, with their formal democracy, tend to speak only across backyard picket fences. For Professor Kitto, yammering away, arguing, quarreling, and joking in a piazza constitute a real and valuable road to democracy.

This concept was driven home to me when touring Sicily by car with a friend in 1965. At sunset we heard a drum beating across a valley. Drawn by the steady throbbing, we drove up a winding road to a tiny hilltop town where we saw that the drummer had summoned farm workers, many of them illiterate, to the piazza to hear the evening newspaper being read aloud. Afterward a lively debate began, exactly as Professor Kitto had said.

The architecture of urban life in Italy, still focuses around the piazza, continues to work toward guaranteeing that its diverse standards of living do not isolate people. And what a gift that is, even when the people in the piazza run amok, as was not infrequent in the early Seventies.

In May of 1969, the *Rome Daily American* sent me to cover an anti-Vietnam war demonstration during a visit by President Richard Nixon. Demonstrations were scheduled, and police had to protect the American Embassy on Via Veneto. Helping them were several organized squads of right-wing

extremists yielding brickbats. After hundreds of demonstrators were forced from Via Veneto toward Piazza della Repubblica, police cars whirled in a circle, sealing the demonstrators as if in a ring. The only sound was a stampede of running feet.

"What are you doing here?" shouted one of the organizers. I was six months pregnant, and terrified. I showed him my press credentials. "Okay. Stay with us," he said, drawing me toward an inner circle.

These days the piazzas are by and large calm, and favorite haunts of Italians and tourists both. Traffic has always been barred from many, such as St. Mark's in Venice, which thrive as open-air living rooms. These open spaces are in marked contrast with the Anglo-Saxon concept of a park, such as Washington Square Park, crisscrossed by lanes.

The Italian piazza is an outgrowth of the temple complexes of Greco-Roman antiquity. Many stood within a walled compound and had treasuries containing valuable votive offerings, so that gates were locked at night for security. The transformation from temple compound to busy piazza with a secular function is nicely illustrated at ancient Pompeii, where the older, simpler Greek temple to Apollo within its walls runs alongside the later, larger Roman forum. Centered on its temple to the Capitoline gods, that forum still has walls and gates but is expanded so that flanking the temple are business offices, an elementary school, a public latrine, warehousing, and local government offices.

This configuration—church, town hall, place of business—continued throughout Italy. During the Renaissance it was the scene of political and religious choreographed events. The Reformation changed its architecture so that the piazza became a propagandistic, theatrical setting for the beleaguered Catholic Church. Personal propaganda was an important function: under Pope Innocent X, Piazza Navona, where his Pamphilj family owned a palazzo, was revamped with Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers as its focal point. The goal was family prestige, and indeed, for a time the piazza was called the Pamphilj Forum.

Under Mussolini, handsome new cities were built in the Pontine area south of Rome, replete with piazzas. There, the town hall, rather than the church, was designed to be the primary focus.

But even then people conversing, dialoguing, quarreling, and enjoying each other remained at the real heart of the piazza.

Imitation is the finest form of flattery, of course. Proof came in a visit last week to a year-old gigantic and stylish mall complex in Glendale, California.

Its centerpiece is, guess what, a sprawling piazza with a large traditional fountain encircled by outdoor cafes and a small green where children play and grown-ups do *tai chi* on Sunday mornings. *Evvi-va la piazza!*

\*Rome-based American writer and journalist



"Square Under Control" by L.F.



# Once Upon a Piazza

"Tomatos" by L.F.

My first experience with an Italian *piazza* was, to my surprise, the only *piazza* in the town that I had visited back in 1970. Then, that small town in Lazio, Settefrati, at the top of the mountains in the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, had a winter population of a few hundred people. Fortunately, I got there in July.

That *piazza* became, for me, a meeting place of the town's citizens, from *contadini* (yes, there were still genuine *contadini* at that time) to the town's *pezzi da novanta*, which included, first and foremost, the priest, someone I remember as a middle-aged man named Don Antonio. (He took a liking to me because, I guess, we shared the same moniker.) Also included in this group was, naturally, the mayor. (Yes, this little mountain town is its own *comune* and has its own mayor, as well as a few *frazioni*!). Then there were a few members of the town, such as a prominent family or two, the barber who, at that time, had the only public phone in town (one of the very few phones at all in those years...), and a relative or two of mine from my home town here in the States. And, of course, my grandfather, who had spent close to two decades, at that time, traveling to and fro because he had retired from Con. Ed. in the 1950s.

That *piazza* was basically the town's central nerve system. The only *bar/caffè* was there; the only *alimentare* was there; the post office was there; the barbershop/*centralino* was there; and the *municipio* and *pro loco* were also located there. As a consequence, if you needed to take care of business, you could basically go to city hall and get the documents you needed, then proceed to the post office for a stamp, and ultimately mail them. Once that series of tasks was completed, you could then proceed to the barbershop to call whoever was to receive your letter. In the meantime, if so desired, you could even get a coffee for that morning or afternoon pick-me-up. Or, if there were some special event going on, you might get a trim either before or after your

phone call, in order to look ever the more dapper for later on.

Yet, that *piazza* was, and remains, more than just the functional nervous system of the *paese*. It was where just about everyone ended up after dinner, somewhere between 8 and 9 PM, dressed well, though not necessarily to the nines; that was reserved for those special Sunday events. During these evening promenades, all sorts of other town business took place. Chats were held, for example, about what to do with the laundry fountain, located literally underneath the *piazza*. Yes, there was still, at that time, a functional public laundry fountain, where the proverbial *lavandaie* engaged their craft: cleaning clothes and, some would say gossiping, as they shared town news! Depending on the time of year, discussions on the annual feast of the Madonna di Canneto took place; a feast that lasts from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of August. Actually, two Madonnas inhabit the area: one ceramic, which spends most of the year in a sort of tabernacle in the church in town that overlooks the *piazza*; the other, a black Madonna that resides higher up the mountain in the Sanctuary of Canneto. And, more important, over the years, what to do with the elementary school, whose population changed significantly from time to time, due to all sorts of reasons, most of which were tied to family economics and possible relocation.

I remember so vividly my first time in that *piazza*. I had traveled close to twenty hours, from New York, to visit my grandfather. From JFK to Fiumicino; then to Roma Termini; then, to my chagrin, a failed attempt to get a train ticket to Settefrati. "Quale linea?" the ticket man asked. "Boh!", I replied, thinking, "What the heck did the paesanos back in Stamford mean when they said Settefrati was near Rome?" It took some research, as I dragged my suitcase all over Rome's train station, but I did make it... I took a third-class train to Cassino, and then a taxi to Settefrati. The *piazza*, at my arrival, was

by Anthony J. Tamburri\*

empty! Well, almost. There was this young boy, sitting idly on a small wall, fiddling. I approached and asked him, in Italian, if he could direct to "la casa di Michele d'Egidio". "You American?", he blurted out loud, almost with relief. "Yes," I replied. And after some introductory conversation, from which I learned he was there for the summer with his family, from a town in Connecticut only a few miles from mine, he knew exactly who my grandfather was and where he was staying. That teenager, who barely knew my grandfather personally, knew exactly where he lived; he habitually hung out in that *piazza*, even when everyone else was resting after a huge afternoon meal, soaking up not only the sun but, indeed, information about every one and everything. (Yes, lunch-time meals were still abundant: a mountain of spaghetti *al sugo*, followed by a roasted *piccione*, followed by salad, and then either fruit or cheese.)

This past August I returned to that *piazza* after twenty-two years. It was the same square, significantly redone, with the newly remodeled church still overlooking the *piazza*. Smack in the middle was a bandstand, where the nightly entertainment played for the few hundred that strolled in and out of that *piazza* after dinner, during this fortnight of celebrating the "festa della Madonna"! I returned, partly, because my cousins Theresa and Al were there on summer vacation, and we wanted to see their new house; partly, also, because, Italo, another dear cousin of 88 years, wanted once more, as he put it, "dopo più di trent'anni camminare con te a braccetto in piazza ancora una volta." Yes, in that square he wanted, once more, to walk arm in arm, discussing with me—once more, after more than three decades—so many things, including my grandfather's escapades over the years, as we had often done since 1971 in his *sartoria*, in Florence, in Piazza Santa Croce.

\*Professor and Dean, Calandra Institute

# Origins of Fantasy

by Peter Carravetta\*

When he was seven or eight, to amuse himself and kill the boredom and the fear of animals and adults, he would spend hours drawing people, houses and maps, crouched at his father's army surplus utility chest by *u'focularu*. He had learned to be thrifty with any available sheet of paper, plus he would pick up, even off the floor and by the *piazza*, any piece of blank or somehow usable paper. He did not dare ask his parents for an extra notebook. Spending for school supplies came at a designated moment, in September, when they'd buy him one pen, one pencil, three marbled notebooks, plus a reader and a general topics anthology—"*u'sussidiariu*." And he loved *u'sussidiario* especially. It had lots of maps, graphs, sketches, headings in bland magentas or dull blues, and some black and white photographs.

He was fascinated by the Ancient World, and he would strain to imagine what the Great Wall of China and the Coliseum looked like in reality. But he liked the part about the Modern World as well. He read that in New York there was a building that was 102 stories high! *Per la miseria!* The photograph was so small, he couldn't quite grasp the dimensions: he thought of 34 Municipios stacked atop one another! It was unbelievable. He queried the experts in construction in his family: his uncle Michele, a contractor who had actually built two-story houses, said with poured concrete you can do anything. His brother Franco just starting his own company had read they could make the floors lighter with a new honeycomb brick. His father, a foreman, just shook his head, wondering aloud: who knows what kind of steel they came up with. They agreed it was an engineering masterpiece, *è un capolavoro edilizio*.

He recalled that just outside of Lappano and perched on a hillcrest about 500 meters above Cosenza, there was a bluff with a majestic 270 degree view, where he could see the Crati River lazily vanishing in the north end of the valley, the Norman-Swabian castle down below atop a knoll in the city, then rising on the other, western, side the Appenine range, and pyramid-shaped Monte Cucuzza towering above it. The bulging hills that rose up gradually toward La Sila were to the southeast. Behind and further up the railway station and then the paternal house. It was a breathtaking location. It was one of his favorite spots to which he would steal away and daydream, undisturbed, and draw. He would sit there for hours trying to calculate in meters how far down the slope the Empire State Building would have to be built in order for him to have a straight level view of the 102th floor. He had to ignore the height of the spire. But it looked like it would have had to be located just below Zumpano, yet slightly higher up than Cosenza. It would have been awesome. Just the cement needed! Imagine the motors to pull elevators four hundred meters up! And the thousands of people who could fit inside; why it'd hold Lappano and Zumpano and probably San Pietro too! He'd fantasize how this imaginary monolith would sit in that valley, out of place, true, but grandiose, imposing, beautiful, and imagine what you could see and do from up there.

Fly away?

Did he know or even dream that someday—only eight years later!—he would be taking his father right up to that 102th observatory? Looking south toward the Statue of Liberty, his father had remarked: Do you recall that picture in your fourth grade *sussidiario*?

Oh yes, oh yes...

\*Alfonse M. D'Amato Professor of Italian and Italian American Studies, SUNY/Stony Brook

# Italianità on FaceBook

by Jana Vizmuller-Zocco & Roberta Iannacito-Provenzano\*

Given that the generation of young people born in North America who are now between 18 and 25 year of age is technically savvy and enjoys the activities offered by programs available on the web, the question arises as to the manner in which "Italianità" is reflected in those Facebook groups which have as their focus matters that the creators have identified as "Italian". Our research takes into consideration those Facebook groups which have been created by US college and Canadian university students who are children or grandchildren of Italian immigrants or children of mixed-marriages where one parent is of Italian extraction. There are hundreds of groups (some with thousands of members) dealing with aspects of *Italianità*. The group's title clearly identifies its focus. This may be "national" or "local"/"paese": Being ITALIAN Just Simply Amazing; I am SICILIAN...not Italian...get it right!!; Abruzzese and PROUD, Half-Italians, Villa San Michele; or manner of being raised and cultural traditions: I used to get botte when I was small, I love fettini, The world according to nonna, etc. There are at least three significant observations that stem from our research:

1. Young North Americans of Italian background self-define themselves as Italian. What connection to Italy is shown by the Facebook groups creators who were not born in Italy? Why do individuals of second, third and subsequent generations self-identify as Italian? According to the straight-line assimilation theory, each generation of immigrants feels less and less ethnic and lives and acts more and more like the host society; this path also presents "detours" that Markus Lee Hansen alluded to: "the third generation wants to remember what the second generation tried to forget". The analysis of the data collected from Facebook groups with Italian content shows clearly that the assimilation theory is insufficient to understand the creation of ethnoculture as practiced on the Web 2.0 today. Specifically, neither Hansen's hypothesis, nor Richard Alba's European American ethnicity, nor Herbert Gans' symbolic ethnicity can account for the connection that young people of Italian background have with Italy today. Their attitude is often tongue-in-cheek, but it does not prevent them from creating their own Italy or their own Delia: they are not dependent on the idea of a "paradise from which they are excluded" (as Robert Orsi put it): they choose to retain those aspects of ethnicity with which they have a direct experience. Clearly, *nonni* are an integral part of this picture, just as some variety of Italian or dialect belongs to the mix. And this is true whether the group has been created by a young person born in Canada or the US. Therefore, cognitive ethnicity and creative ethnicity proceed hand-in-hand in general in North America, and with most probability in other countries with Italian immigration as well.

2. The meaning of the term "Italian" relies on the knowledge of aspects of modern Italy as well as familiar traditions common to North American Italians.

The fact itself that all the second- and third-generation individuals (Canadian or US-born)

who participate in Facebook groups call themselves Italian requires some analysis and explanation. In Italian, there are two terms each indicating a different perspective of one's connection to Italy: *italiano* and *italico*. Even though the political and social definition of *italiano* is by no means without problems, it is generally used with the meaning of someone born in Italy whose parents were also born in Italy; *italico* is anyone born outside of Italy with parents/grandparents born in Italy. This distinction is made in English in some research on children and grandchildren of immigrants to North America (see Monica Stellin's title of part one of her edited book: "Italicity" in Canadian Media), but it has not entered the common vocabulary of speakers of English. Therefore, "Italian" is the umbrella term for every individual who has an ancestral connection to Italy, however near or distant. This attitude and the subsequent fusion of referents of "Italian" is also supported, in part, by the political decision to grant citizenship to the descendant of emigrants (in Italy, since 1992).

3. The third stage in ethnic development is creative ethnicity.

It must be emphasized that the individuals who created the descriptions of these groups were not concerned with negotiating their ethnicity in a socio-economic world, nor were they forced or led by a capitalist system to choose the words they used, nor are they concerned with integration. It is most likely that the individuals who created the groups' descriptions and those who join these groups as the time passes attempt to understand themselves and their background in a particular way which is not symbolic but cognitive. There is therefore a third possibility in the evolution of ethnicity, that is, cognitive ethnicity (after the stage of 1. twilight, and 2. symbolic ethnicities). Cognitive ethnicity indicates a strong desire to articulate (by verbal and visual means) one's background, family characteristics, preferences in food, clothing, trips, and communicate this understanding or the lack of it to others, and all of this is possible through the medium of the Web. Technology allows to understand one's position vis-à-vis ethno-cultural concerns in a more holistic perspective shared by others of the same background and age-group.

It remains to be seen not only whether these groups will stay active and continue to grow, but also whether they will acquire some type of social relevance and concomitant political action (for ex., in the direction of a different type of teaching of the Italian language and culture). It is notable that the connection to Italy is very strongly felt and demonstrated: through pictures, mention of parents' or grandparents' birthplace, through interest in gastronomy of a town or region, through (last) names. No mention is made of the immigrant experience, the tragedies and difficulties of integration: the personal familial experiences are shared but with a view to Italy rather than to Canada or the US.

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The screenshot displays the i-Italy website interface. At the top, there's a 'COMMUNITY' section with a social network for those interested in Italy and Italian America. Below this is a 'MULTIMEDIA' section featuring a video player for 'RADIO/Fred Gardaphe: Beyond the Immigrant Paradigm'. The video player includes a 'CHANNELS' sidebar with categories like Arts/Culture, Music, and Italian America. To the right of the video player is a 'VIDEO' section with a grid of video thumbnails. Below the video player is an 'EVENTS' section with a calendar for October 2008, listing various cultural events such as 'Sunday at the Met - Giorgio Morandi 1890-1964' and 'New Italian American Cinema'. On the far right, there's a sidebar for 'Italy in New York.com' with a 'CALENDAR OF EVENTS' and a 'CATEGORIES' list.

from page 1

by Ottorino Cappelli\*

# Our First Year in the Internet Piazza

The success of i-Italy is the living proof that the Internet can be a powerful “piazza” for the Italian American community.

We have 50 regular contributors and columnists (we call them “bloggers”) from the U.S., Canada, and Italy, including amateur and professional journalists, academics, and “public intellectuals”. Our online magazine (www.i-Italy.org) has reached 250,000 readers, one-quarter of whom are frequent visitors of our site.

But we are particularly delighted by the synergy between the journalistic activity in our magazine and the grassroots-level contributions on our open-access community and social network (www.i-Italy.us). One good example of this is the issue of preserving and expanding the Italian language in America.

In both the online and print issues of our magazine, we have often touched upon this subject which is considered to be a cultural imperative by the Italian American community at large. We have also been actively supporting the campaign to save the Advanced Placement Exam in Italian, which is still in jeopardy as we write.

Last June, we published a special issue of i-Italy dedicated to this topic. At that same time, members of our community at i-Italy.us started two lively discussion threads on this subject: “Studying Italian: Why and why not” and “Why most Italian immigrants do not teach Italian to their children.”

In these forums, dozens of multi-generational Italian Americans from all over the U.S. shared their experience with the Italian language: their desire to speak the language, connect with their heritage, their frustration at the obstacles they encounter, and their proposals to improve the situation.

And all of them testify to something that is sadly missing. Many lament that Italian is not offered in their school districts. Others point out that Italian is not even offered at college level. Even when Italian is offered in colleges, its absence from high schools may have already determined its future. What emerges from these forums, as well, are the real-life problems related to the experience of children of Italian immigrants, such as mediating between English, Italian, and a regional dialect.

There are “local” discussion groups created by people who want to stay in touch and share information about their place of origin in Italy. These include regional and town-based groups such as *Calabria*, *Abruzzo*, *Ciocciaria*, *Emilia Romagna Group*, *Pugliesi in America*, *Piemontesi di America...and beyond*, *Guardia dei Lombardi* (Avellino), *Furore* (Costa d’Amalfi), and *Roseto Valfortore* (Foggia).

Several discussion groups unite those with artistic interests, such as *Italian American Writers and Editors*, *Cinema Italiano*, *Italian American Actors and Performers*, *Italian American Architects*, *Italian American Filmmakers and Artists*, and *Fotografia*. One active writers’ group, called *Cicchetti*, was created by essayist, poet, and cultural critic Mary Cappello, who

writes: “In the interest of cutting through the logorrhea produced by new information technologies, I write to announce a call to *cicchetti* makers—a new literary form that I hope we can inaugurate together...[w]ith the idea of the small snack...in mind...I want to use this blog space to post *cicchetti*...and to ask you to do the same.” In addition to animating this community of writers, Mary also contributes to our magazine where she has recently started a series of conversations with “mostly gay and lesbian writers, artists, filmmakers, and public intellectuals who have some link to Italian or Italian American life and letters.”

*Greenwich Village Italians* (created by Emily, a freshman at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst), intends to be “a forum for young adults to express what Italy means to them – whether your parents are the first generation to come to America or the fifth.”

One of the largest and most active is *Women in Italy and Italian Women in the World*, “a forum for sharing ideas, information, and announcements pertaining to the intellectual and creative work of women in Italy and the Italian diaspora.” Understandably, this group has been thoroughly discussing Hillary Clinton’s candidacy during the Democratic primaries. Many interesting issues have emerged here, including a debate about the remnants of the “macho culture” in some segments of the Italian American population in the U.S. This group is definitely worth a special mention and more than a cursory visit.

Last but not least, some discussion groups have been created by Italian citizens residing in the US.

One of them, *Terre Promesse* (Promised Lands) invites people to share critical thoughts about the “unfulfilled promises” of both Italy and America. Another, *Movi-Menti*, is managed by Italian supporters of Barack Obama who hope to replicate the “Obama phenomenon” in Italy. They ask provocatively: “Obama. Here, We Can. There, Can We?” In the latter case, an interesting relationship exists between the community and the magazine, where several articles analyze both the “Italians for Obama” phenomenon in Italy and the attitude of Italian Americans to Obama in the U.S.

Even Italian Fulbright students who participate in the 2008-09 BEST (Business Exchange and Student Training) program have created their own group in our community. The program was started in 2007 by US Ambassador to Italy, Ronald P. Spogli. It trains PhD students and post-doc researchers in business to help them establish technology-based companies in Italy. Participants work as interns for six months in select Silicon Valley companies and attend executive MBA lectures in the evening. Once they return, participants will hopefully start new technology-based companies. We are pleased that i-Italy can provide them with tools to stay in touch and share their experiences.

\*i-Italy Project Coordinator

# Two Writers Meet the Italian Piazza

by Marina Melchionda

Two writers from Italy, Stefano Benni and Amara Lakhous, will soon come to the U.S. to present their new works, respectively *The Time Skipper* (Europa Editions, 2008) and *Clash of Civilizations in an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* (Europa Editions, 2008). The two novels embody two different conceptions and attitudes towards the "piazza". We have interviewed them about it.

## Stefano Benni...

**You are about to arrive in the U.S. to present your book, *Time Skipper*. What inspired you to write it?**

It is in part autobiographical. A boy's life in a small mountain town, in the 1960s.

**The "piazza" is the theme chosen for Italian Heritage and Culture Month. It can be considered an integral part of Italian culture. How much does it reflect your personal identity?**

The piazza, meaning a place to meet and tell stories, has been a "school of observation" for me. It was the place where I heard stories and oral narrations of street theater. Therefore it formed me, as if it were a speaking library. But this piazza no longer exists. Italians no longer spend time in the piazza, at least not as spectators of an event. Perhaps it still exists in some small towns, but television has wiped it out for the most part.

**Can you recount an episode, a story, or an event in your life that you particularly associate with the piazza?**

I am familiar with piazzas in the north, as well as the south because my mother is from southern Italy. I remember as a child, the first time I arrived in the piazza in Baranello, a small town in Molise. I noticed something strange. I realized that there were only women seated at the doorsteps of the houses. I asked my grandmother: "But where are the men?" She responded that "they all went for coffee in Canada." At that time, more than half of the male residents of the town had emigrated.

**In your work, the concept of the piazza is configured in different ways. In *Margherita Dolce Vita* we could say that the piazza is an abstract location: a heart, her heart where all her emotions converge. It is also a defenseless place, exposed to all kinds of novelties, surprises, but also to intrusions and violence...**

It is, again, the place for stories and emotions. There is day and night, and it can be a meeting place or a threatening place. For children it is a place to play outside and, therefore, it can be transformed into an adventure. But it can also be dangerous, so it might be safer to stay shut at home, oppressed by ghosts and numbed by television.

**The piazza in *Time Skipper* is, on the other hand, the boy's clock. In this work, the meeting is not set within a defined space and time, but consists of occasional journeys into the future. The boy and Margherita have opposite reactions when facing the different and the unknown: he is curious while she is terrified. What is that makes the present scarier than the future?**

The time of the book is not the time of everyday life. The winds of time—past, present, and future—all exist inside one single breath. It is neither frightening nor friendly, and the characters live much longer than a human life. The reader will decide if, and in what way, his/her time in everyday life and time in book resemble or are distant from each other.

**Time and space are perceived differently in each culture. How do you think American readers will identify themselves in your work?**

I think that shared cultural places exist, as well as "sequel-literature" that does not want to surprise readers, such as certain best-sellers. Frequently Americans like to read about a stereotypical and simplified Italy and the same goes for Italian readers with respect to America. For this reason, Italian readers are more familiar with Grisham than Melville. But if we leave the somewhat miserable topic of literature, then everything is more exciting and unexpected. In this sense, I am a writer who is a bit outrageous, not very "Italian," or at least this is how they often see me abroad.

**Imagine that all of your American readers were gathered in a piazza. What kind of people would you expect to meet? Would they be different from your average Italian reader?**

I do not know what they would be like, and for this reason I would be curious to meet them. I have already met British readers and I was struck by the fact that there were so many young readers among them, as there aren't as many in Italy.



## Amara Lakhous...

**Your novel has recently been translated into English with the title *Clash of Civilizations in an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*. Does that "piazza" have, autobiographically speaking, a particular meaning for you?**

The choice of Piazza Vittorio is not casual. There is nothing exotic or "literary marketing" about it. I spent my first six years of immigration right there in this piazza. I rediscovered the atmosphere that was typical of the neighborhoods in my birth city, Algiers. In this sense, Piazza Vittorio brought me luck: at first it helped me to overcome the usual issues with adjustment, and then it offered a stage to tell the story of today's Italy and also of tomorrow's. I often say that in Piazza Vittorio I see the country's future. In fact, my novel is gathering success even in other Italian cities where immigrants have become more numerous and visible.

**You know that our theme for this month is "La Piazza." What does this word evoke for you? In other words, what do you instinctively imagine when you hear "piazza"?**

The piazza is an extraordinary place of meeting and exchange between two different people. We always need the other to define our own identity. For example, I am male only because there are females, I am a Muslim because there are Jews, Christians, Buddhists, etc. Differences should be a resource and not a threat. In the piazza we can better see our own selves and submit our own certainties for discussion. It is a fertile space to cultivate doubts.

**The word "piazza" often symbolizes a place where people gather, meet, and spend time together. But sometimes it is just intended as a transition point. How are these views included in your work?**

I have always been struck by train stations. They are piazzas of transition. I remember that in the '90s Somalis would meet in the Roma Termini train station. The piazza is synonymous with circulation and movement where we always seem to seek a better life. My father who lived through immigration in France in the '50s always said to me: "Trees have roots to remain stationary, but men have legs to travel and discover the world." The piazza in my novel is the real protagonist.

**Each of your characters, mostly immigrants, has a different perception of the "piazza." Is it a consequence of the way they have managed or not managed to integrate in Italy or, more specifically, in Rome?**

The piazza is not an isolated place. There are gatherings and relationships that develop. For example, in Piazza Vittorio, there are markets, bars, stores, etc. It is a very profound human experience where there should be a reciprocal acceptance of diversity. Obviously, the more means of understanding we have - such as language - the more this can be possible. While fear and indifference can become two obstacles. Pluralism in the widest sense of the word is a positive value.

**In Western culture, the "piazza" has been seen mostly as a place of cultural interchange. Piazza Vittorio instead appears to be a place where people just share the same space with no interest in getting to know each other's experiences and backgrounds. It does look like "a clash of civilizations" where Italians, moreover, seem to harbor prejudices towards their own compatriots. Do you think that the behavior displayed in Piazza Vittorio accurately represents the general attitude of Italian citizens? Also, in your opinion, is the situation portrayed particular to Italy or is it more wide spread?**

My book is a survival manual in the world of immigration. The discovery of the other is not always a pleasant path. Whoever is not comfortable with him or herself cannot get along well with others. This is a well-researched fact in all psychology studies. In Italy, the immigrant represents a cultural challenge for Italians who have experienced immigration in the last few decades. Prejudices become stereotypes, by which it is easy to be taken hostage. We all have prejudices. We must have the curiosity and the courage to verify whether our information about the other is true or false. The bottom line is that my novel is an Italian micro-story that has examples in other parts of the world.

**What expectations do you have about the publication of your book in the USA?**

I am so happy that my book will be translated and published in the USA. For me it is a very important challenge. The fact that I have American or Anglo-Saxon readers fascinates me a lot. I am curious to hear their comments, which will certainly enrich my writing.

**For what kind of audience is the book intended?**

I hope that my book is open to everyone. Each one of us reads a book in his/her own way, beginning with his/her own sensibilities and personal experience. For this reason, literature is an extraordinary adventure that can better our lives.





# The Agora of the Youth

by Silvana Mangione\*

Since time began, a common meeting space has been conducive to reunions and discussions among people. Originally it was a gathering around the fire with music and talk, tales and learning, the calming of fears, and the birth of myths that would grow into wisdom. The young listened to the old who told stories that would be expanded, enriched, reinvented over time, eventually becoming traditions and knowledge that would never be forgotten. Later, the meeting space would become an area between buildings, an *agorà*—a square—where people would go and discuss matters of the *polis*—of the city. The young would go to the square to listen, to ask questions, to learn, to grow, and to prepare for future leadership roles. Today, we have a virtual square, full of possibilities, as fast as the user can make it, and as captivating as the participants, the chat, the blog, the dialogue, the reading and the telling can be. A common language, however, is necessary; and it would be even more desirable if it were a beautiful one, a language culture.

One such language is Italian, the common language of millions of young people throughout the world who have not yet come together in their own square. They will this year, which marks the First Convention of Young Italians in the World. For the first time, there will be a physical square, in Rome, where hundreds of Italo-Italians, Italo-Foreigners, Foreign-Italians, and all sorts of hyphenated Italians from every nation will convene to walk into a glittering, enticing global forum. These young people already share two things—their ancestry and its language—and they will create many common venues. They have already built many virtual squares in preparation for the meeting. They have incredibly similar interests and passions. They have already met in every country under the auspices and through funding from CGIE—Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero—the General Council of Italians Residing Abroad, an international representative body created by the Italian Parliament and whose president is Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Since 1995, CGIE realized that the future of the world's Italian communities and the very future of the Italian language itself rested in the hands of the young. A revolution was called for—a revolution of open minds and open means of communication which centers on the Internet and the Italian language. CGIE has consistently been at their side, ready to solve problems but careful not to overstep. The nationwide “*agoràs*” have become universal, and even though it is a virtual space it is no less engaging and compelling. It is global and local at the same time: *glocal*, as human matters must become as we go forth into the future. Our objective is to create connections among different generations and experiences, to dissolve the barriers between the new “mobility” and the descendants of “traditional” Italian emigration—they both embody the same desire for a vibrant future, and there can only be a future for us and our language if they come together.

\*Vice Secretary General of CGIE (General Council for Italian Abroad) for Anglophone Countries



“Columbus Fun” by L.F.

## Progetto Scuole The Piazza's Mother Tongue

*ProgettoScuole.org* is a non profit partnership between the Italian Consulate General of New York, the Italian American Committee on Education (IACE), the Italian-language daily *America Oggi*, the web services company *Digitalians Corporation*, and *i-Italy*. It offers American students of Italian the tools to publish their own interactive web journal

by Berardo Paradiso\*

For young Americans studying Italian and who are interested in all aspects of Italian culture, the Internet is a wonderful means of getting in touch with their Italian peers: it is a kind of virtual *piazza* where they can chat and share common ideas and interests, and freely express their opinions about all kinds of issues.

We at IACE are very happy to be part of “Progetto Scuole” in partnership with *i-Italy* and Italian and American universities.

Since we started our project, thousands of kids have joined our *piazza*, some aspects of which can be considered virtual. In reality, since it is frequented by real people, day after day our *piazza* is becoming more vibrant and alive, with the common objective to speak the language of Dante and exchange ideas about a common love of Italy. This is what people have always done and continue to do, in real, physical *piazze*.

Piazza del Duomo in Milan, Piazza della Signoria in Florence, Piazza San Marco in Venice, Piazza del Popolo and Piazza Navona in Rome, and every single *piazza* in each Italian city, small town, or village has preserved the same spirit. Like the *agorà* in Athens or the ancient forum in Rome, the *piazza* has always been at the heart of a city where its spiritual, political, and socio-economic events take place.

The *piazza* in Italy is still a common space where citizens gather daily and where they can meet in casual or formal ways. In the same *piazza* usually filled with children, it is not unusual to hear their high-pitched voices expressing their freedom while chasing cats or pigeons under the smiling surveillance of parents or *nonni*. In ancient times the *piazza* was already an established place of communication where at first verbal announcements would be made, and later written pamphlets and tracts would be distributed, read, and commented publicly.

In my village in southern Italy, the announcement of a movie or a special sale was cried out by a person called a *banditore*. Every village had one, and the announcement was always preceded by the sound of a trumpet! I will never forget the *banditore* of my village: his first name was Vincenzo but his nickname was *il francese*. No one could ever understand what he was saying so they called him “the Frenchman” for his incomprehensible language. We were happy to see him; we knew that something new was about to be announced. We would follow him until after a while we could capture the essence of his message.

How I miss my *piazza*! A few years ago I returned to my village and I saw an old, blind woman sitting on her balcony, enjoying the fresh air. I called to her: “Zia Giulia, com'è stai?” [Aunt Giulia, how are you?] She recognized my voice and answered with one word: “Nostalgia.” The word bounced on every wall and resounded in my ears, touching my heart. She was right. I was nostalgic; I missed the stones, the air, the sounds, the light, the odors, and the people. I missed my past and my friends.

This is the reason why we at IACE are promoting a physical exchange between American and Italian students. Our objective is to give American youths who are interested in *italianità* the possibility to connect using modern technology, but we also want to help them complete their virtual experience by visiting the physical *piazza* and exploring different points of view, lifestyles, customs, and foods.

A group of young American students of Italian had the opportunity this summer to spend two weeks in Florence and Lignano near Venice, where they lived and interacted with a large group of their Italian peers. They were compelled to adjust to new situations and new ways of life which they would never have experienced solely through their Internet connection.

This very enriching physical encounter with the Italian city, its *piazze*, and Italian youngsters' ways of living and thinking taught them respect and acceptance for one another and their unique cultures.

The experience of living in a country among its people, as well as being connected to its physical *piazza* will lay the foundation for future generations to have a real understanding and a fruitful exchange with Italy, Italians, and *italianità*.

\*President of IACE (Italian American Committee on Education)

# Students in Piazza

This year IACE's Summer Program has partnered with *Progetto Scuole* in organizing a contest among American students of Italian. The students wrote articles about the “Italian Piazza” and published them on the website [www.progettoscuole.org](http://www.progettoscuole.org). The best of these young authors won a trip to Italy and had a ‘real’ taste of its piazzas.

by Alfredo Valentini\*

Since the summer of 2000, I have had the privilege of accompanying well over 100 IACE scholarship winners to various places in Italy. This year the program split its base with a week in Florence, followed by another week in Lignano (a resort near Venice). The group had the assignment to reflect on the *piazza* as a part of Italian life.

In Italian history, piazzas grew out of the necessity for space for large public gatherings, not unlike the Roman concept of the forum. In our little corner of Florence at the Istituto Maschile Antoniano, each evening the terrace in front of the villa which housed us became a *piazza* in almost every sense. IACE students represented the millions of tourists filling the monumental squares of Italy. The other residents, a real microcosm of what Italy has become: native Italians, foreign-born nationals, illegal aliens, and some who were using Italian soil as a springboard to another place where they could establish roots and a new, successful life. At first, the American students were wary of the residents but through the sports of soccer, volleyball and hide and seek, barriers crumbled and real communication took place. Eventually, social interaction, political discussions, flirting, and recreation took place upon this stage.

IACE students learned how four 16-year-old boys had left what remained of their families in war-torn Kosovo to try to find work. They met a 15-year-old boy who was taken off an illegal Egyptian fishing boat. Americans learned that although the residents liked them, they did not always have a favorable opinion of the decisions and policies of the American government in their homelands. Political differences aside, everyone got along beautifully.

The students saw Piazza della Signoria in Florence and its wonderful art. They noted that it was a political square and the art was chosen to represent the strength and ideals of the city-state. Cosimo de' Medici is portrayed in an equestrian statue like a Roman emperor. Judith cuts off Holofernes' head to save her people. David is sizing up his enemy. Hercules defeats his enemies Cacus and Nesus. Perseus holds up Medusa's bloody head. It was cool!

IACE students saw many of the “Vu comprà,” [“Wanna Buy?”] or African and Asian street vendors who sell handcrafts and other merchandise on blankets spread on the *piazza*'s pavement. They asked why there was a ruckus between a female vendor and another one on Ponte Vecchio. They hadn't seen that the former had been chased away by a police officer from the original place where she had set up and she was now on someone else's turf. Unfortunately, the students learned a few choice words that day that are better left unsaid!

A realization was being reinforced and confirmed through their observations of the Italian *piazze*: Italy has become a nation of immigrants like the US. Most of the IACE students had come to Italy expecting to find a country “locked into” a particular cultural reference; they now realized that the face of Italy is evolving as the world becomes a global society.

\*Director of IACE Summer School

# See You in Piazza

by Riccardo Strano

The Italian word *piazza* means a place, usually circular or rectangular, enclosed by city roads; it is an open space where people meet.

*Piazza* originates from *agorà*; it was the center of religious and political activities in ancient Greece. During the Roman Empire, the *piazza* became the place to build monuments and fountains, and over the course of centuries it has become a magnificent example of art and architecture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals and artists would meet in the *piazza* to exchange ideas and new theories; 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural movements were born in the *piazza*.

People gather in the *piazza* to share common joys, and when their favorite soccer team wins there is a great celebration in the *piazza*. However, sorrow is also shared by crowds in the *piazza*.

*Stasera in piazza!*

Let's meet in the *piazza*... shops, buildings, churches, outdoor cafés... Italians meet in the *piazza*, walk around the *piazza*, chat, sip a cappuccino at "Bar della Piazza," and talk about soccer or politics. Italian *piazze* are a big tourist attraction, especially for Americans. There aren't too many *piazze* in the States and the few that do exist, don't have the charm of the Italian ones. The *piazza* is the symbol of Italian life and style.

Who doesn't know "Caffè Della Pace" in Piazza Del Pantheon in Roma or "I Tre Gradini" in Piazza Navona? Americans going to Italy love to taste the *gelato* and *cappuccino* that those cafés serve, particularly if the café is located in a popular and trendy *piazza*.

Tourists like to experience the lifestyle of the Italian *piazza*, mix with the locals milling around, watch children at play, and discover the beauty of street corners formed by ancient buildings and churches.

In the *piazza* there are things to do all year 'round.

Open markets with stands selling fruit and cheese, clothing, and leather goods, just to mention a few, represent everyday life in Italy. All tourists, especially Americans, enjoy shopping at open markets and look forward to this singular Italian experience while on vacation.

Concerts and religious events all take place in the *piazza*. At Christmas, every Italian city displays a nativity scene in at least one of its *piazze* while outdoor stands sell traditional Christmas sweets.

The *piazza* is the expression of the Italian soul, and I would like to invite readers to come and visit our beautiful country and enjoy the essence of Italian life that only our *piazze* are able to provide.

See you in *piazza*!

\*Director for US & Canada, ENIT (Italian Government Tourist Board)



"Milan. Lady in Black" by L.F.



"Face to Face" by L.F.

## Linking Italian & US Business

by Rodrigo Praino

### Interview with Lucio Caputo, President of GEI (Gruppo Esponenti Italiani)

*Since its inception in 1974 the GEI (Gruppo Esponenti Italiani or Group of Italian Representatives), has been a prominent Italian piazza in New York, connecting representatives from Italian businesses operating in the United States, as well as Italian leaders in industrial design and international affairs. i-Italy sat down with GEI's President Lucio Caputo for an interview.*

**One might say that GEI is the piazza of the Italian excellence. How did GEI come into existence and what does it take to manage such a piazza here in the US?**

GEI was established over thirty years ago as a forum for the advancement of Italian business, science, and culture in the United States. Back in the Seventies a small group of Italian representatives in New York believed in fact that Italy, its many accomplishments and its high culture did not enjoy the reputation it deserved in the United States. They also maintained that misconceptions and ignorance often contributed to a negative image of our country.

Improving Italy's image abroad became their personal goal. They agreed to make it their personal obligation to present the many positive qualities of Italian business and culture in New York and the USA.

GEI was created as a non-political and a not-for-profit organization that for the last 35 years has managed to raise the prestige of Italy among American

business, political, and cultural leaders, as well as the press. Headquartered in New York City, GEI sponsors seminars, round-table discussions, and other events to promote Italy in all of its diversity to an American audience. The guests-of-honor participating in these events include the American ambassadors to Italy and the Italian ambassadors to the United States, the presidents of various Italian regions, U.S. senators and representatives, chairpersons of leading companies and financial institutions, journalists, cultural representatives, as well as numerous members of the Italian government and parliament. During the working luncheons for its members, guests, and press, each invited Italian or American personality will comment on his/her area of work and interact with the audience, contributing to the reciprocal exchange of views and facilitating direct contacts. GEI's website, [www.gei-ny.com](http://www.gei-ny.com), offers a survey of the institution's activities in recent years.

**What are GEI's major accomplishments in creating this network and in promoting Italy's excellence in the US?**

The apex of GEI's activities is its annual presentation of the GEI Award to notable Italians and Americans for their outstanding contribution in furthering relations between the two countries. The goal of this award presentation is to create a widely publicized annual forum during which those present can share their thoughts on the topic of U.S.-Italian relations. The ceremony, attended by highly qualified Italian and American representatives in the fields of

economics, commerce, finance, and press, aims to offer a new image of Italy through lectures, discussions, and an exchange of ideas as well as through extensive newspaper, radio, and television coverage in the United States and in Italy. The prize consists of a limited-edition sculpture designed by the well-known Italian artist Arnaldo Pomodoro. Past recipients of the award include: Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, the President of the Italian Republic between 1999 and 2006; Gianni Agnelli; Guido Carli; retailer Luciano Benetton; former New York State Governor Mario Cuomo; late Metropolitan Opera star Luciano Pavarotti; and banker and philanthropist David Rockefeller. A special GEI Award was presented to the President of Italy, the late Sandro Pertini, on the occasion of his visit to the United States. GEI has also enhanced collaboration and friendship among its Italian members active in this country by focusing on important current questions and topics. Moreover, it grants scholarships to American universities and aids their Italian programs. With great satisfaction, our organizational model has been followed and reproduced in various parts of the world such as Canada, Great Britain, Argentina and Switzerland. This is a confirmation of our success.

**Is there an upcoming project that you would like to announce?**

GEI has met many of the goals it set at the beginning. It will face new challenges coming from the changing economic and political climate in the world. It will also keep deepening the relationship between Italy and the USA. This remains its most important task.



"Scooter in Bensonhurst" by L.F.

# Scooter, USA

by Letizia Airos Soria

## Interview with Paolo Timoni, President and CEO of Piaggio Group Americas

The Italian motor scooter par excellence has been spotted around New York more frequently in the past few months. Italy is invading the city's marketplace with the Vespa. What happened? We asked Paolo Timoni who represents Piaggio in New York. He is a man who is as passionate about his work as few others are...

"Increasingly more people are realizing that the motor scooter – an Italian product with a history of over 60 years – represents an efficient solution to the growing cost of gasoline. In the first eight months of this year our retail sales have increased over 80% with respect to last year's sales. We want to create a wide market for the motor scooter in the U.S., as there is in London, Paris, Rome... we believe in it."

### Is there a specific strategy behind Piaggio's success?

A few years ago we looked at the U.S. and tried to bring certain elements together. While in Europe the motor scooter is an established product used by millions of people, in the U.S. the phenomenon started in the '90s. In 2000, only 20,000 motor scooters were sold that year, which is very few for a country of 300 million inhabitants. To give you an idea, Americans buy between 14 and 16 million cars per year. We needed to understand that the U.S. was very different from Europe and so we put together three benefits.

The first is that after 2000, the development of a global economy has created an exponential demand for oil. The oil supply is not unlimited and therefore prices are destined to keep going up, as we see in the U.S. today.

The second is traffic. Americans spend 3.7 billion hours sitting in their cars, a statistic that is on the rise. This is also affected by a change in lifestyle: Americans are rediscovering

their city centers and "downtowns" as places where to live, many are leaving the suburbs, and it is more difficult to get around by car in the city.

The third aspect is global warming. Many cities are passing laws to reduce carbon emissions. With distance covered being equal, a motor scooter creates 70% less carbon emission than a car.

**This seems to be a perfect situation for you. In fact Piaggio is a leader in the industry...**

We have a focused strategy in actively promoting the motor scooter as a form of transportation. We have launched the initiative VESPANOMICS, Vespa's economic model ([www.vespanomics.com](http://www.vespanomics.com)).

In February 2006, after Bush's national address in which he declared the reduction in oil consumption to be a national objective, we published in the *New York Times* an open letter to the mayors of every American city. We explained how the motor scooter could contribute to reach these goals and proposed making cities "scooter friendly" by creating appropriate parking areas, designated traffic lanes, etc.

### How did the local governments respond?

The situation is getting better. This year Atlanta held its first "day of the motor scooter" in which citizens were invited to try this form of transportation. Other cities are improving their parking situation. And this year the requests are growing. We are fortunate that Vespa is a highly valued product because here in America Italian products are sought-after and we benefit from a level of prestige that other competitors do not enjoy.

Certainly change is difficult. Although there is a scooter culture in Europe, the difference is that it does not exist here. Our bet, therefore, is on educating the consumer.

And we have a certain appeal, nevertheless. Our clients span 25 to 60 years of age and over. This summer two 72-year olds went cross-country from San Francisco to New York on our scooters. They are passionate riders, but for them the motorcycle is a cumbersome way to travel. They chose our scooters to keep their sense of adventure intact. They have also become part of our promotional campaign.

**Images of an Italian piazza frequently include a group of young people with their Vespas parked on angle in front of a café. Are there associations or clubs for Vespa enthusiasts in the U.S.?**

The Vespa entered the U.S. in the '50s and in the following decades these so-called VESPA CLUBS were created. For many years they represented a parallel market, with used vehicles imported directly from Europe. There are still a few and we try to support them. There are events in which we participate as sponsors. We contact them to find out if there are people who would be willing to give testimonials.

### A personal question: you have been with Piaggio since 2005. What motivated you to accept this position?

The rare opportunity to be able to create a marketplace that does not exist, and a unique and very enjoyable experience.



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- Read our multimedia magazine at [www.i-italy.org](http://www.i-italy.org)
- Become a member of our social network at [www.i-italy.us](http://www.i-italy.us)
- Help us to distribute our free print issues every two months
- Wherever you live, send us your articles, reportages, pictures and videos
- If you live in New York, apply for an internship at our headquarters in Manhattan
- And, last but not least, contribute financially to our not-for-profit organization

The Italian/American Digital Project, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to create the first online citizen journalist network about everything Italian in America

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**Exhibition Gino De Dominicis on view October 19, 2008 - February 9, 2009 - P.S.1 New York**

This exhibition will be Gino De Dominicis' first major American museum show and will focus on his late paintings made from the 1980s until his death in 1998. An Italian artist who shrouded himself in mystery and stood apart from any artistic trend or movement, De Dominicis (1947--1998) exhibited little in North America. This will be a rare opportunity for New York audiences to see his art first-hand.

*Organized by P.S.1 Director Alanna Heiss, P.S.1 Curatorial Advisor Andrea Bellini, and Fondazione Merz Curator Laura Cherubini.*

Well removed from mass tourism, the Marche region is a land to be discovered. Because of the variety of the territory many different types of tourism are possible; from seaside resort tourism along the coast, characterized by the high quality of the offering, to food and wine tourism, for connoisseurs and lovers of good wine and excellent cuisine, which can be enjoyed throughout the region, to religious tourism centered around the Sanctuary of the Holy House of Loreto, one of the capitals of Christianity.

Finally, cultural tourism in the Marche encompasses all of the Arts represented throughout the region, from Urbino, the ideal Renaissance city and UNESCO world heritage, to Pesaro and Macerata, renowned for their age-old tradition of lyrical music, to Ancona itself. This region of 100 historic theaters, stands as a symbol of a generous artistic culture that has been nurtured over the centuries.

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