

Sicily. What is There After the Carretto?

Letizia Airos (October 30, 2008)



Discussion with Sicily's Labor Minister Carmelo Incardona in New York to promote today's Sicily. The Carabinieri as the symbol of a region built on authority.

We met with the Minister of Labor Carmelo Incardona who oversees emigration for the region of Sicily.



After only two months in your position, you decided to visit New York for the Italian celebrations during the month of October.

"Coming to New York is a must for anyone who is concerned with emigration. For Sicily, emigration is a page from our history with sad implications, but it is also a reason to be proud because of the achievements of our fellow citizens abroad."

With great conviction, Incardona in no uncertain terms asserts his mission to promote the region's image, one that is based not only on its past but on its present and future as well.

"We want ancient traditions to go hand in hand with the Sicily's current cultural innovation, along with quality regional products. We want to engage our community, Sicilians and those who love Sicily. They are our primary ambassadors of Made in Sicily all over the world."

A provocative question: What is there after the Sicilian cart, the ubiquitous Sicilian symbol par excellence?

"After the cart, there have been many changes. There have been so many advancements, especially in the infrastructure. Many large-scale public projects have been completed and several are still in process. Clearly there is more to be done, but this is to be expected if we want to be in step with modern society.

There is a very high quality of life in Sicily. With the cart, one still imagines a Sicily that is illiterate and poor, but it is no longer like this. Along with the three traditional universities (Catania, Messina, and Palermo), consortia have been formed in practically every province. Ragusa has a consortium, and the smallest Sicilian province, Enna, has a large private university.

They have had a great impact on Sicily and have been changing the region intensely. Today there are many (or perhaps too many) college graduates for the market to bear. This is certainly a problem. Sicily exports so-called "minds" – intellects that were formed in our universities.

We also have hotels that are on the cutting edge and guarantee a high lev



el of hospitality. Even the smallest places provide warm hospitality with all of the services that a tourist could want.

Another important aspect is that Sicily is ever-increasing its awareness about its landscape and architectural assets. There are many interesting travel itineraries where tourism also means culture and gaining knowledge, understanding.

We still lack a coordinated and synergistic plan of action for the promotion of Sicily. For example, on Columbus Day we were featured in a thousand events without any cooperation or coordination. This damages Sicily's own image.

We must present the new Sicily, the one with Falcone and Borsellino as its heroes. This “legitimacy”



is not only the main principle behind the government's action, but it also contributes to Sicily's development. We must therefore put forward our new image, one that corresponds to reality. We must regroup and organize with respect to cultural activities while using diverse channels."

What can you tell me about the new novel set in Sicily, [Agrodolce](#) [2]? The Italian TV Fiction. Could

this be a good channel?



"I have not seen it, but I agree with the initiative. When a book or a film is made with Sicilians as its main characters, one can no longer think solely of the cap, the cart, the shotgun, the dirt roads...today it is completely different. For example, the novels by Camilleri ([Montalbano series](#)) [3] have been very important for us. We have increasing numbers of tourists in Ragusa. Sicily's beauty...but beginning with a positive image. When people leave New York, they want to go to a place where they feel safe!"

In Sicily there is a wide-spread artistic movement, especially among young people. Do you intend to promote this abroad?

"We need to bring young people here who "rock." This usually means traditional music played in a modern key. Contemporary music in our region is greatly influenced by the past and is completely different from anything else. We want New York to be the stage from which we launch our island's modern cultural richness and its international value in the world of sports, science, entertainment, and art."



And this cannot be done without a large-scale commercial effort?

"We will work with the Chamber of Commerce in Sicily and with the Italian American one in New York. Obviously, we will also work with institutions here such as ICE, the Italian Cultural Institute, ENIT, and the Consulate. We want to solicit U.S. investments in the island, which will also contribute to a cultural exchange between young people on both sides of the Atlantic. We intend to facilitate the bureaucratic red tape for foreign investors. For years they have discussed a "one-stop point of service" which Sicily still needs to create."

Another slightly provocative question: You must have visited some of the Sicilian organizations in the area. How many young people did you see?

"Not one. And it is because young people are no longer interested in the cart.... The same father, grandfather reject the cart even if they have an affection for it. They do not

want to return to Sicily, they want to stay here in the U.S. I have an 11-year old son. When he sees me struggling with my cell phone or computer, he says: "Technology, Dad - zero?" This means that compared to me he looks ahead, compared to what I represent. Re-introducing the cart means re-introducing the past."

But for many young Italian-Americans, there still remains a great love of Italy and for their land.

"Yes, I know, but we need to propose something that perhaps connects tradition with modernity."

So then we return to the cart. If you would have to replace the cart with another image, what would it be?



"The Carabinieri. Today there are many young people who are politically active. For example, in Palermo they created an organization called ["Addio Pizzo"](#) [4] to try and convince business owners not to pay protection money. Today young people consider Falcone and Borsellino heroes. Yes, the Carabinieri as a symbol of Sicily that employs many resources to create a legal and law-abiding society."

What was your experience during your stay in America? What impressions do you have of this visit?

"Over the past few days I gained a better perspective about how to organize the Sicilian

[4]presence here. I was in contact with important institutions, I was at the U.N., I visited the Sicilian community in Brooklyn and then in New Jersey. I was at the Calandra Institute and spoke at length with Dean Anthony Tamburri. I met with elected representatives of the CGIE, Comites, and the Carabinieri. I have the ability to network and I spoke with many people. I was able to reflect on the image of our region here. Most of all, it was important to come for Columbus Day when the best efforts are made to promote Italy.

I chose New York because it is the largest window on the world. If we want to recast a new image of Sicily, we must begin here, in the commercial and cultural capital of the world. I would like to make a comparison: if something exists today, it must be on TV. In the same way, in order to make Sicily exist we need to make it exist in New York. And next year I will propose the Carabinieri as our image. Historically, Sicilians were viewed as being hostile toward the Carabinieri. Today they want friendship and community."



(Traslated by Giulia Prestia)

Palermo. "Festa in piazza Politeama (09.27.2008). [From Radio 105 - Flickr Image](#) [5]



Links

- [1] <http://iitaly.org/files/carabinieri1225344715jpg>
- [2] http://www.agrodolce.rai.it/R2_HPprogramma/0,,1067183,00.html
- [3] http://www.montalbano.rai.it/R2_HPprogramma/0,,1067181,00.html
- [4] <http://www.addiopizzo.org/>
- [5] <http://www.flickr.com/photos/himeraonline/2898464872/in/photostream/>