



Italy's Fourth-Largest City and What It Has To Offer

Letizia Airos (May 08, 2014)



A conversation with Mayor Piero Fassino on his visit to the U.S. to promote the old capital of the United Kingdom of Italy—today a modern and many-sided city that is still an innovation leader in Europe.

Those who know Turin, know it as the city where the automobile was born. The presence of FIAT makes it a major industrial center at the international level. But Turin is also a city of art, culture and innovation. Our conversation with Pietro Fassino thus begins with the obvious question:

“What’s the connection between culture and business? How does one present the ‘Turin system’ in the United States?”

“For most of the twentieth century Turin earned a reputation in the world as a large manufacturing city, a ‘one company town’ tied to car manufacturing, like Detroit in America. But



Turin was also the first capital of Italy. However briefly it was the capital, you can still feel the effect of that to this day. In the more recent collective imagination, Turin has gained popularity thanks to the FIAT brand and Juventus, the city's soccer team.

Times have changed and, unlike other industrial areas, Turin reacted to the economic changes produced by the global market with great energy. New neighborhoods have replaced old factories. And the traditional work ethic of Turin's people has allowed entrepreneurs to reinvent a role for them, to diversify production.

Hence the hinterland represents the second largest exporter in the country. Along the way more ventures have been consolidated, making the city a desirable place to invest capital and set up business. Today we're a metropolis with 100,000 university students, a city with an advanced service industry, and a cultural capital with museums and theaters that organize shows, festivals, and events year-round.

The recent promotional events we organized in the Big Apple were aimed at presenting American investors with the picture of a modern and many-sided city in southern Europe that is still an innovation leader."

Why should an American visit the city?

To soak up its marvelously preserved architecture and urban landscape, its rich patrimony of palazzos, piazzas, and enviable beauty. Its richness can be enjoyed in the enormous patrimony of our museums, the Egyptian and the Mole Antonelliana, in the store of treasures from the early days of film, or by passing through the numerous portrait galleries housing collections of modern and contemporary art. There's also a surprising blend of music, cuisine, and culture in the city.

To quote Augusto Monti, Turin remains "a fake indigent," a city that turns up surprises and attractions. The Department of Tourism in Turin has many package deals to delight in the beauty of Turin and its surroundings, including hotels and resorts and high-end dining.

Can you tell us more about the relationship between Turin and the 2015 Expo Milan initiative? You're focusing on Turin's proximity to Milan to make it a gateway to the Expo.

Thanks to high-speed trains Turin is a little less than thirty minutes away from the Lombardy capital. Milan's universal food expo is the perfect occasion to offer the several million visitors from around the continent to take advantage of the initiatives organized by the city. In 2015 Turin will be the European Capital of Sport. It will display the Shroud of Turin and celebrate important anniversaries, such as the bicentenary of Don Bosco, one of the most famous Saints in the Christian tradition.

You coined the slogan "Bet on Turin." What does that mean?

Turin is a city of the new economy and technology research. Our city has an entrepreneurial heart that attracts qualified personnel from all over Europe who come here for work and play, thanks to the cultural renaissance we're experiencing. The automobile infrastructure has been here for a hundred years. Norwegian mining engineers come here to study. There is a General Motors research center here. Turin is a large city and many of its neighborhoods have experienced a metamorphosis thanks to the upkeep of industrial areas abandoned by manufacturers on the far outskirts. It's a great chance for international markets to invest, especially in the city's north end, where there are still large spaces to redevelop and profit from a flourishing real estate market.

Any personal tips to share about Turin? What's your favorite area to walk? Your favorite historical building? Your favorite local dish?

Turin is a city of extraordinary beauty with a rich history. Its roots stretch to the Roman city of Augusta Taurinorum. I have a lot of favorite spots. The city has many baroque buildings, boulevards, parks along the river, and a precious green hill. The eight-mile stretch of porticoes shading the most elegant shops in the city center is something to be proud of. I would tell an American tourist to visit



the museums and portrait galleries, to stroll along the shop-lined streets and have lunch at one of the many traditional trattorias, where they've been serving up agnolotti del plin with truffles for a hundred years. Next I'd suggest visiting Palazzo Carignano, where 153 years ago Camillo Cavour brought together the parties that would lead to the unification of Italy, or stop by one of the historic cafes for a bicerin, a delicious concoction made with dark coffee, cocoa powder, and cream.

For those who can't make the trip, how can they familiarize themselves with the city from afar? Any books, movies, albums you would recommend?

Well, they should first get the latest guidebook. As one of the Olympics slogans put it: "Turin never stays still." Yet one book I'd recommend is a childrens' book woven with solidarity and sympathy for the less fortunate—which feels very contemporary despite being written 130 years ago—Edmondo De Amicis' masterpiece "Cuore" (Heart). As for music, I have to admit that Turin puts me in mind of jazz, of its twilit aspects. That should be clear given that I organized a festival for the genre. As for films, there are tons that refer to the city, especially in the last few decades.

Consider that at least fifty films are shot in Turin every year. But I'm happy to name one that does a good job of showing a certain side of the city: "The Sunday Woman." The movie is based on a book by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, a couple of brilliant, true Turinese writers, and magnificently directed by Luigi Comencini, with an all-star cast including Marcello Mastroianni and Jacqueline Bisset.

What kind of relationship do you have with New York?

I have great admiration for the dynamism of the city and its diverse mix of people. It's a place, one of the most representative of the United States in my opinion, where our co-nationals distinguish themselves every day by their work.

You have led an important political career. You were the national secretary of your party and a minister before becoming mayor. In the meantime, the Mayor of Florence has become the Prime Minister. The question seems natural even for an American who knows little about Italian politics: what is the relationship between national and local politics in Italy today? How did mayors get to be so important?

Mayors have direct contact with citizens. Young and old, student and worker turn to their districts for answers. The municipality is the closest representation of the entire public administration. Who knows the woes and aspirations of the territory better than mayors?

Before we go, let's talk a moment about the province of Turin. You're from Avigliana. How does that province continue to define you?

It's a town at the onset of the valley of Susa with twelve thousand inhabitants, a very pretty place with two lakes located just under Mount Pirchiriano. On the summit is the 11th century monastery of Sacra di San Michele. It's mystical as well as extremely beautiful. I feel deeply connected to Avigliana, given my family ties to it. Like me, my grandfather and my father – who was a commander in the Italian resistance movement against Nazi-fascists – were born there. Part of my story and my roots are there.

****Piero Fassino** was born to a traditional socialist family. A member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) since the late 1960s, he rose to become a national leader. He presided over the transformation of PCI into the Democrats of the Left, of which he became the Secretary in the early 2000s. He is now one of the leaders of the Democratic Party and since 2011 he is the Mayor of Turin.

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