

XII Magna Grecia Week: “From America to the Rediscovery of Mezzogiorno”

Camilla Santinelli (May 17, 2016)



The event kicked off at the Italian Institute of Culture announced by an official proclamation by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who underscored the importance of the contribution Magna Grecia gave to the development of Western civilization and culture.

This inaugural meeting was presided over by Nino Foti, along with Institute Director Giorgio Van Straten and the Consul General Francesco Genuardi.

The event included on Foti's bestowal of the International Prize of Magna Grecia to Professor Mario Fratti in order to pay a tribute to his noteworthy role as a writer and playwright, in addition to marking his contributions to reinforcing the cultural, economic, and social relationships between Italy and the United States.

Hon. Daniel Nigro, Commissioner of the NYC Fire Department, also received the International Magna Grecia Award and spoke before the appreciative audience, thanking all the members of his department and Mayor De Blasio for wanting him back as a commissioner after his retirement.



During the ceremony, several personalities addressed the gathering, among them Joseph Sciame, Chairman Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Presidents and Professor Francesca Cangelli, assessor of the Matera municipality, who also presented the “Matera, Capital of the Culture 2019” project.

Her remarks focused on the importance of the achievement gained by this little-known yet astonishingly beautiful small southern town and how, despite the difficulties it had to face to attain this well-deserved recognition, it has been chosen as the capital of culture among other cities and proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Magna Grecia Week events continued at the Italy and America Chamber of Commerce and at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, on Wednesday, with another gathering titled “From Magna Grecia to Mezzogiorno: the reasons of a non-existing development.”

This evening was moderated by the Calandra Institute’s Dean, Anthony Tamburri, who warmly welcomed the guests and thanked them for being present at such an important manifestation of the Italian-American connection.

He began with saying that the so-called “Southern question” is something still alive and vibrant, in addition to being extremely significant for us today.

The floor was given to Hon. Nino Foti, the founder of the Magna Grecia Organization. He made a speech about how important the tradition and the civilization of this part of Italy has been – and still is – for everyone, not only for Italy, since many immigrants from there spread all over the world, making Italian culture known everywhere. “It is a heritage that must be anchored, updated, reintegrated, and restored to its former value,” he argued.

Angelo Caliendo, the directive councilman of Euripse—a private institution working in political, economic, and social research since 1982—explained how Euripse has become internationally renowned for being a bridge between international and Italian institutions of higher education. “As a result of the collaboration between Eurispes and Fondazione Internazionale Magna Grecia, we have started a new platform named LABSUD—Laboratorio Sud, which brings together both public and private sectors,” he said. “The primary goal of LABSUD is to revive the concern for politics in the Southern regions of Italy in order to revitalize the economy of these territories.”

Following him, Gaetano Cipolla and Mario Fratti gave their considerations on this topic. Professor Cipolla, a Sicilian, proudly presented what he, as an editor of Arba Sicula (the non-profit international organization that promotes the language and the culture of Sicily and also provides of a unique Sicilian/English book that focuses on literature, art, history, cuisine, and folklore of Sicily) has accomplished during many years of activity in order to promote this wonderful region. Fratti focused more on the concept of dialect and language, affirming what an important tool this can be from many points of view.

The final presenter was the Minister Antonio Morabito, the Promotion of the Sistema Paese and Coordinator for Communications and Cultural Tourism for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who further underscored the importance of Southern Italy, defining it as “an ancient world, a land of generosity, and of workers.”

He briefly described the reasons that prevent the south of Italy from being the most developed and emancipated portion of Italy, such as immigration that deprived this region of a lot of potentiality, the Mafia, and the educational, economic, and general gaps that divide this region from the North.

Despite this, wanting to conclude his speech with a message of hope, he insisted that we, as Italians, and in particular the people from the South, have an important cultural heritage, a land of sea, of beauty, and tradition, a “land blessed by God,” that is appreciated worldwide and that has to be valorized using all means possible.

In this spirit of optimism and the exaltation of Italian beauty, the meeting came to an end, after a



warm and spirited interaction between the audience and the speakers, making it clear that this initiative represented an important occasion for everybody.

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