

Soft Power & the Role of Young Italians Abroad

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Considerations after the Palermo Seminary with 115 young Italians from all over the world

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I return to New York after having had one of the best experiences of my life: Five days in [Palermo for a Seminary with 115 young Italians](#) [3] from all over the world.

They met thanks to the [General Council of Italians Abroad \(CGIE\)](#) [4], the Comites (Committees of Italians Abroad) and to the Regional Councils for Emigration of the countries they respectively inhabit. It wasn't easy but their spirit of enthusiasm and teamwork helped overcome the mainly logistic and economic difficulties.

It's hard to describe the constructive atmosphere that from the very first moment engulfed everyone, the young and the less young (or, how people like to say nowadays, "differently young.")



For once, the organizers - due to space restraints I can only name Secretary General of CGIE Michele Schiavone and President of the VII Commission of CGIE 'New Migrations and New Generations' Maria Chiara Prodi, - were careful not to take over, as is often the case.

The young finally spoke, making proposals, objecting at times; they compared their ideas amongst themselves and with institutional representatives. They are now finally ready to create, over the course of the coming months, what will be the first network of young Italians abroad. Their work has already begun, as those who returned home to different continents started sharing new input remotely. In Palermo, we built the foundations, now it's their turn, their moment.

I could say a lot about the young men and women that I've met, but for now I want to initiate a reflection on the themes discussed during the panel that I presented and moderated alongside Domenico De Maio of the [National Agency for Youth](#) [5], Stefano Queriolo Palma of the [General Direction for the Promotion of Sistema Paese \(DGSP\)](#) [6] of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Giovanna Mafodda, from the Marketing Coordination Office of [ICE-Agenzia](#) [7].

I want to do this because it's the theme I have most frequently come across in my work over the past 15 years. At i-Italy, our aim is to communicate Italy to Americans and we do it at 360 degrees. We have to start from the concept of Soft Power.

Italian Soft Power

The term, coined in the early 1990s by Professor Joseph S. Nye of Harvard Kennedy School of Government, is used frequently in Italy, cited by institutions, media, businesses. It's with Soft Power - much more than with Hard Power, which they don't lack - that the United States have constructed the American Brand that is now part of the global collective imagination, for good and bad. The American Dream made this country's fortune, also by attracting millions of immigrants from all over the world, including Italy. A similar Nation Branding operation could today be realized for Italy.

In fact, Italy already has Soft Power currency that is largely unutilized but spontaneously appreciated worldwide. Take "Made in Italy," for example. There is such a thing as an Italian Dream, an Italian Way of Life, the VIVERE ALL'ITALIANA slogan that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coined as an umbrella term under which to qualify all the economic and cultural diplomatic activities of Sistema Italia.

Institutions need to hone this potential Soft Power in order to promote our image abroad. In Italy, however, there is no central entity in charge of designing and activating a strategy for an integrated promotion of Brand Italia. There are many entities involved in internationalization activities, operating nationally, regionally, and locally, and coordinating them is a strenuous feat.

Ten years ago, the DGSP, General Direction for the Promotion of Sistema Paese was founded - and I would like to name perhaps its most important deviser, Ambassador Giampiero Massolo, then Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For those who are unfamiliar, the concept is that,



since we have a ramified diplomatic network (126 Embassies, 80 Consulates, 83 Cultural Institutes) headed by the MAECI (acronym for the ministry of foreign affairs), the DGSP proposes itself as the coordinator of an enormous body of activities for an INTEGRATED PROMOTION of Italy in the world. And for some years it has been doing so through what is called the 'Control Room for Internationalization,' that the MAECI co-presides alongside the Ministry for Cultural Development (MISE). It is composed of ICE-Agenzia, an entity through which the funds dedicated to foreign commerce are canalized, and a variety of other ministerial, financial, entrepreneurial, and territorial subjects.

These are the subjects promoting Italian Soft Power, the coordinators of Sistema Italia in the world, the devisers of our Nation Branding - and the tagline #VIVEREALLITALIANA, realized by Artistic Director Davide Rampello.

Young Italians, the “healthy carriers of Soft Power”

But what do young people have to do with this? That's the question I raised to the organizers of the seminary. It contained, of course, a veiled provocation. There are 60 million people of Italian descent in the world (about 20 million in the United States, where I live.) Around 5 million are Italian citizens. These millions of Italians around the world, and particularly the young ones, are fundamental to Italian Nation Branding, they are “healthy carriers of Soft Power.” But are we aware of this?

These young men and women are real enactors of the “Vivere all’Italiana,” of the culture, the lifestyle, of ‘Made in Italy,’ and, more importantly, they represent contemporary Italy, not the stereotyped version attributed to their parents and grandparents.

The CGIE, the Comites, the Institutions, the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) [8], all have to take on this challenge, work together with these young Italians across the world, and consider them integral parts of Sistema Italia. They have to do this not only by proposing bottom-down initiatives, but by rendering them actors, listening to them, letting them into their own projects, and, in some cases, in their electoral bodies. They have to support, foster, multiply the occasions for encounters such as the Palermo Seminary. And they may have to learn to listen, rather than talk, and to step aside when necessary, in order to favor the generational changeover, which is also a cultural changeover and a spiritual renewal.

The network that these young men and women have begun building is what really matters. With their online media and social networks, younger generations have become actors in the global political, social and economic spheres. They are the - perhaps still unaware or unexpectant - enactors of the possibilities ahead of them, not docile instruments or collection basins for votes. Italy's soft ('morbido') power in the world depends on them.

It's starting from this idea, and from them that we have to build our Soft Power. By creating networks. I believe that their network can become a significant asset for Italy abroad. And all of this could be extremely beneficial to their peers in Italy.

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