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EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE INTERCULTURAL
PRACTICES IN MODERN ITALY

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I. Introduction

During the past decades, many debates have taken place around the concepts of culture and intercultural practice. Theoretically, we can say that every nation-state has its own set of values, historical background information, beliefs, traditions, social practices, which are passed on and applied from generation to generation, and are collectively known as ‘cultural background’. The notion of “culture” spreads through all human intellectual and educational levels. Culture is, according to Nikos Papastergiadis in his work on cultural identity, “not just an organization of objects and rituals which define a sense of place, but also an optic, a way of seeing and making sense of the world”¹. In a nutshell, as John Tomlinson says, in his essay on “Cultural Imperialism”, culture “embraces most aspects of human existence”².

However, the current issues of modern world, such as globalization and migration, are very powerful when it comes to defining and influencing cultural identity, at the level of every single individual in particular. Nowadays, most people have access to other cultures in one way or another, by discovering and assimilating the information about the ‘other’, and, eventually, applying it to their own lives. We could even say that most cultural barriers have faded: traveling has become much easier, from tourism to cultural exchanges, the media virtually erased all traces of geographical borders, and, for those who would like to go higher with intercultural knowledge, and experiment foreign high culture, it is possible, thanks to the regular organization of relevant events. The result is, most probably, a cultural cross-breed, a mix of global and local within every person, region, and even country. We might go a step further and say that it is impossible these days to have a pure cultural pattern within the borders of a country, no matter what this country might be.

¹ Nikos Papastergiadis in D. Fleming, *Formations: a 21st Century Media Studies Textbook*, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 137.

² *Ibidem*, p. 130.

Every nation, at some point, confronts itself with other cultures, whether they are in the form of minorities, immigrants, and even when it comes to promoting their culture outside of their geographical borders. This is where the issue of intercultural communication comes into discussion. Taking a look at the cultural mix that the European Union, and, in fact, the whole developed society is, and will still become, we must admit that cultural differences exist in plenty of forms, from language and social practices, to artistic manifestations. In this context, intercultural knowledge and acceptance is a must, and it is all available to every single nation, broken down to every person. All they have to do is develop an open attitude and an appetite for knowledge. Is it possible, though? And, most of all, how is this achieved?

What we are planning to do by this research is take a look at the modern Italian society, and its interaction with other cultures, concentrating on the positive aspects of intercultural practice. Nearly all intercultural practices have a cause and a starting point in history and an ongoing evolution in the present day. The research strategy is based on tracing the intercultural practices back in history, and analyzing them with the aid of specialist literature, and, as we progress, we will focus on the consequences existing in the present day. For the latter case, online sources have been used more often than academic texts, as contain are up-to-date information sources regarding specific cases, about the most recent examples of intercultural practice.

We will start with the unification of the Italian state, back in the mid-19th century, also known as the Risorgimento, which was an intercultural process in its own right. All parts of the Italian population, although of different cultural roots and structures, found it possible to converge into a single nation, under a single cultural identity.

However, history left many influences from outside, which we cannot deny, despite the strong culture of the Italian nation. Nowadays, we can find several national minorities existing on the Italian territory, which are still a current issue. In the second chapter, we will track down their historical roots, and in the end we will focus on their status in the present day. What is the intercultural communication between the

autochthonous population and these minorities like? Can we talk about acceptance and mutual knowledge? What examples can we give? I chose the historic minority groups which are either the most numerous, either the best known. Northern Italy was exposed to foreign domination more than the South of the country, therefore the most significant minority groups in the area are either of French or of Austrian origins. But we will also take a look at the island of Sardinia, which has a very special, ancient cultural identity, consisting of a mix between Italians and ethnic Sardinian and Catalan populations.

After the ethnic minorities, who have already earned a place within the Italian society a long while ago, we will raise another important issue, which, as it is Italy that we are talking about, is also controversial: immigration. At the beginning, we will be talking about the global perception of the immigration problem in Italy, as this country has turned, in a rather short while, from a country of emigrants to a country targeted by immigrants. Although they have come across enough difficulties in receiving and accommodating immigrants, culturally speaking, they have made considerable efforts to remedy the situation. Finally, we will approach an unavoidable issue: intercultural communication between Italy and the Romanian immigrant community, which some people would argue that it does not exist at all, but the research will reveal the truth. Are there any *good* intercultural practices, despite all the bad publicity?

The fifth chapter will bring into discussion Italy's cultural image on the international level, and what the Italian state does in order to promote its national culture, but also how it cooperates with other nations towards intercultural practices. We will give examples of some cultural projects carried out by state institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Cultural Goods and Activities, and the Italian UNESCO National Commission. Eventually, we will analyze Italy's contribution to the European Capital of Culture scheme, namely Florence 1986, Bologna 2000, and a more detailed presentation of Genova 2004. We will find out what made these cities special in terms of culture and what it means to host a European Capital of Culture, both on national and international level.

Media communication is, most certainly, a symbol of civilization. Access to information of all kinds has become more and more possible over the past few years, thanks to television, the written press, and the Internet. Globalization would not have been possible without the media, in all its forms. In his book, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, Chris Barker points out that “Television and the media are vital to the construction of cultural identities because it circulates a bricolage of representations of class, gender, race, age and sex which we identify or struggle against.”³ Yet, taking into consideration the surprisingly large amount of good intercultural practices that appeared during the research, and the “intercultural prejudices” that are still associated with the Italian people, we can only draw upon one conclusion. Although the good intercultural practices exist, do they get enough publicity? Are the masses aware of any intercultural issues?

In this paperwork, I am planning to analyze as many aspects of Italian intercultural practices as possible, trying to discover the Italian nation’s views on interculturality, and how they are applied.

³ C. Barker, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, Routledge 1999, p. 169.

II. The Risorgimento: the Story of the Italian Unification and the Triumph of Italian culture

1. Historical Outline

The *Risorgimento* is the name given to the process of unification of Italy during the nineteenth century. This political event, from 1859 to 1870, transformed Italy from a fragmented peninsula to an independent and unified nation-state under the Savoy king, Vittorio Emmanuele II. Up to that moment, as we know, Italy was made up of several independent city-states of different levels of social, political, economic and cultural statuses. These political formations managed to overcome their differences (including cultural ones), and join each other into the creation of a single state.

The first phase of the Risorgimento (1847 – 1849) saw the development of several revolutionary movements. “In Piedmont, the leading state in the unification process, the monarchy had ceded some of its powers to the middle classes following popular and national insurrection throughout Italy in 1848. Other parts of the Italian peninsula had been subjected to foreign domination, as in the case of Austrian-controlled Veneto and Lombardy.”⁴ This phenomenon reached its climax on the occasion of the riot of the “*Cinque giornate di Milano*” (“*Five days of Milan*”) in 1848. As far as the rest of Italy was concerned, The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (making up the South and Sicily), were also ruled by foreign dynastic powers, and a large part of central Italy was under the rule of Papacy. The second phase, matured between 1859 and 1860, was the most decisive one for Italy’s unification process. Unity was reached with the annexation of Piedmont, Tuscany, Emilia and Romagna, and became finally completed by Garibaldi’s “*Spedizione dei Mille*” (“*Expedition of the One Thousand*”).

⁴ J. Dunnage, *Twentieth-Century Italy : A Social History*, Pearson Education 2002, p. 4.

But, in order for the Risorgimento to evolve, the Italian nation needed to free itself from the foreign domination of the past, and to look towards its future as a united nation. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era caused the development of the ideas of independence, freedom and unity in the conscience of the Italians. In his study of Italian history, writer Jonathan Dunnage describes the unification process as “both an act of national redemption, as Italians were liberated from foreign rule, and a Liberal revolution against absolutist rule and temporal power”⁵. Italian unification is seen not as the inevitable revolution of an oppressed population against their rulers, or the rise of a new class, but as a rise of a powerful and independent Italian population, brought together by a sense of common cultural values, against foreign rule. A modern state was formed, thanks to the growth of a national culture based on language and literacy and the development of a capitalist economy.

2. The Risorgimento as an Intercultural Process

The Risorgimento caused different responses within each Italian region. In other words, the northern Italian regions quickly managed to put their reforms into practice the way it was intended, and this resulted in building up powerful and competent government organizations. However, southern regions did not make progress of the same quality, nor at the same speed. “From the late medieval period onward, northern Italy was a collection of self-governing city-states – Venice, Milan, Genoa, and Florence, among others – with a very lively tradition of large-scale community participation in governance. Southern Italy, in contrast, was governed by a succession of autocratic foreign imperial powers that ruled through appointed elites.”⁶

Apart from an economic and political movement, the Risorgimento was also a matter of intercultural practice. Not only had it been hard to join together northern Italy, which was by far better developed from the economic point of view than the south of the

⁵ J. Dunnage, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁶ P.J. Richerson, R. Boyd., *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 28.

country. Culturally speaking, although the two parts were sharing the same language and the same national conscience (which, actually, determined them to fight for unity), notable differences could be noticed in terms of traditions and forms of behavior. This fact made the mutual acceptance between the north and the south into a single nation rather hard.

The first episodes of interaction between northern Italian leaders and the southern population was one of shock and even disgust. Northerners had the tendency to compare southerners to Barbarian and African populations, rather than regard them as fellow Italians, especially given the self-description of the Piedmont inhabitants as a civilized and stable culture and population. “The representation of the south as a land of barbarism (variously qualified as indecent, lacking in ‘public conscience’, ignorant, superstitious, etc.) is evidently one of the most effective ways to assert its distance and difference from the civilized, Piedmontese north. (...) The distance and difference of the south from the north is thus one that consolidates the north’s self-identity as morally, culturally and technically superior to the south.”⁷ Once again, Jonathan Dunnage, in his book, *Twentieth Century Italy: a Social History*, explains how northerners always accused the southern population of rejecting the civilized values they were trying to impose upon them, and how the north truly believed in its superior society power, and its capacity to manage and influence the transformation of the south.

Regardless of the difference and the types of relationships between northern and southern Italy, an aspect which must not be forgotten is the fact that the ideology behind the Risorgimento had its roots in the cultural manifestations of the previous centuries. “The practical and intellectual activities of the enlightenment elite and the political reform of 18th Century monarchs contributed to the creation of the Risorgimento.”⁸

Therefore, from the cultural point of view, we could trace the Risorgimento way ahead of the actual political event. To be specific, even from the Middle Ages and the

⁷ A.R. Ascoli, K.C. Von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, Berg Publishers, 2001, p. 129.

⁸ <http://cronologia.leonardo.it/storia>

Renaissance, the most prominent cultural personalities of those times, including Brunetto Latini, Giovanni Boccaccio, Francesco Petrarca and Niccolò Machiavelli, “had consistently cultivated the idea of ‘Italy’ on the basis of a shared linguistic and cultural patrimony”⁹. Further on, during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, other artists tried various approaches of the concept of a unified Italy in their works. “Poets, musicians, writers, and painters who began to promote the vision of an independent and unified Italian nation whose achievements would match the glory reached by the Italian city-states during the Renaissance.”¹⁰

With the idea of unification turning into reality, the reactions and interpretations of the intellectual elites also started changing, but the attitude they adopted was still positive. Apart from pure artistic expression, they also sought to make practical improvements to intercultural behavior. “Southern writers and intellectuals, whose examination of the detrimental effects of unity on the Italian South opened the discourse on the ‘Southern Question’. On the other hand, this same reality also led the Liberal state governments (...) to actively pursue practices of nation-building and state formation”.¹¹ Writers – including Giosue Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli, Edmondo de Amicis, and Carlo Collodi – joined the nation-building efforts of biographers and painters. They used their works of poetry and narrative by spreading conciliatory messages in order to mend class, religious, and territorial conflicts. Other forms of cultural manifestations included the building of monuments, the proclamation of civic and patriotic commemorations, and the formation of a cult dedicated to Risorgimento heroes and their deeds.

3. The Risorgimento: a Golden Age in Italian Culture

The process of nation-building and state formation also generated a period of artistic and cultural flourishing, as the newly-found patriotic and nationalist views, which

⁹ N. Bouchard, *Risorgimento in Modern Italian Culture: Revisiting the Nineteenth-Century Past in History, Narrative and Cinema*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

appeared on the occasion of the Risorgimento, were expressed in all forms of art. The change was felt mainly in literature, whether it was fiction, philosophical or historical writing, but also painting or music. As a result, the Risorgimento gave birth to a rich cultural heritage, in all domains, somehow carrying on the cultural renewal of the enlightenment years. Milan has become a center of intense cultural activity. In many cases, Italian writers actively played a part in the political scene, taking on board civil and military responsibilities, reflecting “certain broader tendencies in culture of central-northern elites (...) to provide important contributions to the formation of a national public opinion”.¹²

For example, Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) always promoted, in his writings, the people’s rights and duties. “Life is a mission, the country is a faith and an ideal in which everybody’s wills converge.”¹³ Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), in his work *Primato* (1843), even though he is skeptical about the possibility of achieving a peaceful unity between the north and the south, remembers the Middle Ages, when Christian Rome managed to overcome the Barbarians. The success of the Italians is, in his opinion, linked to the close relationship between the nation and Papacy, and this could also bring back to Italy the strength that the country had lost during foreign domination.

Italian Romanticism, although it follows the patterns of the international current, finds its particular feature in its defense of national values in opposition with foreign domination. A whole set of philosophical and aesthetical concepts were formed, giving art and poetry an essential educational role, aiming to renew the people’s memories of past glory and to inoculate the desire for freedom from any foreign occupation. The main characteristics of Risorgimento literature are the attachment to traditions and patriotic motifs.

Poet Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828), the promoter of neoclassical literary style, expresses in his works the enthusiasm and the disappointments arising from the events he

¹² N. Moe, *The View from Vesuvius : Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, University of California Press, 2002, p. 87.

¹³ <http://cronologia.leonardo.it>

witnesses. With a different style and expressive power, Ugo Foscolo (1778-1821), writer and former army officer, in his prose writings (*Jacopo Ortis*, *I Sepolcri*), talks about his political passions and his love for the country. He often evokes past Italian glory, not without looking ahead with optimism for the future grandeur of the nation. Also linked to the Romantic current of the Risorgimento, there is the great poet of that era, Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1937), who expresses in his *Canti* all his passions and beliefs in a philosophical mood. The works of Giovanni Berchet (1783-1851) is also a warm expression of popular patriotic poetry, with a high moral and social content (*Half-Serious Letter from Crisostomo*, *Romito del Ceniso*, *Fantasies*, *Romances*).

Another poetic style is the one proposed by Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) which joins together patriotic feeling (*March 1821*) and religious inspiration (*Sacred Hymns*). In his historical tragedies (*Adelchi*, *The Count of Carmagnola*) he announces the theme of his major masterpiece, historic novel *The Betrothed* (*I Promessi Sposi*) which, on the background of Spanish domination in Lombardy, tells “a popular story of joy and pain, lived in the light of Christian faith”¹⁴. Religious tradition, underlining the contrast between the humble and the rich oppressors, which became the main trait of Manzoni’s work, encourages the rebellion against the foreign, also acting as a reminder of past fights for freedom.

However, many writers believe that the Risorgimento is a process that never actually finished. “In short, cultural responses to national unification continued to flourish, eliciting persistent but highly contradictory images of Italy’s foundational history that can be traced uninterruptedly from the time of unification to Fascism, the resistance, the First Republic, and beyond.”¹⁵

Nationalist discourses and the cultural heritage of the Risorgimento have continued to be an object of attention also in contemporary Italy, as there have been many attempts to familiarize the present-day population with the historical past. “However, whereas cultural responses dating from the period of Liberal regimes to Giolitti’s

¹⁴ <http://cronologia.leonardo.it>

¹⁵ N. Bouchard, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

ministry, Fascism, the resistance, And the immediate post-World War II era have been duly examined, the assessment of Risorgimento and its myths in more recent times continues to remain, for the most part, unexplored. The few works that focus on revisiting the Risorgimento either describe its waning importance in recent Italian cultural history or tend to be confined to the examination of works by selected intellectuals.”¹⁶ One of these examples of works of art that look back on Italian history came from filmmaker Luchino Visconti, with his movies *Senso* (1954) and *Il Gattopardo* (1963). The latter is an adaptation from the novel of Risorgimento writer Tommaso di Lampedusa.

4. Conclusions

Although the Risorgimento is a historical event related only to Italian history, we cannot deny its intercultural aspect. Before this point in history, Italy was a fragmented country, and the differences amongst all the populations, from the north to the south of the peninsula were high in number and rather obvious. Basically, we are talking about variations in language, different historical backgrounds, cultural values and social behavior. However, an ideal of an overall Italian national identity had existed centuries before, and it had been expressed through certain forms of art and cultural manifestations. This time, though, the feeling of cultural unity managed to fight against foreign domination, overcome political fragmentation, and create a nation as a whole.

The point I want to make is that in order to achieve a cultural and political unity, the key was to concentrate on the similarities that united, rather than on the differences that separated the Italian populations. Even the result of this cultural unification was conclusive, as what emerged in the field of art and culture during and after Risorgimento was a flourishing process in all directions, producing masterpieces of a value which is still recognized in the present day. As a conclusion, we have the proof that culture is not

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

only capable to unite what is separated, but also to strengthen the power of an entire nation.

III. Ethnic minorities: history, status and cultural influences

1. The Napoleonic Age & French culture

a) Historical Overview

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte had already descended in Lombardy in 1796. Initially Italians welcomed Napoleon into their country, as they saw him as a liberator, especially from 18th Century political oppressions, including the Austrian authorities. With the treaty of Luneville in 1801, Austria recognized French domination in Italy. The exceptions that remained outside French influence were Sicily and Sardegna, where the Bourbon and the Savoy dynasties “found refuge under the protection of British marine troops”¹⁷. But Napoleon, in the end, did not live up to the expectations of the Italian population. He “neither united Italy nor provided it with self-government – he merely set up his own friends and relatives as the new princes and dukes”¹⁸.

The first years of the 19th Century was the last part of the French domination in Italy. This period (1801-1814) was based on monarchic governments which tried to guide Italian society after the same principles which ruled France. Italy was conducted after French principles, and its republics simply became small French provinces abroad: one in the north, with the capital in Milan, and the other in the south, with its capital in Naples. Napoleon’s strategy was to reorganize Italy’s political structure, with the aim of eventually integrating it in his Empire. “This period represented a fundamental break-out from the past and an anticipation of future hopes and tensions.”¹⁹ All these radical territorial changes started to threaten historical and regional differentiation existing up to that point in each particular Italian state.

¹⁷ L. Riall, *Il Risorgimento. Storia e interpretazioni*, Donzelli Editore, 1997, p. 13.

¹⁸ R. Bramblett, *Frommer’s Northern Italy: Including Venice, Milan & the Lakes*, Wiley, 2006, p. 428.

¹⁹ L. Riall, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

On the other hand, it would be impossible to underestimate the influence of the French occupation on the Italian territory, in all sectors. “For the first time since the Roman Empire, all of Italy was united under one centralized administration. The Napoleonic civil code was introduced, providing a uniform political and judicial system and overcoming the provincialism and fragmentation which characterized Italy for almost a millennium. Social change that had been introduced in most of Europe now arrived in Italy.”²⁰

The French government also made important changes in the field of commerce, financial reforms, and several improvements to all means of communication throughout Italy. Commercial routes with the rest of Europe were further improved, and northern Italy prospered in the trade of linen, wool, leather, minerals, and construction materials. Many parts of Italy encountered major industrial development and prosperity in this period.

Apart from this, all traditional political, administrative, and legal practices from the 18th century were replaced with those imported from France. “Feudalism was officially abolished. The attack towards the economic and political power of the Church was intensified: the lands owned by the Church were sold and in 1809 the power of the Pope ended. Laws were codified and standardized throughout the whole of Italy.”²¹ With the feudal system declared illegal, and the sale of the estates of the church and the aristocracy caused the formation of the middle class. In the south, the situation was different. “The feudal system was abolished everywhere, except Sicily, in 1806, but in the absence of major land reforms, the land remained in the hands of a few powerful families, and there was no move toward the forming of a middle class or an industrial base as was found elsewhere in Italy.”²²

²⁰ T. R. Cole, *Italian Genealogical Records: How to Use Civil, Ecclesiastical & Other Records in Family History Search*, Ancestry Publishing, 1995, p. 16.

²¹ L. Riall, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²² T. R. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

A part of Italian civilization where Napoleon and his law played a major influence was the area of civil and religious traditions. As far as religious practices were concerned, the law prohibited burials in church grounds or on private grounds in the cities. Cemeteries were created outside of cities' limits for the first time. Napoleon also introduced the notion of civil records, such as civil acts of birth, marriage, and death that were recorded by town officials in duplicate. This practice started being applied throughout the whole of Italy under Napoleon, but continued also after the decline of the French domination. Moreover, this method of registering and archiving civil records lasted including after the unification of Italy in 1870.

No city was more obviously marked by French cultural influence during this period than Milan, the capital of the new established Kingdom of Italy. "While the Enlightened traditions of literature and journalism which had distinguished Milanese culture under Austrian rule during the late eighteenth century were inevitably constrained by the Bonapartist censorship and the government's utilitarian approach to education, and the viceroy's court was not without its sophistications."²³

This important episode of the Italian history was also depicted by French writer Stendhal in his novel *The Monastery of Parma*. "Through the terms in which this invasion is portrayed, that of a joyous coupling between two destined partners, may echo the writer's own nascent Italophilia, he was shrewd enough to understand the extent to which Italian culture was already imbued with French ideas, as well as being able to grasp the irony and ambiguity in the subsequent cultural response of Italians themselves to incorporation within the Napoleonic Empire."²⁴ Napoleonic domination in Italy started with joy and hope from the population. Although the occupation did not last for long, the interaction between French and Italian civilizations had a strong impact on the further development of Italian culture, and the organization of the unified state later in history.

²³ G. Holmes, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Italy*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 210.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

b) The French community in Italy and French cultural influences

Although the reign of Napoleon and the French domination in Italy ended in a rather short time, we cannot deny that those times had a certain amount of influence over Italian culture and society. These influences can still be seen in the present day. There is a well-established French community in northern Italy, close to the borders with France, notably in the Regions of Piedmont (including the city of Turin) and Valle d'Aosta. The latter represents the best example of Franco-Italian intercultural cohabitation, and it deserves amore thorough analysis. This is the smallest and wealthiest region in Italy, it is the home of the largest French community in the country, and the French population enjoys the same rights as the Italians.

In 1860, Valle d'Aosta was the only francophone region which resisted on the Italian territory. On the other hand, "the inhabitants of the valley had become and remained, mainly because of their attachment to the Piedmontese dynasty, loyal citizens of the Italian state. They nonetheless demanded linguistic and cultural autonomy within the confines of their 'little homeland'"²⁵.

The bilingualism of the region had a troubled history. At the beginning of the century, the region depended upon the Prefecture of Turin, which tried to reduce school teaching in the French language, by sending over Italian teachers. Things were supposed to change after the end of the First World War, thanks to the political support the region had shown to the Italian state during the war. However, the Fascist regime imposed a complete Italianization of the region in the 1920s. Italian became the official language, the use and the teaching of French was totally abolished, and geographical names were translated into Italian. However, the final turn for the better took place after the Second World War, in 1945, when Charles de Gaulle occupied the region and included it under French administration. "Italy hurriedly formulated a special statute granting Valle D'Aosta the self-rule which its inhabitants had so long asked for, especially those of them who had taken an active part in fighting against fascism."²⁶

²⁵ M. Anderson, *Frontier Regions in Western Europe*, Routledge, 1983, p. 112.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

Today, Valle d’Aosta is officially a bilingual region, its two main languages being Italian and French. Valle d’Aosta legally acquired this status in February 1948, when Italian and French languages were deemed equal. By law, all public documents (nowadays, that includes websites of Valdostan institutions) must be written in both languages, and all schools of the region must teach equal amounts of hours in both French and Italian.

The EURAC Research Centre is located in South Tyrol, but its activity revolves, amongst other political and economic topics, around all issues of multilingualism in the north of Italy. Their studies on the Valle D’Aosta case have revealed facts of particular significance to intercultural communication in the area. Bilingual practice is compulsory in schools. “Valdostan bilingual school was born out of precise political choices, with their roots in the region’s socio-cultural and economic context.”²⁷ In order to teach in a Valdostan school, all staff must demonstrate fluency in both French and Italian. In the teaching process, there are no fixed rules concerning the alternative use of the two languages. Every teacher has the freedom to make the decisions, according to the particular case of every child. “The continuity of the familiar language within the school is actually considered a psychological support which sustains the child’s integration within the educational environment.”²⁸

A fair percentage of its inhabitants, known as Valdostans, speak an unofficial Franco-Provencal dialect, called *Patois*, which is the French word for a degrading dialect. “A patois, then, is a language norm used not for literary (and hence official) purposes, chiefly limited to informal situations. (...) This distinction introduces a new dimension in our discussion: the social function of a language. In terms of the language-dialect distinction, we may say that a patois is the language that serves the population in its least prestigious functions.”²⁹ Having said that, in Valle D’Aosta the dialect has overcome its ‘unofficial’ role. Despite of its variations according to certain parts of the region, this

²⁷ www.eurac.edu

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ D. Hutchinson, A.J. Smith, *Nationalism : Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Routledge, 2000, p. 1343.

Franco-Provencal dialect has been used for the creation of dictionaries and literary works. In the mid 19th century, writer J.B. Cerlogne gave *Patois* its first literary functions, and he was the one who also takes wrote a grammar book and a dictionary of the dialect. At that time, several contemporary authors followed in his footsteps, and started writing in dialect. “Particular spelling methods were adopted, in order to render the sounds which do not exist in French or in Italian. There are also several active local theatre companies, who perform new plays in *Patois* every year, and also certain singers-songwriters who express themselves in dialect.”³⁰ At the same time, with all the dignity given to the Franco-Provencal dialect, Valdostans never neglected Italian culture, especially after the unification with the Italian Kingdom. They have studied the history, the traditions, trying to detach themselves, at least partly, from French culture.

Valle d’Aosta is not only a region that practice mutual tolerance between Italian and French inhabitants. Valdostans are also open to receiving all the cultures of the world on their territory, and this is proven by the large number of international cultural events they organize each year.

A first example worth mentioning is *Le Festival International de la Paix*, organized by the Regional Council, in partnership with the Regional Department for Education and Culture, the Valle d’Aosta Musical Institute, and the commons of Courmayeur and Cogne. *Le Festival International de la Paix* is an international symphonic concert which takes place at the beginning of August, and, for the past 8 years, it has been backed up by international heads of state, of countries like France, The United Kingdom, Russia, The United States, Italy, Canada, Israel and Austria. “The purpose of the Festival is to organize, through musical cultural manifestations of the highest quality, aimed both at the young audience and at the adult public, a unique Festivity of Peace targeted at all cultural universes, through which we can launch messages of tolerance, love, and peace.”³¹ To remain in the musical domain, another interesting cultural manifestation is the *Reunion of the Valdostan Musical Bands*, in the

³⁰ www.naturaosta.it

³¹ www.consiglio.regione.vda.it

month of May, being organized by the Regional Council of Valle d'Aosta and the Regional Administration. This is a festival where all musical bands in the region have to participate.

Cervino Cinemountain International Film Festival, taking place in late July, shows mountain, adventure and exploring films from across the world. This is another cultural practice that lets people know about the natural beauties of the Valdostan areas, and not only. "The festival tends to propose and respect a vision of the mountain, presenting the most original films, and those most deeply linked to mountain culture, not only alpine one, but also to social and cultural aspects, to traditions, at the 'tout court' life, without leaving aside those aspects related to nature and environment which are the patrimony of the mountain side, but also of the world".³²

Last but not least, another important cultural manifestation, taking place in March, is *La Journée Internationale de la Francophonie*, a one-day event dedicated to the French-speaking community, their language, and their culture, celebrated under the slogan "Vivre ensemble, différents". The events shown during this day include a French musical festival, art exhibitions, documentaries about the natural beauties of the area, film shows, writing workshops and competitions for children.

2. The Habsburg domination and Austrian culture

a) The Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia and Northern Italy

The Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia established in northern Italy after the defeat of Napoleon, following the Congress of Vienna, in June 1815. The Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia was founded and ruled by Habsburg Emperor Francis I, from 1815 to his death in 1835. His successor to the throne was Ferdinand, who reigned between 1835 and 1848. Although it was formally independent, it acted as a province of the Habsburg Empire, and, as a consequence, Austrian legislation became applicable in 1816. With the

³² www.consiglio.regione.vda.it

Second War of Independence in 1859, Lombardy (Mantova excluded) separated itself from the Kingdom, following the Treaty of Zurich. Eventually, the Kingdom ceased to exist when, on the occasion of the Risorgimento, it was united with the Kingdom of Italy in 1866.

The Kingdom was divided in two main regions – Lombardy and Venetia -, with two independent governments, one in Milan and the other one in Venice. Each region was structured in provinces, districts and cities. Lombardy included the provinces of Milan, Como, Bergamo, Brescia, Pavia, Cremona, Mantova, Lodi, and Sondrio. Venetia included the provinces of Venice, Verona, Padova, Vicenza, Treviso, Rovigo, Belluno, and Udine. Each region had its own attribution, and, under Habsburg domination, public instruction and services has encountered a remarkable development, and so has the economy.

The Habsburg domination over the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia is a particularly interesting example of interculturality and respect for diversity. In fact, one of the key characteristics of the 19th century Habsburg Empire was diversity, found both in cultures and languages. As we know, apart from Austria and the Italian territories, the Habsburg Empire also had under its rule, Hungary, Bohemia (at present, the Czech Republic), Transylvania, and many more. Although economic and political administrations were handled in a centralized manner, from the cultural point of view, things were not working the same way.

Francis I was a popular monarch, who used as a method for gaining the loyalty of the population and the unity of his Empire thanks to his “sensitivity to traditional rights and privileges and a sympathy for the cultural diversity of his lands, (...) and he would have never risked a radical programme of centralization, even though they continued the battle to curb the powers of the historic entities that combined to form the Habsburg Empire”³³.

³³ D. Laven, *Venice and Venetia under Habsburgs, 1815-1835*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 18.

Even before Habsburg domination, Venetia had a particular cultural structure, and a complete assimilation by the Austrians was virtually impossible. “Given both their demographic significance and the proud traditions of the thousand-year Republic, Venetians - and especially the patrician elite – had good grounds for entertaining a fiercer sense of their own identity and independence than other Habsburg subject”.³⁴ As ethnic Italian groups, Venetians and Lombards were a major linguistic group in the Empire, and they shared a ‘national’ culture with millions of other Italian compatriots beyond the borders of the Habsburg Empire. Therefore, any attempt to impose upon them the Austrian cultural values would have failed.

b) Austrian culture in modern-day Italy

On the other hand, we cannot say that northern Italy lacks influences and reminders of the Austrian culture. A good example is the entire region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, in the far north-east of Italy, close to the border with Slovenia. This region has a strong mix of Germanic, Slavic, and, naturally, Italian elements. From the entire region, though, the borderline town of Trieste is probably the one that has the strongest Austro-Hungarian influence, notably in architecture and in the presence of Viennese coffee houses. “The faded grandeur of its imposing and largely homogenous neoclassical architecture is a sharp reminder of its days as a great southern port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Habsburg spirit still lingers amid Trieste’s elegant squares, palaces and Viennese-style coffee houses.”³⁵

Habsburg landmark influences can also be seen in the area of straight boulevards to the north of Corso Italia, known as Borgo Teresiano, which was designed by Austrian architects. At its western end, Corso Italia runs into the vast Piazza dell’Unita d’Italia, another “elegant triumph of Austro-Hungarian town planning”³⁶. Another architectural masterpiece, reminding of the Habsburg era and its prosperity is Castello Miramare, situated 7 km north of Trieste. Its construction began in 1855, under the coordination of Archduke Maximilian of Austria.

³⁴ D. Laven, *Venice and Venetia under Habsburgs, 1815-1835*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 20.

³⁵ D. Simonis, *Italy*, Lonely Planet, 2006, p. 394.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 397.

Another example of intercultural practice is a cultural event of our times, which took place in the town of Modena, with the purpose of telling people about the times and the atmosphere of Austrian domination. Last year, the Giuseppe Panini Museum of Photography, in collaboration with the Albertina Museum of Vienna and the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio from Modena, organized the exhibition entitled *Street Photography – Images of Viennese Life 1860-1912*. The event was presented on the Provincia di Modena official site. The theme of exhibition lies in the intense cultural relationship existing in the 19th century between the Ducat of Modena and the capital of the Habsburg Empire. Actually, this cultural relationship also took place in the field of photography. Modenese photographers used to be sent to Vienna to perfect their studies, during the reign of Francis V, Duke of Modena.

3. The South Tyrol Region

a) Historical overview

Apart from a popular tourist destination, Southern Tyrol is a multicultural region which deserves a special consideration, thanks to its large German-speaking population. Southern Tyrol, officially known as Trentino Alto Adige, is close to Italy's border with Switzerland. The territory was annexed to Italy after World War I, when Austro-Hungarian troops were defeated in October 1918 in Veneto. The Treaty of Saint-Germain established that the southern part of Tyrol had to be ceded to Italy. "The region included not only the largely Italian speaking area today known as Trentino, but also the territory now known as Sudtirolo / Alto Adige which, according to the census of 1910, was inhabited by 92.2 % German speakers, and a small part of today's province of Belluno."³⁷

At the beginning, South Tyrolean population was assimilated against their will and the use of German language was prohibited. However, "the historical identity of the Tyrolean region has of course sought its equivalent during the Second Republic, and this

³⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org>

remains an ongoing process”.³⁸ In 1946, after the Second World War, though, Austrian and Italian foreign ministers signed the “Gruber – DeGasperi Agreement”, named after themselves, and by which they allowed equal rights between the German-speaking population and the Italians. Other issues legalized by this agreement included “special safeguard-provisions for the improvement of the ethnical German character and its cultural and economic development; autonomy for the German speaking population (autonomous legislative and executive power on regional level); appropriate ethnical proportions in public service; bilingual topographical naming; the right to re-establish German family names and mother tongue education”.³⁹

b) Intercultural communication in South Tyrol

The largest ethnic group in South Tyrol is German speaking, and covers about 70% of the region’s population, followed by Italian nationals, with a percentage of 27%. Just like Valle d’Aosta, South Tyrol is officially a bilingual region: each language group studies in specific separate schools, and each professional of the public sector must show evidence of proficiency in both languages.

Education is a sector where intercultural acceptance and cooperation is well achieved. Every citizen of South Tyrol has the right for education in his native language, starting from nursery school. There is a particular school system for all populations: Germans and Italians, and also for Ladins (another national minority comprising only about 4% of the population). Each family has the right to send children to study in any school, but a special level of language skills is required for studying in a school that does not belong to the child’s native language group. In German as well as in Italian schools teaching the second language is compulsory starting from the first year. When Ladin pupils start school, parents may choose whether their children attend the German-Ladin or Italian-Ladin class. From the second year onwards, teaching is then carried out in the other two languages, and these classes include two hours of Ladin a week. South Tyrol

³⁸ G. Bischof and A. Pelinka, *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, Transaction Publishers, 1997, p. 45.

³⁹ www.midas-press.org

has also a trilingual (German, Italian, English) university in Bolzano and a number of diploma and degree-awarding schools, colleges and academies.

Given the fact that we are dealing with a multicultural environment, we can expect that cultural manifestations in South Tyrol are very rich and varied, and they are also presented by the official website of Trentino Alto Adige or by the Minorities Daily Association (MIDAS). These forms of intercultural entertainment prove that, apart from mutual acceptance between the populations of inhabitants, there is also the freedom for each of them to let the others know their culture, but also the openness to accept and become familiar with the culture of the other. This fact can be nothing but beneficial and evolutionary for the intercultural communication in the South Tyrolean region. Cultural manifestations take place throughout the year, and each ethnic group has their own initiatives, with distinct features, and from different domains.

For example, the cultural initiatives of the German ethnic group are generally related to parades of traditional costumes, traditional markets, or folk music and dance shows. An uncommon cultural manifestation, though, is taking place in the middle of January and is called *The Countryside Wedding*. 17 couples, accompanied by witnesses, friends and family, all dressed up in traditional wedding costumes, get married with an ancient 18th century ceremony. The ceremony is followed by the banquet, consisting of folk music and dance, and traditional dishes.

The Italian ethnic group, however, is turning more to high culture rather than folkloric cultural manifestations, often organizing events in association with other Italian regions. These cultural events include the “Festival of Religious Music”, the “Festival of Contemporary Music”, literary competitions, theatre festivals, and the international ballet summer course. An important event of this kind can be considered *The Merano Musical Weeks*, an international classical music festival.

The media sector in South Tyrol is also very diverse, and there are enough media forms both for the Italian and the German populations, in equal numbers. Namely, there

are four daily newspapers (two in German and two in Italian), nine weekly papers, one Sunday newspaper, 286 local papers and a large number of other publications. There are German language programmes on RAI radio and television and some private radio and television stations in both languages.

The multicultural and multilingual environment of South Tyrol is definitely an example of good intercultural practice between the German and the Italian ethnic groups. Apart from the political equality imposed by law, the region makes use of its rich cultural life in order to display and share each ethnic group's cultural heritage, whether in the shape of traditional arts celebrations, high culture, or patriotic manifestations. South Tyrol is a region where there is enough space for all inhabitants and their cultures.

4. The Island of Sardinia

a) General information

The Mediterranean island of Sardinia is also a region of a special structure, both from the administrative and the cultural point of view. Its Special Status as an autonomous territory was officially recognized by the Italian Constitution in 1948, and, apart from Veneto, Sardinia is the only Italian region whose inhabitants were recognized as a *popolo*, or a distinct population.

Even since Antiquity, Sardinia has been an island of several ethnic and cultural influences, thanks to a large number of invasions of foreign populations, which have gained power over the territory through the centuries. From the early Middle Ages, Sardinia has been under the rule of the Vandals in Northern Africa and the Byzantine Empire. Later on in history, the island experienced Arab and Spanish invasions, and the latter has set up a numerous Catalan-speaking community, which still exists today. In the 18th century, Sardinia and Piedmont became an autonomous kingdom, under the House of Savoy. In the end, in 1860, it was annexed to the unified Kingdom of Italy, just like all the regions of the peninsula.

All these cultural interactions which took place in the past have transformed Sardinia in a multicultural territory. “A long story of indigenous traditions and external cultural influx gives Sardinia a very special place in the Mediterranean world. The archeology, the architecture, the art of the island witness the variety and the quality of the local productive contexts, brought to life by the works that were imported from abroad. The arts domain also includes artisan traditions, music, celebrations, and, in the more contemporary years, photography and cinema: all elements which contributed to the creation of a complex historical and cultural evolution, of strongly original traits.”⁴⁰

At present, there are two major historical minority groups in Sardinia: the Sardinian population and the Catalans. Apart from the obvious language issue that exists on the territory, Sardinia is also a region of various cultural manifestations, which either portray the cultural identities of the inhabiting populations, either serve as reminders of the island’s history and the cultures of the past.

b) Sardinia as a multilingual territory

The first aspect that comes into discussion when talking about intercultural practice is the one of the languages. Although the main spoken language remains Italian, the second most widely spoken language is Sardinian. Sardinian is a language of Latin roots, but also containing Pre-Roman elements, including Phoenician, Etruscan, and Near Eastern languages. “It is true that the most widely-spread dialect on the island, which dominates civil transactions, is called Sardinian, and, at the first sight, it inherits many of the features of Spanish. (...) This Roman language encounters, according to various places, the actions of the same elements which form Tuscan, Corsican, and Spanish languages, in those specific places”⁴¹. The two most common forms of Sardinian dialects are Campidanese, found mainly in the south (from Cagliari to Oristano), and Logudorese, which extends from the central part of Sardinia, to the north, near the town of Sassari. Sardinian is generally spoken in the rural parts of the region, and is considered to be the

⁴⁰ www.sardegnaicultura.it

⁴¹ C. Cattaneo, C. Carlino, *Geografia e storia della Sardegna*, Donzelli Editore, 1996, p. 11.

language of the local culture and tradition, as folk music and literature are written in Sardinian.

Apart from the role it plays in promoting local culture, Sardinian language, also known as *Limba Sarda Comuna*, was approved by regional authorities in 2007 for the drafting of official documents, besides Italian. The Council of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia has carried out “a thorough research on the status of Sardinian language and on formulating of a linguistic standard that can be used for the official writing of certain documents.”⁴² *Limba Sarda Comuna* is the most widely spoken version of the Sardinian dialects, but its improvement remains an ongoing process, as it is supposed to be a language for all Sardinian-speaking population. In April 2006, for the first time in history, the first official deliberation written in Sardinian took place, and, in March 2007, the law was approved with a majority of votes.

Given the recent approval of Sardinian as an official language, the consideration it receives in education is also rather recent. The right to learn Sardinian language during primary and secondary school was granted by the State in 1985, although it is still an optional subject in schools. However, the universities of Cagliari and Sassari have been offering courses in Sardinian linguistics since the 1950s. Sardinian language courses are also available in other European Universities, such as Bonn or Vienna, within the Departments of Romance Philology. According to the Euromosaic report, issued by the Catalan university of Oberta⁴³, it was only in August 1993 that the Regional Council of Sardinia decided to pay a greater amount of attention to the presence and promotion of Sardinian language in the education system, especially regarding issues such as Sardinian language training for teachers and the issuing of teaching material.

A Catalan dialect is spoken in the northern city of Alghero, and this language is a reminder of the island’s history as an Aragon colony. The dialect was introduced when Catalan invaders defeated autochthonous Sardinian population and forced their presence

⁴² www.sardegna.cultura.it

⁴³ www.uoc.es/euromosaic

in Alghero, in 1372. Later on, Spanish became the official language of the area, and, in the end, it was replaced by Italian. According to linguistic statistics, 22.4% of the population speaks Algherese Catalan as their first language. At present, just like Sardinian, Catalan is used within the rural environment, or for the creation of religious texts and folk literature.

c) Cultural heritage and intercultural manifestations

When it comes to culture, Sardinia is a place of contrast between the ‘official’, modern Italian society, and the ancient, traditional Sardinian culture, including the Spanish-Catalan influences. These popular traditions still practiced and promoted these days have grown stronger in the recent past following the need of the Sardinian people to remember their history, and to keep and show their cultural identity in the middle of Italian homogenization.

Apart from their typical folk music, crafts and cuisine, the Sardinian population is one of religious and traditional celebrations, where everyone can take part. Sardinian celebrations have their roots in an antique culture, with specific music, poetry and dance routines, traditional costumes parades, traditional cooking, or horse races. These events can last for days in a row. “The celebrations have always displayed the lives of the island’s communities and today more than ever before, emphasizing especially the minor sacred rituals, as they are linked to the desire (and the necessity) to reaffirm their own unique cultural identity.”⁴⁴

One of these celebrations is called *Sa die de sa Sardigna (The day of Sardinia)*, which has been deemed official on the 14th of September 1993 by Sardinia’s Regional Council. This festivity represents the glory of the Sardinian population, it takes place throughout the entire island on the 28th of April each year, and it is meant to remember the popular rebellion that chased the Piedmontese away from Cagliari, on the 28th of April 1794. Another major religious festivity in Sardinia is *The Holy Week (La Settimana Santa)*, which takes place between Palm Sunday and Easter. This celebration reflects the

⁴⁴ <http://it.wikipedia.org>

influence of Spanish culture, mixed with local religious traditions. The celebrations of The Holy Week consist of interpretations of scenes of the Christ Resurrection episode of the Bible in the streets of all Sardinian towns, and performances of religious hymns in Latin and Sardinian.

Remaining in the area of Spanish influences, another important reminder of Iberian culture lies in the Catalan-Gothic architecture, notably in the town of Alghero. Such architectural masterpieces include the Cathedral of St. Mary which is partly constructed in the Catalan-Gothic style, as its building began during the days of Gothic architecture, in 1570, and ended in 1730. Catalan-Gothic elements can be seen in its five chapels and the base of the bell tower. Another Catalan-Gothic church is St. Francis, with the typical architectural elements shown by the high altar and the chapels. Examples of Catalan-Aragonese architecture can be also found in Palazzo Carcassona and Palazzo D'Albis.

To sum up, we can draw the conclusion that intercultural communication in Sardinia is more of an interaction between past and present, between traditional and modern, and between Italian, Sardinian and Catalan culture. Culture has the role of bringing back ancient values in modern times, and to define the cultural mix of the Sardinian population.

5. Conclusions

National minorities and regional ethnic groups are an important social and political issue in every country, and Italy is no exception. What we have learned from this chapter is that culture can play an even bigger part than politics when it comes to the assimilation and integration of national minorities. As these minorities have been inhabiting the Italian territory for centuries, they gained an officially-recognized status a long time ago. The aim of the intercultural practices that exist today must be the maintenance of good relations between ethnic minorities and the Italian population.

Intercultural practices can embrace various forms, but they still operate on an exchange basis. We have seen that the law can be conceived in order to accommodate the culture of the minorities. We see this in the bilingualism of public schools and institutions in certain regions, such as Valle d'Aosta or South Tyrol, and in the encouragement for the minorities to express their culture through artistic manifestations. Tolerance and cohabitation is a mutual process, where both parts must show their will to express themselves and accept the other. And, as far as Italy is concerned, we are dealing with efficient cultural cooperation between the state and its minorities.

IV. Intercultural practices and programmes for foreigners and immigrants. Support for immigrants and their adaptation to Italian culture

1. General immigration issues in Italy

Immigration in modern day Italy is, most definitely, a controversial issue. On one hand, there has been a dramatic increase in the flow of immigration during the past few decades, which caused major disruption for the Italian authorities and population. On the other hand, the way Italians receive and handle immigrants is a major problem. I would add my personal comment that what the press shows does not earn any good marks for the Italian nation, especially in the eyes of those who are not familiar with their culture and history.

In the defense of the Italians, however, I would have to mention, first of all, that it was only until the 1970s that they were a nation of emigrants themselves. Right after the Second World War, Italy was a rather poor country, and this fact forced many people to emigrate in search for a better life. Their economic and political system developed dramatically over the years, but still, what they did not foresee is that Italy would face a major turning point, and become a popular destination for immigrants coming from countries that were less developed. Consequently, we might say that they have only started to get used to the immigration wave just recently, and that they have just taken their first steps in learning how to deal with the issue. “This probably explains why Italy was unprepared to handle the dramatic increase in foreign immigration particularly in the 1980s and the 1990s. Existing measures on immigration offered merely a formal possibility of integration without creating real conditions of integration that took into account social exigencies. Only in 1997, after introducing the new immigration

legislation, immigrants were granted 'semi-citizenship rights'. Within a space of a few years, Italy became a country of immigration rather than emigration."⁴⁵

Therefore, at present, Italy acquires immigrants from all over the world, and their origins are fairly heterogeneous. Generally, most immigrants come from Eastern Europe (especially Romania), North Africa, Asia, and South America, but there are also smaller groups from other parts of the world, including North America and Western Europe. According to a research presented by Wikipedia, statistics show that, at the end of 2006, foreigners comprised 5% of the population, which meant just under 3 million people, with an increase of 270,000 since the previous year. In cities like Rome, Brescia, Milan, Padova, and Prato, immigrants total more than 10% of the population.

Consequently, we can realize how dramatic the immigration issue has become, and, in the end, there is no surprise that Italians experience major difficulties in accommodating and accepting them. Eventually, the Italian population and authorities had to accept that many of those foreigners have come to their country because of their need to find a better life. "It is more and more the case that people emigrate in order to escape harsh economic, political, and environmental conditions at home and not because of a perception that Italy welcomes guest workers."⁴⁶ As a result, Italians realized that concrete steps had to be taken towards the integration of immigrant communities, including from the cultural point of view.

From the legal and political point of view, immigrants are able to find support and advice within institutions called Unions, which exist in all major cities. These Unions have the role of helping immigrants adapt themselves to the Italian legislation and civic society. "Next to religious organizations, unions are the primary immigrant support group. In most major Italian cities, union caucuses and advocacy groups welcome immigrants and help them gain access to healthcare, housing, and other facilities. Unions

⁴⁵ F. Dell'Olio, *The European Citizenship: Between the Ideology of Nationality, Immigration, and European Identity*, Ashgate Publishing, 2005, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁶ C.C. Roseman, H.D. Laux, G. Thieme, *Ethnicity: Geographic Perspectives on Ethnic Change in Modern Cities*, Rowman Littlefield, 1996, p. 188.

have also spearheaded efforts to ensure the broad implementation of provisions of the 1986 law to help integrate immigrants and their families into Italian society.”⁴⁷

Some steps have been taken in the cultural direction as well, and the Italian population is finally able to prove that they are ready to integrate new cultures into their society. “Two laws have been issued to support intercultural strategies and practices: *Regional Law 29/2000*, which defines a general framework for the development of intercultural strategies embedded within the regional administration as a whole and *Regional Law 33/2005*, which conceives intercultural practices as a key foundation for the development of contemporary culture.”⁴⁸ However, as we have done before, we will leave aside the economic and political aspects, and concentrate on the cultural practices, and we will try to figure out what were the good attempts of dealing with immigrants in an efficient way.

2. Programmes of integration for immigrants

The most important aspect of the immigration process, anywhere in the world, is the willingness of the foster-country to integrate the foreign nationals, and the concrete measures that they take. Two key processes in intercultural dialogue are to promote and share the cultural values of immigrant communities, but also the ability of the immigrants to understand Italian culture. As far as culture is concerned, integration is not something imposed from “above”, namely from a political or national level, but rather an initiative of the people of those regions which are inhabited by immigrants. The actions presented in this sub-chapter are explained in detail on the *Compendium* cultural policies database for intercultural dialogue, created by the Council of Europe.

⁴⁷ W.A. Cornelius, P.L. Martin, J.F. Hollinfield, *Controlling Immigration: a Global Perspective*, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 321.

⁴⁸ www.culturalpolicies.net

The notion of ‘cultural integration’ comprises two aspects. The first aspect has to do with the immigrant’s participation in social life and interaction with the local people and their cultures. The second aspect has to do with those initiatives which encourage immigrants to reflect their own cultural heritage through artistic manifestations, bringing their own contribution to the cultural diversity of the area they inhabit. “In this respect, local authorities are only just beginning to explore the true potential of their cultural policies, institutions and activities, although with a few notable exceptions of long-established services and programmes. In fact, there is still a more or less evident tendency to consider the cultural life of immigrant communities as a domain of ‘socio-culture’, if not an ‘option’ for cultural policy makers.”⁴⁹

Although many of the intercultural practices we will talk about have become legal policies, they have been conceived by certain regions which were affected by immigration, and then implemented on a national level. Furthermore, we shall not ignore the presence of smaller institutions, such as local cultural centers, foundations, or non-governmental organizations in encouraging and practicing intercultural events. We will notice that many of these intercultural practices tend to focus on the arts sector, as this artistic expression reflects a nation’s cultural identity better than anything else. All these cultural initiatives represent an encouragement for the consumption of culture in diverse forms, and interaction between the various communities cohabiting in a specific region.

First of all, we will start with some laws of intercultural practice. The first example is Emilia Romagna's *Regional Law 5/2004*, which is “one of the few Italian regional laws specifically devoted to these issues”⁵⁰, and does not refer to the arts sector in particular. The Emilia Romagna initiative was conceived by the Department for Immigrants’ First Reception and Social Integration. They decided to develop Intercultural Centres, in order to organize a large variety of intercultural manifestations, such as cultural and sporting events, with the purposes to facilitate interaction between residents of different backgrounds, and to promote each group’s national culture.

⁴⁹ www.culturalpolicies.net

⁵⁰ Idem.

At present, there are about twenty Intercultural Centres in the Emilia Romagna region, and their activities are different. For example, there is the Massimo Zonarelli Intercultural Centre, which pays a particular attention to immigrant women and their integration within Italian society. They are encouraged to interact through Italian language courses, creative writing workshops, and dance or sewing classes. Another example is the Documentation Centre, which organizes seminars aimed at teachers, in order to help them interact with foreign students, by studying issues of citizenship, human rights and equal opportunities. This centre also promotes good intercultural practice through local, national, and international student exchange schemes.

From Emilia Romagna, we shall move on to Tuscany, and to the *Porto Franco* project, implemented in 1999 by the Department of Education Policies, Heritage and Cultural Activities of the region. Through this project, Tuscany aims to promote itself as a 'free port', where there is a place for people of all origins and cultural background. This network initiative was adopted by the whole region, and it benefits from the involvement of the regional administration, Tuscany's 10 Provinces, more than 200 city councils and nearly 100 Intercultural Centres, all at the same time. This project, just like many more, aims to focus on several areas of culture and intercultural dialogue, and the activities organized by the participating institutions involve a wide range of events, from photography and short film competitions, to academic conferences on cultural diversity.

While other projects do not focus on arts and cultural heritage in particular, something different happened in Turin in 2004, with the opening of the Department for Heritage Education, which took on board the responsibility of exploring other cultures in museums. The programme *Heritage for All*, has set up three main objectives: "to carry out research on immigrant communities' participation patterns in the city's cultural life, to increase the intercultural competence of museum educators through training opportunities, and to experiment with storytelling and other forms of active involvement in structuring museum visits"⁵¹. The project is being carried out in partnership with several other institutions, such as the Permanent Territorial Centres for adult education and training, the Intercultural Centre of the City of Turin and a number of museums. One

⁵¹ www.culturalpolicies.net

of these examples is the project *Sul tappeto volante (On the Flying Carpet)*, organized starting from 1996 at the *Castello di Rivoli - Museum of Contemporary Art*, in partnership with a primary school located in San Salvario, a Turin neighbourhood which was famous for several ethnic conflicts in the past. “The main goal of this initiative was to promote a new way of "living together" through the knowledge of and the experimentation with contemporary art.”⁵²

Of course, there was no chance that the capital city of Rome would not bring a significant contribution in the achievement of intercultural campaigns, especially given the fact that Rome is the city with the highest number of immigrants. The Foreign Citizens’ Council of Representatives and the Council of Religions have been set up in 2001, in order to promote ethnic and religious pluralism, under the coordination of a Councilor for Multi-Ethnic Policies and four Assistant City Councilors, elected by migrant residents. Besides, Rome also hosts its own Documentation Centre, *Archivio dell'Immigrazione*, which gives access to an audiovisual and written press archive on the issues of immigration and immigration laws, racism and political asylum, but also academic research materials on these topics and literary works written by immigrant authors.

Last but not least, we must not forget the role played by the church in the integration of immigrants. For instance, Catholic charity *Caritas Italiana* and its local branches also provides assistance and counseling to immigrants, and provide regular immigration information updates through its yearly publication, *Dossier statistico sull'immigrazione*. At the same time, ten years ago, *Caritas Diocesana* of Rome started working on the *Forum per l'Intercultura*, “one of Italy's main intercultural education programmes, which explores different aspects of the immigrant communities' cultures, including art, cinema and literature”.⁵³ Just like in many countries of the world, places of worship provide a space for socializing and cultural interaction, regardless of the religious cult they belong to. Apart from their specific religious masses and festivities,

⁵² www.culturalpolicies.net

⁵³ *Idem.*

churches, temples and mosques organize, in an equal measure, events such as language courses, cultural and sporting events, theatre and music performances.

3. Case study: Romania. What about the *good* intercultural practices?

Probably many Romanian nationals would regard the title of this sub-chapter with skepticism. Records have shown that Romanian immigrants are, at present, the highest in number amongst all immigrant groups on the Italian territory. However, we all know too well that almost everything we see and hear on the news on Romanian-Italian relationships should rather be assigned to a “bad intercultural practice” file. Most of us believe that these relationships are compromised forever, and that Romanians will always remain the “unwanted” immigrant community.

We could blame everything on the political interest of certain parties, to present the dark side of Romanian immigrants and, afterwards, the efforts of the political class to get rid of these threats for the Italian society, everything for the final purpose of earning electoral capital. Or, we could blame it on the problem of the employment, and the jobs that the Romanian workforce is likely to occupy. Anyway, if we look for the bad things in any problem, we are always likely to find them.

What about culture? Do culture and intercultural communication have any power whatsoever to improve the relations between the Romanian immigrant community and the Italians? Are Romanians ready and able to show Italy that there is more to our culture than crimes and poverty? But, most of all, are Italians willing to discover and accept this fact? After undergoing a fair amount of research, I had the surprise to discover that there have been several initiatives to bring Romanian and Italian cultures closer, from articles and manifestos, to concrete cultural projects.

First of all, we must start with the most official, or best known intercultural practices and these are the ones initiated by Romanian organizations in Italy, in order to create a positive image for our country, through the use of culture.

One of the oldest and most famous institutions is the Romanian Academy of Rome, set up in 1922, and which functions following a Cultural Agreement between Romanian and Italian Governments. The organization is a division of the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry, and its activity is coordinated by the Romanian National Academy, the Romanian Education Ministry and the Romanian Cultural Institute. Their activities include the organization of scholarship schemes for Romanian students and academic researchers in Italy, and conference and seminars for cultural exchange between Romanian and Italian students. The Romanian Academy also hosts a bilingual library, with books and media publications on Romanian culture, history and literature, in both Romanian and Italian, and where Romanian language courses are organized every year. Plus, events such as shows, exhibitions and concerts are also an important activity of the Academy. “The institution has been coordinating for years, in the Italian capital, a normal activity of cultural proliferation, in order to let the Roman public know how many good things are created in all fields of Romanian contemporary art and creativity, on a cultural and artistic level. At the same time, the Romanian Academy of Rome wishes to act as a meeting point for Romanian and Italian artists and cultural associations.”⁵⁴

Secondly, the promotion of Romanian culture lies in the hands of the Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research, opened in Venice in April 1930. After a period when it was neglected, during the communist years, the Institute began functioning again in 1992, and caught up rapidly with the long period of absence, by organizing large amounts of events, such as exhibitions, concerts, theatre shows, or conferences. In the past decade, an emphasis was put on Romanian-Italian relationships and everything that the two cultures have in common. “We could ensure a better mutual understanding between the two countries, as well as an excellent highlighting of

⁵⁴ www.accadromania.it

Romanian culture in various domains: scientific, literary, artistic.”⁵⁵ Apart from all these cultural manifestations, we have to mention the numerous teaching initiatives, obviously, in the field of Romanian language and culture, and the cultural exchange schemes. For example, the Institute organizes a course of Romanian language and literature, and another one of Romanian culture and civilization, at the Venetian Ca’Foscari University.

An example of a more recent Romanian cultural institution is the *Columna* Socio-Cultural Association, which opened to the public in March 2005, in Padova, and it was set up by fifteen people. Their activity and beliefs are specifically focused on the safeguarding of national identity by Romanian immigrants, but also by showing the Italian population what Romanian culture is all about. “The Association was born to keep alive the Romanian traditions in the hearts of the Romanians and Moldavians living in Padova, to proliferate Romanian culture. (...) We believe that it is preferable to integrate ourselves in the new community, maintaining the richness of our ancient culture, rather than being simply assimilated, and therefore losing for good the possibility to build a real bridge between two different nations.”⁵⁶ The cultural manifestations the association organizes are fairly similar to the ones we have found in the previous examples: traditional manifestations, folk music and dance shows, conferences on Romanian cultural themes, exhibitions, but also Italian and Romanian language courses. Their last cultural manifestation, achieved in partnership with the Romanian Cultural Institute, took place last Saturday and consisted of a literary meeting dedicated to national poet Mihai Eminescu, on the anniversary of his birth.

As we have seen, Romanian national institutions and associations are willing to do whatever it takes to practice and share Romanian culture. However, these practices are happening in all immigrant communities, of all countries. When abroad, there is always a need to manifest your national culture and we must expect to see this kind of practices anywhere in the world. Yet, given the fact that we are talking about Romania, which is a ‘controversial’ country in the eyes of the Italian population, it would be interesting to

⁵⁵ www.icr.ro/filiale

⁵⁶ Idem.

know how willing are the Italian to accept and assimilate our culture. Surprisingly or not, we can find several examples of *good* intercultural practice.

We will start with the most recent event of this kind, which is actually taking place right in these days, and which is one of the most famous Italian cultural events. It is the 2008 Carnival of Venice, which dedicates a good part of it, in the style of an ‘event within an event’, to Romania and its culture, aiming to strengthen the cultural ties between Romania and Italy. In fact, this year, most of the 150 artists involved in the show are coming from Romania, and they are ready to prove what is more valuable in Romanian culture, in terms of contemporary performing arts, under the slogan “Romania: in all senses, all senses in one celebration!”⁵⁷.

The Carnival will start with a concert from the Bucharest Philharmonic Orchestra, to mark the opening of the festivity. The public will also be able to enjoy performances from Theatre Masca of Bucharest, Dan Puric and his famous one-man show *Vis*, several Romanian rock and folk acts, instrumental pop band Amadeus, and a “Calusarii” dance show. The institutions involved in setting up all these cultural manifestations include the Department for Cultural Production of the Province of Venice, the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Romanian Ministry of Culture, the Romanian Cultural Institute of Bucharest and the one of Venice, and the Romanian National Board of Tourism.

The organizers of the Venetian Carnival are aiming to concentrate more thoroughly on a particular country each year, and, in consequence, “to achieve projects in co-production, in the field of performing arts, valuing and promoting the mobility and the synergy between the artists and the creative people, and the cooperation between cultural associations and institutions. All this will prove Venice to be an international laboratory of cultural productions which are innovative, contemporary, interdisciplinary and intercultural.”⁵⁸

Remaining in the area of performing and visual arts, we have a piece of news which is also a sign of acceptance from the Italians, and for the Romanian community.

⁵⁷ www.culturaspettacolovenezia.it

⁵⁸ Idem.

Last autumn, cinemas from Rome and Pisa dedicated a few days each to contemporary Romanian cinema, in recognition of the well-deserved place it has recently earned amongst other European countries. “We want to show the Italian public, the journalists, the producers and the distributors a panoramic view of the new trends of contemporary Romanian cinematography, which has received, during the past few years, important international recognition. Unfortunately, in Italy it is almost unknown outside the professional public. Therefore, through a brief journey through the most significant recent pictures, we intend to let Italy know the day-to-day reality of a country in full development, and so well represented in the movies that will be part of the projections.”⁵⁹

The projection will include both feature films and short films, and meetings with the actors and the filmmakers were also available. The movies on show included *Moartea Domnului Lazarescu (The Death of Mr. Lazarescu)* by Cristi Puiu, *Hartia va fi albastra (The Paper Will Be Blue)* by Radu Muntean, *Legaturi bolnavicioase (Sickly Liaisons)* by Tudor Giurgiu, *Cum am petrecut sfarsitul lumii (How I Spent the End of the World)* by Catalin Mitulescu, *4 luni, 3 saptamani si 2 zile (4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days)* by Cristian Mungiu and *California Dreaming* by Cristian Nemescu. And, besides these, there were many others. The movie show was organized by the Estenest Romanian cultural association, and ItaroArte, from Italy, in cooperation with the Experimental Cinematography Centre, the cultural association Arsenale from Pisa, and the Romanian Cultural Institute.

There was another interesting example of intercultural practice which has nothing to do with performing arts, but with people of culture trying to bring reconciliation between Romanians and Italians in a troubled time. Last November, following the Romanian-Italian crisis after the Giovanna Reggiani case, some Romanian immigrants have reportedly faced several episodes of unjustified discrimination and violence. A group of Italian artists, writers and intellectuals (including, amongst others, film director Bernardo Bertolucci), have issued a manifesto entitled *Il Triangolo Nero (The Black Triangle)* as a protest against racist abuse towards Romanian people. They stress the unfairness of judgment towards Romanians, as their bad deeds are excessively amplified

⁵⁹ www.zabriskiepoint.net

and individual crimes result in general punishment for the whole nation. Yet, at the same time, the good deeds of Romanians tend to be ignored, and so do the moments when a Romanian immigrant is in the victim's position. The authors of the manifesto conclude: "In front of all this, we cannot remain careless. Silence, denial of the right to criticize, and dismissal of intelligence and reason do not belong to us. Individual crimes do not justify collective punishments. Being Romanian or Rom is not some form of 'moral guilt'. There are no such things as guilty and innocent races. No nation is illegal."⁶⁰ The manifesto is available online, and, at present, has gathered thousands of signatures, from Italian and Romanian nationals, and not only.

Efficient cooperation between the media of two countries towards a mutual purpose can also count as intercultural practice. This time, our main players are Italian and Romanian Public Relations organizations. The project in question was initiated by FERPI (Italian Public Relations Federation) in association with ARPR (Romanian Association of PR Professionals), last November, in a time of crisis between the two countries. Their mutual aim was to use public communication in order to improve the relationship between the two populations, on both territories. The project counted on the efficient use of the media in both countries, and the power of influence of Italians living in Romania over their co-nationals in Italy, and the other way around, from the Romanian immigrants in Italy to the Romanian people at home. "It is an explicit attempt to apply live – maybe the first in the world – of the new theory of public diplomacy called 'sociologic globalization', which offers a central part to Public Relations."⁶¹

4. Conclusions

In the end, it looks like the Italian population has made a considerable effort to learn how to accept and integrate immigrant communities, despite their rather new status as a 'destination' for immigrants. Good will exists on behalf of the authorities, such as the Councils of the cities which are inhabited by large numbers of immigrants, or the

⁶⁰ www.petitononline.com/trianero

⁶¹ www.ferpi.it

foundations which are dealing with this particular issue. Projects are carried out in many parts of the country, include various fields of activity, and are aimed to all age groups. As far as Romania is concerned, we were probably surprised to find out that several steps towards good communication between the two nations have been taken. Culture played a 'mediating' role, especially in the very recent past, in a time of prejudice and xenophobia. It was comforting to see that Italian intellectuals, people of a high professional value, appreciate Romanian culture, are aware of its worth, and are willing to defend it and to know it better. However, it is true that prejudice still exists. In my opinion, this happens because initiatives and events like those exemplified in this chapter, or anything that would lead to a better attitude from the public, do not get enough media coverage. Actually, it would be interesting to see if they get any media coverage whatsoever. But we will discuss this issue in a separate chapter.

V. Italy and international cultural exchange. Promoting Italian culture abroad.

1. Creating an image for the Italian culture

In the previous chapters, we attempted to take a look at what happens to foreign cultures inhabiting the Italian territory, whether in the form of ethnic minorities or immigrants. Yet, there are two different perspectives of intercultural communication, and what we are planning to do in this chapter is to analyze the Italian good intercultural practices ‘from the inside out’, namely the way Italy presents itself abroad and the way it handles cultural communication with other countries.

The major form of good intercultural practice that any country would benefit from is the creation of a positive image as far as cultural identity is concerned, an image that should be approved outside the country’s borders. Italy, for instance, is one of those countries with an enormous number of items making up its cultural identity in the eyes of the foreigners, some of them very actual. Almost everyone in the world knows Italy for its cuisine, its fashion tradition, its architecture, its music (from classical to modern), its cinema heritage, or the extroverted nature of its people. “Culture became less associated to an external aspect of life to which one had or did not have access, and more with a lifestyle that was defined by the shared beliefs, tastes, language, spaces, clothes, and political world-view of group members.”⁶²

However, we shall make a more detailed analysis of how Italian culture is promoted abroad on a higher level rather than cultural stereotypes, and we will see what makes a positive cultural and intercultural image. And this can be seen only in relation to

⁶² Z.G. Baranski, R.J. West, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 92.

other cultures or other nations. We will take a look at how Italy valued its cultural resources, how it cooperated with other countries, and how it promoted its cultural assets through intercultural manifestations.

2. Cultural initiatives of national institutions: Foreign Affairs Ministry, Ministry of Culture and UNESCO

Cultural diplomacy is probably the most efficient and the most widely-spread method to achieve intercultural cooperation. Every country has the official duty to promote its culture outside its borders, through well-established national institutions. “Cultural development is also a major objective of the foreign policy of a state, primarily because the concept of the cultural identity of a nation is deeply rooted in the idea of nationalism. Preservation and promotion of the national culture is therefore an important foreign policy objective. This is done partly through positive cultural diplomacy, which seeks to protect the national culture abroad.”⁶³

However, in these days, when phenomena like globalization and migration are occurring in more and more parts of the world, the mere promotion of a country’s national culture is no longer enough. An increasing number of people are developing an interest in traveling, and in getting acquainted with other cultures as well. After all, efficient intercultural communication should be a two-way process, where each person or group who gets involved in this dialogue must be prepared to transmit, as well as to receive information. One of the ways to do this is by developing bilateral and multilateral intercultural projects with other countries, and this practice is a feature of a culturally developed and open society, which is willing not only to show itself to the outside world, but also to interact and exchange information with different cultures.

In most parts of the world, Italy included, a fair share of this responsibility is in the hands of governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, which also have the task of initiating and sustaining a large number

⁶³ J. Bandyopadhyaya, *A General Theory of Foreign Policy*, Allied Publishers 2003, p. 41.

of intercultural projects, aimed at both promoting and preserving Italian culture abroad, but also at achieving various forms of cultural exchange with other countries.

a) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a separate Department for Cultural Promotion and Cooperation, which carry out a large variety of projects in the field of studying Italian language and culture abroad, manage scholarship and student exchange programmes, and also delegations of Italian academic staff who teach in foreign universities and schools. Besides, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs administrates the network of Italian Institutes of Culture across the world, which provide solid information sources for all foreigners who would like to know Italian culture more thoroughly, but also for Italian residents in foreign countries. “The cultural and linguistic needs of millions of Italians abroad are of paramount importance; social changes and international debate on the production and distribution of knowledge must not be ignored in the Italian context.”⁶⁴

The first example which we will concentrate upon has to do with the initiatives taken towards Italian language teaching in foreign schools. The first obvious benefit of language study schemes can be noticed within Italian Diasporas. Taking into consideration Italians’ former status of ‘emigrant nation’, cases of ethnic Italian families settled abroad (especially in America) generations ago are very frequent. Therefore, it is easy to see the importance of a more thorough knowledge of the Italian language and culture when it comes to those people. The study of their culture of origin facilitates the maintenance of Italian cultural identity and the continuous use of Italian language. As far as non-Italians are concerned, language courses in schools, universities and cultural centres are also becoming more frequent every day, and many Italian academic institutions initiate partnerships with similar institutions from other countries with the purpose of organizing different types of courses or student exchange programmes.

⁶⁴ M. Totaro-Genevois, *Cultural and Linguistic Policy: the Italian Experience*, Multilingual Matters, 2005, p. 59.

An interesting example could be considered *La Settimana della Lingua Italiana nel Mondo* (*The Week of Italian Language in the World*), which is taking place in October each year. The event was also organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the first time in 2001. “The general purpose of the initiative is to promote the knowledge and the interest for the Italian language abroad. Specifically, the focus is placed on the present situation of the Italian language, and on the image of the country which it promotes abroad. Every year we choose an area of use of the language, for more in-depth study.”⁶⁵

The institutions which host the events that are part of *The Week of Italian Language in the World* include Italian Cultural Institutes, Embassies, Italian language departments within foreign universities, committees of the Dante Alighieri Society, and several other Italian associations. Since its first edition, the project has developed notably, both in terms of numbers of participants and in numbers of events. In fact, it included 750 events in 2001, and today it has grown to 1300 events on a global scale.

However, the intercultural manifestations practiced by a country are most often associated with its global network of Cultural Institutes. There are 90 Italian Cultural Institutes, operating in the main cities of five continents. The Italian Cultural Institute offers a permanent and up-to date source of Italian culture, both for Italian communities living abroad and for foreigners who love Italian culture and wish to learn more about it.

The section dedicated to the Italian Cultural Institute, on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, also offers a description of the activities organized by the Institute. These activities cover various cultural domains, such as art, music, cinema, theatre, dance, fashion, design or photography. Of course, the Institute provides academic support to both Italian and foreign nationals, by organizing language courses, or through its library, which comprises various topics.

⁶⁵ www.esteri.it

The Italian Cultural Institute is “a meeting and dialogue place for intellectuals, artists, and other cultural operators, but also for everyday citizens, both Italian and foreign, who want to initiate or maintain a relationship with our country”.⁶⁶ In fact, the policy of Institute stresses the importance of developing intercultural cooperation and dialogue between Italian people and the citizens of the country of location. “The first innovation is the official and unequivocal commitment of the Italian State to promote and propagate the Italian language and culture abroad in order to achieve reciprocal knowledge and cooperation with other nations.”⁶⁷

b) The Ministry of Cultural Goods and Activities

Issues of intercultural cooperation and international manifestations can also be found in the schedule of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Goods and Activities, abbreviated as MIBAC. In a similar manner to the Cultural Institute, the MIBAC organizes several kinds of cultural events throughout the year, and takes part in organizing the Italian version of international projects. Taking part in these international projects, the Italian State also enhances its image as a cooperating nation, which shows solidarity with its European neighbors, by helping the population learn about national and international cultural heritage.

One of these events is the *European Days of Patrimony*, which takes place every year in the last week-end of September. According to the official website of the Ministry, this festivity started in 1991, when all European Ministers of Culture decided to extend this French-born event in the whole Union. Italy has been taking part in this project since 1995. During these two days, monuments, historical buildings, museums and other cultural areas are open and public access is free of charge. The events staged in Italy, from 1995 to the present day, have included art exhibitions, science and history events, cultural conferences, concerts, film projections, or culinary manifestations. The *European Days of Patrimony* “are meant to value the cultural and landscape patrimony, to develop within European citizens the knowledge of their common roots,

⁶⁶ www.esteri.it

⁶⁷ M. Totaro-Genevois, *Cultural and Linguistic Policy: the Italian Experience*, Multilingual Matters, 2005, p. 61.

and are an opportunity to share the extraordinary richness of the continent where we live and to find out what are the foundations of history and identity: an occasion for development and creativity, with the certainty that any experience generates passion and respect for what is known.”⁶⁸

Another similar event, which is also happening throughout Europe, is taking place in September, and is entitled *The White Night*. The event has a quite recent history, as it only started in 2006, and allows visitors to spend an entire night in all Roman cultural places. People have free access to museums and other cultural sights, where they can assist at musical, theatrical and entertainment shows.

c) The Italian UNESCO Commission

As we should expect, initiatives of intercultural cooperation are also carried out by the Italian UNESCO Commission, which has been active in Rome since 1950. Again, the manifestations organized here are of international level, common to numerous countries worldwide, and emphasize Italy’s involvement in international cultural practices.

For instance, on the 21st of February, Italy is celebrating the *Mother Tongue Day*, which has been worldwide recognized for eight years. The event, organized by the Italian UNESCO Commission, in partnership with the Italo-American Institute, is meant to gather important personalities of the academic and institutional field, in order to take part in a conference on linguistic diversity, concentrating upon “the value of the so-called ‘minority languages’ or those languages in danger of extinction”⁶⁹. Last year, the event started the “Adopt a Language!” project, which encouraged public and private language schools and universities to teach one or more ‘endangered’ languages.

Another UNESCO worldwide event, in which Italy brings its participation, is the UNESCO Youth Programme. “UNESCO’s objective is to help empower young people, reaching out to them, responding to their expectations and ideas, fostering useful and long-lasting skills.”⁷⁰ The initiative encourages young people, aged between 15 and 25 to collaborate with UNESCO and its partner institutions, by setting up projects and

⁶⁸ www.beniculturali.it

⁶⁹ <http://italy.comnat.unesco.org>

⁷⁰ <http://portal.unesco.org>

programmes that express their views on education, sciences, culture and communication. The Italian UNESCO Youth Programme is carried out together with the Florence UNESCO Centre, and is called Youth International Observatory. The aim of this scheme is to provide intercultural interaction and education between different cultures of the Mediterranean area, through programmes and projects in domains like culture, education, science, social sciences and humanities, communication and informatics.

3. Italy and European Capitals of Culture

a) What it means to host a European Capital of Culture

An example of good intercultural practice taking place throughout the European Union is the organization of different European Capitals of Culture each year, in different cities from every EU member states. The idea behind this large-scale initiative is to create a sense of what it means to be culturally European, and to gather representative cultural manifestations from across the Union in one or two cities, deemed ‘European Capitals of Culture’. With the mission to “bring European citizens together”⁷¹, this intercultural scheme, which, in its early years used to be called ‘European Cities of Culture’, was launched in 1985, after the idea of former Greek Minister of Cultural Affairs, Melina Mercouri.

According to the May 1999 Decision 1419/1999 of the European Parliament and Council, the main purpose of the Capitals of Culture programme is “to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and features they share, as well as to promote greater mutual acquaintance between European citizens”⁷². The selection scheme functions on a rotation basis, as every member state, in turn, will get the chance to host a European Capital of Culture. In general, the activities involved in the scheme are roughly the same everywhere. There is the organization of artistic events, from all European countries, in all domains: music, dance, theatre, cinema, and more. Interculturality and

⁷¹ M. Demossier, *The European Puzzle: the Political Structuring of Cultural Identities at a Time of Transition*, Berghahn Books, 2007, p. 197.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

multilingualism are a top priority, as the event must be accessible for all European citizens willing to participate.

And, what is also of maximum importance is that all cities that are chosen to play the part of the host in this initiative have either an outstanding cultural heritage, either a history of multiculturalism, or both. This is why the designated European Capital of Culture must emphasize and promote the value of the city's particular role in the history and the creation of culture, and also of the emblematic historical and cultural figures and events. Hence, we can talk about a summary of the 'European culture' brand, restricted within certain limits of space and time, but we must not forget that each Capital of Culture has something special to offer in terms of culture, and that these unique assets must be exploited to the full. "The colours and shapes of each city, its excitements and *longueurs*, impart a distinctive flavour to each one, a characteristic style of art and science, architecture, history, cuisine and the social relations of a public culture of civic pride."⁷³

Italy was involved in hosting European Capitals of Culture three times. The first occasion was 1986, when Florence became the second city to host the famous multicultural manifestation (the first one being Athens in 1985). The second European Capital of Culture on the Italian territory was Bologna, which, in 2000, shared the title and the responsibility with a several other European cities: Reykjavik (Iceland), Bergen (Norway), Helsinki (Finland), Brussels (Belgium), Prague (Czech Republic), Krakow (Poland), Santiago de Compostela (Spain), and Avignon (France). In the end, Genova was the 2004 European Capital of Culture, together with the French town of Lille.

The case of Florence was special for obvious reasons. Since the Early Middle Ages, namely the 4th century, and until the moment of the Risorgimento, in 1861, the region has been interacting with foreign domination from many directions, and the influences coming from those cultures were unavoidable throughout the ages. It is enough to mention Byzantine or Longobard domination, but also Tuscany's inclusion in

⁷³ M. Miles, N. Kirkham, *Cultures and Settlements*, Intellect Books, 2003, p. 32.

the Habsburg Empire or, in the end, the French rule or that of the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont. A more recent foreign domination happened during the Second World War, when the city has been under the occupation of German troops for an entire year (1943-1944).

From the cultural point of view, Florence is known to be the birthplace of the Renaissance cultural movement. Florence is universally associated with an outstandingly rich art heritage, in all its forms. Culture is spread throughout the city, acting like true testimonials of the country's architecture, painting, sculpture, history and science, "this same moving testimony to the part which Florence had played (...) as the ideal, the natural home and the focus of all that was most dynamic in new culture. (...) Florence was to become the chosen home of a civilization soon to spread throughout the Western world, her archives and monuments were to constitute the very sources of 'rebirth', and she was in herself to offer a complete picture of a whole age of human history."⁷⁴ The Historical Centre of Florence was recognized by UNESCO as Patrimony of Humanity in 1982. The Arno river crosses the city, and is overlooked by cultural landmarks such as the Piazza della Signoria, the Palazzo Vecchio, Palazzo Pitti, the Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral, or the Galleria degli Uffizi, one of the world's most famous art museums. Of the bridges crossing Arno, there is the Ponte Vecchio, the only bridge remaining intact after the Second World War in the whole of Florence. Florence is also the hometown of numerous personalities of the Italian culture, such as painters Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo, or writers Dante Aligheri, Giovanni Boccaccio, Francesco Petrarca and Niccolo Machiavelli.

The second Italian European Capital of Culture is Bologna, which is also the home of a rich cultural heritage. Bologna is worldwide famous for its university and its education system. In fact, the University of Bologna is the oldest in Europe, as it was founded in 1088, and, even since its early days, it has been a multicultural study environment. The University of Bologna used to be "an important centre of European intellectual life during the Middle Ages, attracting scholars from throughout

⁷⁴ F. Adorno, *The World of Renaissance Florence*, Giunti, 1999, pp. 7-8.

Christendom. (...) The location of the early University was thus spread throughout the city, with various colleges being founded to support students of a specific nationality.”⁷⁵ The University of Bologna still has one of the finest reputations in Europe, and it hosts one of the largest communities of students, including Erasmus, Socrates and international students.

Apart from its value as a university town, Bologna is also known for its well-preserved Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque architecture and monuments. But, what is also special about Bologna is the fact that it became a UNESCO City of Music in May 2006. "As the first Italian city to be appointed to the Network, Bologna has demonstrated a rich musical tradition that is continuing to evolve as a vibrant factor of contemporary life and creation. It has also shown a strong commitment to promoting music as an important vehicle for inclusion in the fight against racism and in an effort to encourage economic and social development. Fostering a wide range of genres from classical to electronic, jazz, folk and opera, Bologna offers its citizens a musical vitality that deeply infiltrates the city's professional, academic, social and cultural facets."⁷⁶ Amongst the cultural figures born in Bologna, we must remind writers Giosue Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli, Umberto Eco, and composer Gioacchino Rossini.

By taking this quick look at what makes a town tick when it comes to becoming an European Capital of Culture, we discovered that both Italian towns of Florence and Bologna have a special cultural (and intercultural) history and structure. However, we shall analyze in detail the most recent European Capital of Culture in the peninsula, which is Genova 2004, by talking about the town's cultural history, and also about what being a European Capital of Culture meant to Genova.

b) Case study: Genova 2004

Genova, just like Florence, has been a town of intercultural interaction even since its days of origin. Because of its position by the sea, during Antique times, the population

⁷⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org>

⁷⁶ Idem.

of Genova used to maintain commercial relationships with Phoenician and Greek populations, an exchange system which was later favoured by the Roman conquest. Later on, during the Middle Ages, Genova was under Byzantine and Longobard domination, and it was also subject to invasions on sea from the Norman fleet.

A period of economic and cultural expansion in the town of Genova started during the 16th century, when the alliance with the Spanish Empire opens the so-called “Golden Century of Genova, characterized by the extraordinary launch of the Genovese people towards financial investments in the whole of Europe, and by the construction, in the city, of beautiful villas and palaces”⁷⁷. Of course, it is needless to remind of the years of Austrian and French domination, which is common for the whole north of Italy. Besides, a historical event of great importance for the city consisted of its role as the departure point for Garibaldi’s “Expedition of the One Thousand” (*Spedizione dei Mille*), an event leading to the unification of the Italian territory.

Consequently, we can realize what makes Genova special. Its ‘harbour city’ status caused a permanent interaction with other populations, through the ages. Although these exchanges were more of an economic nature rather than cultural, it is almost impossible not to learn about ‘others’ from a cultural perspective as well, from the moment when communication takes place. “It is still in the harbour that when can read the history of the city: in the fact that it became the most important harbour in the Mediterranean and a place for commercial and industrial activity, but also an arrival and transit point for tourism, and, right in its restructured historical area (Porto Antico), touristic and cultural area by excellence which links the beautiful historical centre to the sea. The new economic and strategic design of the city sees a ‘harbour city’ Genova, which is touristic and cultural, and service-orientated.”⁷⁸ Therefore, there were plenty of criteria that made Genova deserve to host a year-long cultural marathon coming from the whole of Europe.

According to the statistics shown on the official website of the event, 72.3% of the Italian population and 88.5% of the Genovese believe that taking part in this event

⁷⁷ www.genova-2004.it

⁷⁸ Idem.

brought a positive change to the town. Among the aspects that changed for the best, the interviewed subjects mentioned the fact that Genova received a higher amount of attention from tourists worldwide, and that it stopped being perceived simply as an industrial town, as the public finally managed to see its cultural value. Furthermore, the local population is also grateful for the changes linked to the restoration of the city buildings and the infrastructure. However, there are still a small percentage of the Italian citizens (6.7%) who believe that the event might have benefited from more extensive publicity. On the whole, 66% of the respondents admit that participating in a multicultural event of such proportion was beneficial for the town of Genova, especially as far as its cultural image is concerned. “Genova finally showed off to the people and displayed the beauties it always had.”⁷⁹ In addition, I would add that Genova not only showed a cultural value not known before, but it also proved itself to be a culturally open space, which is able to give, as well as to receive. And this is what any city that is willing to host a European Capital of Culture should be able to demonstrate.

4. Conclusions

Any country in the modern world must also achieve intercultural communication from a national level, as a state, on a European or Global level, through the state organizations in charge of handling cultural matters. As far as Italy is concerned, we can say that it has done it well so far. Consequently, cultural and intercultural events are carried out on both national and international premises, through which an in-depth knowledge of what is most valuable in Italy’s national culture is provided. Moreover, participating in international cultural programmes shows the country’s capacity to cooperate, and its worth of being integrated in international structures. Finally, a famous intercultural programme, in which Italy took part three times, is the European Capital of Culture scheme, which exemplifies all the intercultural abilities mentioned before. Through these initiatives, Italy has shown a thorough knowledge of the country’s cultural values, and has places them strategically, in spaces that used to be multicultural at some

⁷⁹ www.genova-2004.it

point, to one degree or another. Last but not least, a European Capital of Culture is the top expression of cultural openness, and preparedness to display the national culture, but also to receive 'visiting' cultures from abroad.

VI. Good intercultural practices and the media: is there enough media coverage?

1. Cultural events as news values

As I said at some point in this paper, an everyday person would probably be surprised at Italy's actual openness towards *good* intercultural practices, especially as far as Romania is concerned. The reason? There is an old statement in the world of journalism, saying that 'good news is bad news', therefore the media has an obvious tendency to prefer reporting unfortunate events rather than somebody's good deeds. And that is happening, more or less, on a global scale.

It is not enough to conceive a large variety of efficient intercultural programmes and schemes, or to design good intercultural law projects, if these efforts are not perceived and understood by the large public. The process of intercultural communication is complete only when people understand its importance, and start looking at other cultures in a different way. This will only be achieved with the help of the media.

The point I am trying to make is that these intercultural practices we have talked about are not getting enough media coverage. Media coverage is particularly poor in the case of the media that target the masses, rather than the media for a connoisseur public. It is important for the media to encourage an anti-discriminative behavior, but also a desire for knowledge, because, the more we learn about another culture, the more we appreciate and respect it. This is why the most efficient method of getting the message across is by targeting the masses rather than a specific segment of the audience. If the target audience only comprises a small number of people, such as those directly involved in the intercultural communication process (minority groups, cultural professionals, etc.), there

is a fair chance that the message will not produce major changes in their behaviour, as they are already familiar with the story.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze what makes an event newsworthy, whether an event of cultural and intercultural practice fits in those criteria, and whether the Italian mass-media has paid enough attention to this kind of news.

Theoretically, there are several characteristics that an event must have in order to qualify as a news story. In his book, *Spinning into Control: News Values and Source Strategies*, Jerry Palmer cites a list of characteristics. It is true that “negativity” appears as well, but we will try to ignore it, and focus on values such as “Cultural proximity – It must be meaningful to the audience of the news organization in question” or “Consonance – The event must be in accordance with the framework of understanding which typifies the culture of the potential audience”⁸⁰. I would simplify these descriptions, by stating that a good news story must fulfill at least one of the following criteria: inform, serve the public interest, and produce a change in human behavior.

Moving on from general considerations to our particular situation, a cultural or intercultural event has the possibility to fulfill any of these three conditions. It can inform on a certain event taking place, serve the public interest in case a representative of the audience is involved or is willing to contribute to a certain intercultural manifestation, and it can change the audience’s attitude towards a certain culture, by underlining what is good about it. Apart from that, any event might be transposed into an accessible form and language, according to the targeted audience group.

Consequently, now we will see whether we can find any of the intercultural initiatives and manifestations mentioned throughout this paper presented in the Italian written media. We will analyze the publication’s target audience, and the language, tone and style of the news article.

⁸⁰ J. Palmer, *Spinning into Control: News Values and Source Strategies*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000, p. 26.

2. Cultural news and the Italian media

My assumptions proved to be right, after I researched several Italian publications online, both by publication as such and by news story. Intercultural events get a small amount of attention from the mass-media. The event that I decided to focus on is the Venice Carnival, to be more specific, the days dedicated to Romanian culture. I made this choice because it is a very famous event, still taking place in this very moment, and therefore we are more likely to find possible media coverage. The publications I had access to include the websites of some of the most famous Italian newspapers (*La Stampa*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, etc.), but also all-comprising websites, which contain news reports on several topics.

The Venice Carnival has got a considerable media coverage, containing in-detail descriptions of the events, the costumes, the celebrities that are going to take part, and the huge tourist influx. There have been several entries, at an average of one per day, in each publication. However, there was hardly anything on the Romanian festivity. The only small exceptions were *Corriere della Sera* and *Yahoo! Italia*, where they mentioned the presence of the festivity “Romania: in all senses, all senses in one celebration”, without any further information on the event and its agenda. Researching the general content of the cultural sections of the publications, 99% of the contents are focused on music, film, and celebrity news, and, in the majority of cases, the events presented tend to be all-Italian. In other words, news involving intercultural initiatives and events are virtually inexistent in the most read media publications, being preferred mainly by specialist media.

By contrast, more detailed information on the event could be found on the official website of the event or of the town of Venice, as well as travel sites from around the world. Plus, we must not forget the media for the Romanian Diaspora in Italy. For example, one of these publications is RomaniaItalia.NET, an online newspaper for the Romanian community living in Italy. Here, the amount of reports on the presence of Romanian artistic manifestations at the Venice Carnival is considerably more numerous.

There is a total of six entries on the event, of which five in Romanian and one in Italian. The Romanian part of the event gets a detailed description, including the names of the manifestations, the list of the guest artists, and testimonials from the organizers. There is an interview with the Artistic and Technical Manager of the Carnival, Calogero Lo Giudice, who explains the newly found intercultural side of the Carnival, offered by the special section dedicated to one specific country each year. He also explains that Romania was the chosen country for the inauguration of this scheme “in response to the disinformation campaign carried out by the media, which has taken place in Italy lately, when the emphasis was placed on the criminal news linked to Romanians.”⁸¹ As expected, the detailed information we were looking for was found in an online publication aimed specifically at Romanians living in Italy, or, at the most, at Italians who happen to be interested in Romanian culture.

Therefore, although the good intercultural practices exist in every sector and form, they only exist on the official level, and only a small amount of people are aware of them, and generally those who are directly involved, or who are particularly interested in this field.

It is true that culture is a domain considered to be of significance only for certain elites, but encouraging the majority of the population to learn about other cultures would do them no harm, and would put an end to prejudice and stereotyping. Perhaps it would be good for the Italian media to show the ‘intercultural’ side of the country, instead of over-emphasizing the worst and reducing the worthy causes to a minimum. The media has an astounding influencing power, and it would be a shame not to use it towards positive influence as well.

⁸¹ www.romaniaitalia.net

VI. Final conclusions

As we have seen, we are finding ourselves in front of a complex nation, with a complex history and a strong sense of cultural identity. Given their ancient history, we must not forget that Italians have inherited the strong belief in their culture from the Romans, but they should also have the power of assimilating other cultures in their genes.

However, many experts say that intercultural communication and multiculturalism could be considered a threat to national cultural identity. There is, definitely, a danger to see national traditions and cultural values being pushed aside, especially by younger generations. According to media and culture theorist Stuart Hall, the concept of cultural identity has become an issue of a maximum importance. “The re-emergence of questions of ethnicity, of nationalism – the obduracy, the dangers and the pleasures of the rediscovery of identity in the modern world, inside and outside of Europe – places the question of cultural identity at the very centre of the contemporary political agenda.”⁸²

In response to that, and taking into consideration Italy’s case, I would say that before intercultural communication is initiated, a nation must, first of all, **have a thorough knowledge of its own culture** and how to bring it to fruition. Historian Jacques Le Goff describes Italian national consciousness as being three-dimensional and contradictory, “firstly through the realization that they are ancient as a people, assuming an imaginary thread across the centuries linking the Roman Empire to the present Italian nation. Secondly, Italians perceive the splendor of the past as conflicting with their contemporary situation, considering it a comparative decadent phase. Thirdly they are aware of their immaturity as a nation state.”⁸³ To comment upon that, we could admit

⁸² Stuart Hall in D. Fleming, *Formations: a 21st Century Media Studies Textbook*, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 136.

⁸³ Jacques Le Goff in M. Totaro-Genevois, *Cultural and Linguistic Policy Abroad: the Italian Experience*, Multilingual Matters, 2005, p. 14.

Italy's immaturity as a nation state, but we must not forget that Italians have had a sense of who they were and what brought them all together centuries before they became a nation-state. Besides, throughout history, and up till the present day, they always put an emphasis on the glory of the past when it came to representing and promoting their culture and identity.

Cultural differences on the peninsula existed in plenty of forms, from history to traditions and social behavior, with obvious discrepancies between the economically stable and civilized north, and the poorer, less-educated south. However, the Italian population **concentrated on the similarities and the ideologies that brought them together, gathered them all into a single set of cultural values, and that generated the birth of a nation**, on the occasion of the Risorgimento. Having done that, the value of their culture and cultural identity became stronger, the creation of art and culture flourished. Consequently, the Italian nation became ready to promote itself, and to interact with other cultures as well. If a nation does not know and respect its national culture, it will not be able to promote it properly outside, and it will not be able to convince foreigners to respect and understand it either.

Virtually all nations are subject to intercultural interaction, either on their territory or outside of it. In many cases, this kind of situations can be found within a country's geographical borders. Some of these 'outside' cultures are reminiscences of the country's history, and take the form of national minorities. Some others, on the other hand, are new to the country, and are represented by immigrant communities.

Italy is no exception to this rule. Whether we are talking about the French, the German or any other minority, we can say that, throughout the ages, the Italians have learned to deal with them in an efficient way. The key lies not only in mere tolerance, but also in concrete evidence of acceptance and integration, such as the **request for bilingualism in the official environment and in education in the case of ethnic minorities**. The right for education in the native language of the minority group, existing both in Valle D'Aosta and South Tyrol, or the use of native languages and dialects for

drafting official documents, will always ensure a good relationship between minorities and the autochthonous population. A step ahead in this respect is also made by the permission to use formerly ‘unofficial’ dialects for official purposes, as it happened with the Franco-Provencal “patois” or the Sardinian dialect.

Plus, a crucial role has also been played, for many years now, by **encouraging all these different minorities to express themselves and their local cultures in their characteristic forms**. For example, an expression of minority cultural events could be considered the *Journee Internationale de la Francophonie* and the *Reunion of the Valdostan Musical Bands*, in Valle D’Aosta”, dedicated to the language and musical culture of the French population. Or, we could mention the minority folklore traditions still practiced every year in South Tyrol and Sardinia, or the Austrian architecture heritage still existing in Trieste. On the other hand, **interaction with the Italian culture, and not only, is also encouraged**. A good example is the *Festival International de la Paix*, a classical music event held in Valle D’Aosta on an international level, or the division of events organization in South Tyrol, where the German population is in charge of folklore manifestations, while the Italians handle everything that relates to high culture.

With the immigrants’ issue, things have been slightly more complicated, as it is a more recent problem in Italy, but the fact that the Italians are learning how to accommodate them is important. Just like in the cases of ethnic minorities, **immigrant communities are encouraged to express their national cultures**. For this purpose, the **setting up of various intercultural centers was sustained by relevant legislation, in the regions with the largest concentration of immigrants**, such as Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Lazio, or Piedmont. **Each intercultural institution has its own specific structure, handling a wide range of activities, from organizing cultural events to offering consultation for immigrants in different domains**. Surprisingly or not, Romania also receives a significant amount of attention on the cultural level, even in these troubled times. After all, it looks like the Italian population is aware that our culture is worth more attention than the scandalous news reports. It is enough to mention

manifestations such as the 2008 Venice Carnival, with its special section dedicated to Romanian art and culture, or the Romanian Cinema Days, which took place across several cinema theatres in Rome and Pisa.

When it comes to intercultural communication and practices on an international level, an emphasis is placed on the same two key requests: knowledge of the own national identity and availability for cooperation with the other nations and their cultures. Again, Italy has demonstrated good intercultural abilities. **Whether the issue is promoting their own culture abroad, or participating in international cultural programs, they knew their cultural assets well.** The proof lies in the fact that their culture is probably one of the best-known ones in the whole world, whether we are talking about history, art, cuisine, landscapes and tourist attractions, and, why not, even clichéd behavior patterns. The consequence is shown by their **multiple involvements in the European Capital of Culture scheme.** The cities they proposed through the years, namely Florence, Bologna and Genova have either a cultural heritage of great value, either have been points of encounter of various cultures in Italy's history.

Apart from that, the fact that Italy has taken, and still **takes part in numerous international cultural schemes, with the main support coming from state organizations, demonstrates that it is an open nation, willing to align itself with worldwide initiatives.** As we have seen, apart from the European Capitals of Culture, there have also been plenty of events organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, and the Italian UNESCO Commission, transposing, in most cases, international initiatives on a national level.

As a conclusion, moving on from the particular case to the general view, the notion of good intercultural practice can be summed up in a few lines, and in two key concepts. The first concept is **knowledge: knowledge of your own culture and its values, and knowledge of the culture of the 'other'**. The more you get to know a certain culture, even your own, the more you get to understand, respect, and appreciate it. The second important concept is **dialogue, which can take place on several levels, from**

individuals to nations. Dialogue is a two-way communication process, and when it comes to culture, you must be prepared to promote and express your own, but also to accept the culture of the 'other' wholeheartedly. These are the purposes of all the examples of intercultural practices described in this project: to develop intercultural knowledge and to exchange information.

Culture can do much more than the political, economic, or media sector ever will, when it comes to bringing people together and fight discrimination. As a matter of fact, most forms of intercultural conflict were caused by these other sectors of public life. Good intercultural practices do exist, in Italy and elsewhere, but it is a true shame that many people hardly ever heard about them. In this respect, perhaps the media should take action, change attitude and show the audience that there is nothing wrong in accepting the other and letting the other accept you. Even the fact that, in the shadow of recent events, many Romanians considered the Italians completely incapable of good intercultural practice, and that they considered my project almost impossible tells a lot. In everyday mass communication, the worst in every person, group or nation is the first to resurface, and is the one which gets the highest amount of attention. Unfortunately, this happens in most parts of the world, and this is a real threat to positive intercultural communication.

The biggest impediments in the way of efficient intercultural practice are precisely the refusal to know the truth about other cultures, leaving it up to prejudices and stereotyping, and the refusal to communicate. Intercultural communication is not a threat to anyone's identity, nor is it a competition between good and bad cultures and nations. It is just a method for all participating parties to evolve, by giving and receiving information on each one's culture. Perhaps it sounds idealistic, but every nation and culture should give it a try and make the most of it.

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