

**CULTURE AS A FACTOR  
PROMOTING THE  
POSITIVE IMAGE OF A  
COUNTRY: THE CASE OF  
ITALY****Introduction**

The pressure of globalization in the last few years has forced states to focus on a strategic image building. States have been building their image for centuries. A lot of factors such as historical events, personalities or culture influence the image building. However, never before has there been so much attention paid to image formation. One of the important tools for soft power building is a nation branding. It is a quite new method used in foreign policy which extends into many fields such as marketing, PR, public diplomacy, culture diplomacy and international relations. States struggle for the strong, credible and reliable brand which helps to reach a positive perception at international level and to gain a lot of benefits (inflow of foreign investment, arrival of foreign students, acquisition of new business partners etc).

Simon Anholt defines nation brand as being «the sum of people's perceptions of a country across six areas of national competence.» These areas include – tourism, exports, people, governance, culture and heritage, investment and immigration [1].

Nation branding draws heavily on the culture and imagery of the nation and uses it to gain an advantage. Culture and heritage are important aspects of measuring a nation – brand. Culture plays a fundamental role in the process of enriching a country's reputation, since differently from some geographical ones it is a unique feature of the community.

Culture is an essential element of Italy's position in the world. It represents a tangible and intangible heritage to draw upon to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Cultural promotion thus plays a key role in Italian foreign policy and constitutes one of the main instruments in Italy's national brand.

Italy succeeded in establishing a highly successful, dynamic export model, based on family-owned, regionally based enterprises such as Benetton. This success contributed to fostering Italy's cultural identity, basically by turning the country into a brand («Made in Italy»).

**Cultural Diplomacy as a component of soft power**

Italy is a country with a quite balanced international reputation: according to the Nation Brands Index it comes at the top for tourism

and culture. It is rich in heritage, monuments, and natural beauty; it is well known for its cuisine, the tastiness of its food and wines; it is the homeland of great personalities of the past and of stylish fashion, design and luxury companies; not to mention that it also owns some «sub-brands» with an extraordinary reputation like Venice, Florence and Rome.

Program Document of Italy's Ministry for Foreign Affairs «La nuova Farnesina per il Sistema Paese» (2011) developed the concept «Sistema Paese». This concept generally refers to the promotion of Italy as a country (its values, culture, history and economic interests) and is often used to indicate the promotion of economic, cultural and industrial interests of Italy abroad [2].

To this regard, particularly telling has been the creation of the General Directorate for the Country's Promotion (hereafter DGSP), which has replaced the former General Directorate for the Cultural Promotion and Cooperation.

Directorate General for the Country Promotion at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was established to involve and to channel all the possible financial, cultural and scientific resources into projects, aimed at the international promotion of the whole country; the innovative element in this case is connected to the fact that, for the first time, Italian Economy, Culture and Research will not be represented and promoted abroad as separate sectors, but rather as components of a single organic system (namely, the so called Sistema Italia). The rejection of a fragmented approach to the promotion of our Country in favor of a more «systemic» one would enable Italy to face the international competition and to better recover after the recent financial crisis.

Hundreds of actors spread all over the world compose the network of the DGSP: 261 lecturers, 293 scholars, 21 scientific attaché and 89 Italian cultural Institutes.

The Italian cultural Institutes represent then not just pivotal elements of Italian cultural diplomacy, but also crucial tools to promote the national culture abroad. The general aims of the Italian Cultural Institutes are enumerated within Italian Act 401/90. The Institutes main institutional objective is to promote the image of Italy and its culture, both classic and contemporary, through the following activities:

- Organizing events with a focus on art, music, cinema, literature, theatre, dance, fashion, design, photography and architecture;
- Offering courses in the Italian language and culture in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages;

- Promoting Italian scientific culture;
- Managing an efficient network of libraries;
- Establishing contacts between Italian and foreign cultural spheres;
- Facilitating an intercultural dialogue founded on democratic principles.

As a consequence of the envisaged new course the Italian Cultural Institutes, which are part of the area of competence of the DGSP, have been asked to promote the whole Sistema Italia, rather than focusing merely on national language and culture.

Cultural promotion and cooperation, though, was not to be limited to DGSP and Italian Cultural Institutes, but would also be the responsibilities of other actors, such as the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, Italian Government Tourist Board (ENIT), Ministry of Economic Development, Italian institute for foreign trade, and locally created Dante Alighieri Societies.

Cultural tourism is one of the main generators of Italy's image. Culture is Italy's natural resource, almost like oil for the Middle East. It is home to 44 UNESCO World Heritage sites, about 5,000 museums and 60,000 archeological sites, more than any other country in the world. Cultural tourism is the most developed product of Italian tourism, with amount of visitors of cultural sites increased over the past years despite the crisis.

In 2013, Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism adopted a National Strategic Plan titled «Italian Tourism 2020: Leadership, Jobs, South». According to conservative estimates, the implementation of the Plan should generate 500,000 new jobs and an increase of € 30 billion in the GDP by 2020 [3].

Italian Government Tourist Board (ENIT) plays a significant role in promoting Italy's cultural tourism image as well. ENIT with headquarter in Rome is represented by its 25 worldwide offices and is responsible for «the overseas promotion of tourism in Italy.» It pursues this objective by «adopting initiatives to raise awareness abroad of national and regional tourism resources, and in particular our country's natural, environmental, historical, cultural, and artistic values,» and to «lend assistance and offer technical services to Italian tourism enterprises, to enable them to penetrate foreign markets.» Therefore, given its responsibility for a general public interest, ENIT's central core consists of promotion and direct communication with possible users/consumers residing in foreign countries, and providing service to Italian tourism enterprises.

The Società Dante Alighieri with its headquarters in Rome, with 3,300 branch offices worldwide plays

an important role in spreading the Italian language and disseminating Italian culture worldwide. Its chief purpose is to promote the knowledge of Italian culture among all foreigners or Italian immigrants and their descendants wishing to keep up their former links with Italy. Through its committees, the Società Dante Alighieri establishes schools and libraries, runs language courses, promotes the diffusion of Italian books and publications, and organizes lectures, cultural meetings and events and awards fellowships.

### The problems with funding restrictions on culture

Italy has more UNESCO World Heritage sites than any other country in the world, yet its culture budget has been cut almost in half over the last years. France spends 1 per cent of its GDP on culture compared with just 0.2 per cent in Italy. Spending on culture in Italy totals 1.2% of GDP compared with a European average of 2.2%. [4] At the same time the creative and cultural industries (CCI) in Italy produced 78,6 billion euros and they have a multiplier effect in other economic sectors, such as tourism, of 1,7. This means that every euro spent in culture produce 1,7 euros in the market. This implies that the CCI contribute to the 15.6% of Italian GDP corresponding to 227 billion euros. [5]

Under former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the government's cultural budget shrank by a third within three years. His finance minister Giulio Tremonti defended the cuts by saying: «I don't know what all the fuss is about. After all, you can't eat culture». It is claimed he dumbed down Italy and diverted state funds to television rather than art and opera.

Italian cultural diplomacy was boosted in 2013, when former Foreign Minister Emma Bonino stated that it should help revitalise the Italian economy and

a heritage which is the world's richest but which has all too often been neglected and at times defaced.

The government of centre-left Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is certainly not relying on the cheque book to put things right. Instead, his Culture Minister Dario Franceschini is involved in a giant fund-raising campaign, in which he hopes to attract private donations from companies and wealthy individuals. [6]

The success of Milan World Expo influenced on reinvigorating of Italian cultural diplomacy. The World Expo is many things—forums, events, and pavilions, with a widening array of players—from cities and transnational organizations to businesses and non-government entities, but nations and their pavilions remain its central feature and the participation of the general public a core mission. It is therefore a platform for public diplomacy, here broadly defined as a nation's engagement with foreign publics for better communication and desired relationship. The event facilitates cultural transfer and transformation, as countries bring their cultures into direct contact with foreign publics. This aspect of the Expo is particularly poignant in light of the expanding, increasingly mobile global middle class.

Milan Expo was an innovative project organized by the City of Milan and the Italian Chamber of Commerce as an economic driver for the country's creativity, natural attractions, and the Italians' innovative spirit. It allowed building on and showcasing the rich cultural, educational, and entertainment industries in Italy.

Yet Italian cultural diplomacy needs many improvements in some points. A simple SWOT analysis (Table 1) was conducted to understand current Italian cultural diplomacy condition, so Italy can transform its weaknesses into strengths, and threats into opportunities.

**Table 1** – SWOT-analysis of Italy's cultural diplomacy

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Country has a very rich cultural heritage</li> <li>– A global leader in the creative industries (fashion, design, architecture, engineering, hi-tech)</li> <li>– Attractive Tourist Destination. The growth of cultural and heritage tourism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Insufficient assessment of country's cultural potential</li> <li>– Low level of government funding for culture</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
Milan Expo has achieved great success and greatly improves Italy's soft power	Absence of strategic approach to cultural diplomacy and soft power on government level

## Conclusion

To sum up, the main feature of Italian model of cultural diplomacy is the interconnection of culture, politics and economy. Cultural diplomacy alongside diplomacy for growth, to help revitalize the Italian economy and heritage. The analysis revealed the main forms and mechanisms of Italy's soft power policy as well as its priorities and organizational set-up. Italy prioritizes national language and cul-

ture promotion. Both state and non-state actors are involved in Italy's efforts in these areas. Italian Directorate General for the Country Promotion coordinate the activities of various actors.

There are two main problems impeding capacity of Italian «soft power»: absence of unified strategy, combining the various initiatives of ministries and departments at central and regional levels, and funding restrictions due to the financial crisis in the country.

## References

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