



PRESS RELEASE

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The sociologist De Rita on the relationship between land and community

THE 'SUPER-COUNTRY' IS MORE POWERFUL THAN GLOBALISATION

Italy has a form of territorial capitalism and in contrast to many other countries, this has allowed it to keep afloat in difficult times. For more than fifty years, narrow identities and the relationship with the local area have represented our guarantee of success

"As Giuliano Amato always said to me affably, I do not have the culture of the Eiffel Tower. I see things from the ground". The sociologist Giuseppe De Rita, member of the Italy-USA Foundation and one of the founder fathers of CENSIS, opened the session at Palazzo Geremia with these words. The presentation was followed by a packed hall, the subject being extremely topical.

At a time of crisis such as the one we are experiencing, the need to find an identity in a community is strong and not only among the 'friends of the squirrel'. Many of the speakers coming to Trento for the fourth Festival of Economics have also discussed the right way to do so.

De Rita has no doubts: the lifeline and key to success in avoiding becoming a "forgotten player" lie in the relationship established with the local area. "Let us take as an example the recession that is keeping many people awake at night. What have governments done? They have only sewed on a few patches, demonstrating their inadequacy. This is because they are functional rather than sovereign states", explained De Rita. "On the contrary the crisis has been dealt with pretty well within dozens of contexts (from families to associations and municipalities).

"Let's be clear about it", continued the sociologist, "a situation that had all the ingredients for creating more damage than a giant meteorite has instead been redistributed over millions of workers and hundreds of small businesses, but above all it has dispersed over different geographical areas. Certainly each of them has experienced its own crisis, but as the negative effects have been dispersed, as stated, a crater has not formed".

De Rita asked himself whether all this is a backwards step in terms of collective identity and in what direction the Italian identity is heading. To answer it is necessary to establish a premise: identity comes from a relationship. Indeed an individual does not feel at ease in an pre-established identity. Having said this one can happily affirm that the Italian identity is

turning inwards. There is therefore a trend away from a public towards a more intimate relationship.

"The average Italian", explained the former Chairman of CNEL "has never had a relationship with the world. Or rather there was a partial relationship but it was empty, made up of newspaper headlines and the jungle telegraph. A relationship through the media is not a relationship. It is merely a flow of information. A mediated reality such as television or the radio for example, cannot define itself as such".

So at a time of economic difficulty, reality becomes short rather than long range. The relationship becomes one of proximity, a strong bond developing with the land.

The subject has been little studied by academics, affirmed De Rita provocatively, despite the fact that the Italians have a close link to the land and have built on this relationship.

Although it is hard to admit, it must be said: as a people we are anything but adventurers.

Emerging from a negative period, agriculture is thus back in fashion. We are seeing production take on increasing value; young people are gradually starting to cultivate the land once again and the flow of tourism that is being generated around farm guesthouses and small villages is an excellent thing. In other words, we are seeing a return to the past and not simply a fashion. "To say it in De Rita style", we are returning to an anthropological relationship which in its turn becomes a new identity.

Land is becoming a metaphor for a culture which has nothing left of the old agricultural culture in more advanced contexts around the country. In short modernism comes from the relationship to the land and its constraints. We are returning to the wisdom of limitations and a mechanism of psychological challenge.

"The average Italian", repeated Giuseppe De Rita "needs an identity that cannot be the result of a flow of opinions. The underlying basis in our country is the countryside and the way of life in small towns".

One doubt comes spontaneously: are we not trusting too much in the value of the area and at the same time moving away from the approach of global finance, a global exchange of ideas and acceptance of foreigners?

"There is a risk", responded the Professor, "but if our identity continues to be governed by the media and middle class culture, reality becomes a mush. On the contrary the land creates not only an identity but also a community of people. In villages there are hardly ever problems of integration. Difficulties in accepting others are more evident in urban suburbs, where the relationship with the community is lacking. We should recall: proximity is never exclusive".

In short, the relationship with the local area reinforces new developments with tenacity and has created a typically Italian culture, based on the value of the family and capitalisation, elements which have once again shown themselves to be successful, underlining the validity of the 'super-country'.