

## The Agora of the Youth

Silvana Mangione (October 20, 2008)



The youngest "Italian piazza" ever: waiting for the First Convention of "Young Italians in the World" (Rome, December 2008)

Since time began, a common meeting space has been conducive to reunions and discussions among people. Originally it was a gathering around the fire with music and talk, tales and learning, the calming of fears, and the birth of myths that would grow into wisdom. The young listened to the old who told stories that would be expanded, enriched, reinvented over time, eventually becoming traditions and knowledge that would never be forgotten. Later, the meeting space would become an area between buildings, an agorà—a square—where



people would go and discuss matters of the polis—of the city. The young would go to the square to listen, to ask questions, to learn, to grow, and to prepare for future leadership roles. Today, we have a virtual square, full of possibilities, as fast as the user can make it, and as captivating as the participants, the chat, the blog, the dialogue, the reading and the telling can be. A common language, however, is necessary; and it would be even more desirable if it were a beautiful one, a language culture.

One such language is Italian, the common language of millions of young people throughout the world who have not yet come together in their own square. They will this year, which marks the First Convention of Young Italians in the World. For the first time, there will be a physical square, in Rome, where hundreds of Italo-Italians, Italo-Foreigners, Foreign-Italians, and all sorts of hyphenated Italians from every nation will convene to walk into a glittering, enticing global forum. These young people already share two things—their ancestry and its language—and they will create many common venues. They have already built many virtual squares in preparation for the meeting. They have incredibly similar interests and passions. They have already met in every country under the auspices and through funding from CGIE—Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all’Estero—the General Council of Italians Residing Abroad, an international representative body created by the Italian Parliament and whose president is Italy’s Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Since 1995, CGIE realized that the future of the world’s Italian communities and the very future of the Italian language itself rested in the hands of the young. A revolution was called for — a revolution of open minds and open means of communication which centers on the Internet and the Italian language. CGIE has consistently been at their side, ready to solve problems but careful not to overstep. The nationwide “agoràs” have become universal, and even though it is a virtual space it is no less engaging and compelling. It is global and local at the same time: glocal, as human matters must become as we go forth into the future. Our objective is to create connections among different generations and experiences, to dissolve the barriers between the new “mobility” and the descendents of “traditional” Italian emigration—they both embody the same desire for a vibrant future, and there can only be a future for us and our language if they come together.

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