



Pathways to Portland & Bologna

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President's Message

November's Know Bo was held at Caffè Umbria (thanks Pasquale and Staff) and featured Foy Renfro from Global Incentive Group. His subject was a possible group trip to Bologna, sometime in 2013. The Portland Bologna Sister City Association would love to organize a tour either in 2013 or 2014 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of our "twinning" with Bologna. Foy mentioned some of the possible itineraries a trip like this might have and assessed different Bologna-related interests that those who attended the session might have. Thank you Foy for your work on this so far. Please stay tuned for further developments.

Please look for notices by email and mail for PBSCA's annual appeal for support. Our Association is entering its tenth year and we really appreciate your donations. We provide many services, our Youth Exchange Program, our free Know Bo series, numerous cultural and social events, information and connections in Bologna among them, that need your continued support. This month, when many non-profits are asking for your contributions, please consider making one to Portland Bologna Sister City Association. We are an all-volunteer organization that survives due to your generosity. We try to give back to the community and lay the groundwork for a viable and meaningful relationship with our beautiful partner in Italy. In order for us to maintain our status as a resource, we need to share in some of yours. Thank you sincerely, in advance.

Phillip Potestio, PBSCA President



Remains of a clock tower after the 2011 earthquake in Emilia Romagna.

My November Trip to Italy

By Mirella Rizzatti

Normally, I go to Italy at least four times a year to visit family and friends. This year I skipped one trip at the beginning of fall and instead went in November.

I spent around ten days with my family and friends, including trip time, and the weather was still nice and not too cold. I had a very nice time with my mother, my relatives, and my closest friends whom I was able to visit and spend time with. I was also able to relax during the day and watch TV.

The news about the economy and the political situation were not good at all and a lot of people I talked to complained about the high prices and outrageous taxes, along with rampant government corruption. I noticed, in fact, that many politicians were interviewed while making official trips or while on vacation and they did not look as stressed as the rest of the population. They were always talking about the "difficult

economy" and the need for the individuals "to make sacrifices" in order to help the country recover the economical stability it once enjoyed.

One day I was listening to the news and the name *esodati* hit my ears. I have been an Italian teacher since I was in college and started my career and I had not heard of this word. It reminded me of the Italian word *esodo* (exodus) but I could not connect the meaning with the words on TV. So I asked my sister-in-law what the word meant and I was completely stunned when she gave me the answer.

Italy is trying save money on its retirement system, consequently the government keeps pushing the retirement age higher and higher. It seems the current limit is 65 years for everyone, at least that's what I was told. Whereas before it was only 65 years for men and 60 years for women. They are considering raising the limit yet again, and one would expect the rule to be good for younger people who are still far away from retirement. Instead, the Italian government decided to make the rule become effective immediately and a lot of people find themselves caught between the old and the new regulations. They have to take retirement according to the old rules but the social security payment will not start until they reach the new age limits set by the government, so they find themselves without any income. That's the reason for the name *esodati* which basically means "stuck in limbo." Sadly, there is a lot of talk and no immediate solution for these people who must cope with a total lack of income at retirement age.



Some 40,000 hams drying in a cellar near Parma. The drying process takes a year. Photo by Benoit Decout.

Will This Man Change Italian Politics?

By Ray Verzasconi



Beppe Grillo, founder of the Movimento Cinque Stelle

When comedian Beppe Grillo launched the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement) in Bologna in 2007, he attracted over 80,000 people to the main piazza, plus thousands of others throughout Italy were linked via their cell phones. The major political parties ignored him. He was just a disheveled comedian looking for attention.

Even before Obama used computer nerds to help him win in 2008 and again in 2012, Grillo ran an end run around the stranglehold that the major political parties have on the media in Italy. Using Facebook, Twitter, and other social media on the internet, he got 80,000 to show up in Bologna in 2007 and another 80,000 to show up in his native Genoa in 2008.

The political parties still ignored him. Even *Newsweek* recently dismissed him as a neo-Fascist, grandstanding comedian whose movement couldn't win elections. Except last spring the Movimento had already won the mayorship of Parma by capturing a stunning 60% of the vote. It won mayorships in two other towns as well. It shook up the establishment.

Italians have periodically been outraged by graft and corruption in government. Their response has always been stoic. They get angry and then they accept it as just what happens. And then they join the game. Like all of us, Italians complain about high taxes, but an estimated 20% of Italy's economy is a white market.

But this time, maybe it's different. Italy's poor and its middleclass are being asked to make real sacrifices, while the super-rich continue to avoid paying the taxes they really owe, and politicians continue to dip into the public till. Yes, as Mirella

reports above, the retirement age has been pushed higher. A sales tax Berlusconi's People's Party eliminated has been reinstated. And now, middleclass shopkeepers are being hit with a new tax collection law.

It's why an increasing number of Italians hate Merkel and the Germans even more, specifically for having forced the new tax collection law on the country on January 1. All purchases of €50 (about \$65.00) or more will have to be charged with a credit card. If you've been to Italy of late, you know it doesn't take much to run up a tap of €50. Lunch for two with a decent, but inexpensive bottle of wine!

I was sitting in the bar of a restaurant in Chiusi in September the day the new law was announced in the press. After reading essentially the same article in two different newspapers, I turned to a former student of mine at OSU who I was visiting. He's fluent in Italian, having lived and worked in the Castelli Romani for eight years. No, I hadn't misunderstood the articles. He then turned to the restaurant's owner for his opinion of the new law.

The owner started by damning Ms. Merkel and the Germans for foisting the law on Italy, and then damning the Italian technocrats for accepting it. Why, he and his wife would now have to go through the checkout line at the grocery store several times come January 1. What he really meant but didn't say was that, come January, he'd have to issue several bills for his best customers and trusted friends who are still willing to pay in cash.

Since at least the 1980s Italian law has been very clear. If I purchase anything, I must keep the receipt with me until I get home (or back to my hotel). If I leave an establishment having purchased something and am asked by the Guardia della Finanza to produce a receipt, and I don't have one, both the owner of the establishment and I will be fined. In more than 20 trips to Italy since the 1980s, I've never seen an agent of the Guardia standing outside any establishment asking anyone to produce a receipt. So small merchants avoid taxes on some income by taking cash from some of their trusted customers (and not issuing official invoices on their computer-cash registers) or by using the barter system. Both allow small and mid-size merchants to avoid paying taxes on some of their income. Why not? The super-rich do it all the time on a grand scale.

The Movimento Cinque Stelle got a really big boost at the end of September when a number of established politicians got caught with their hands in the taxpayer cookie jar. What was different this time was not the graft and corruption itself. No, the difference was that a majority of Italians were being

forced by austerity measures to tighten their belts, and a high percentage of 18 to 25 year olds simply could not find work. Protests of university students in September, over increased tuition and fees, and the lack of jobs, turned violent in Rome, Florence, and Milan (though not in Bologna).

Amidst the scandals that impacted mostly on his "People's Party," former PM Berlusconi (who was sentenced to a three-year prison term, reduced to one year ... no one I talked to believes he will ever serve a day) went off to Russia to help celebrate his friend Putin's birthday. The anti-Berlusconi media were having a field day, ridiculing his recent face lift. He's gone from being Italy's most popular PM since WW II to the favorite butt of comedians and cartoonists.

His friend and party member, the governor of Lazio, resigned. A deputy in Lazio and his girlfriend were arrested. Among other things, they had used taxpayer money to take a number of holidays at expensive resorts. He had also used taxpayer money (€1880) for a dinner for 80 people – a reasonable amount, except the restaurant simply would not hold more than 40 people. In last year's snow storm, the good gentleman spent €45,000 (\$59,000) of taxpayer money to buy himself a Jeep Cherokee so he could navigate the streets of Rome.

His lawyer was on a TV talk show the first week of October arguing that his client should not be charged with a crime because he had intended all along to reimburse the government. The lawyer was shouted down by numerous audience members.

That one deputy wasn't alone in being exposed in Lazio. Another spent €1550 of taxpayer money on lunch for himself. That' over \$2,000. I left Italy before that story played out, and just as a different scandal erupted in Liguria. Not before, however, Berlusconi's *Il Giornale* accused the left-wing parties in Bologna and Emilia-Romagna with even greater graft and corruption. I don't know if anything came of the accusations.

I don't want to judge Grillo and the Movimento Cinque Stelle, at least not yet. He is tapping into a great deal of pent-up hostility toward the established political parties. The movement, while not officially a political party (it has no officers and no office, and Grillo says he has no intention of ever running for office), is now considered the 2nd largest political party in Italy! Here's the movement's Italian language blog site:

<http://www.beppegrillo.it/movimento/> If you search, you can find websites for over 20 Italian cities, and you can find a website in English.

Regardless of Grillo's ideology, however, his genius was in seeing that the internet's social media

let him circumvent Italian laws that allow a few political parties and individuals to control radio, TV, and newspapers, and thus control what Italians read, hear, and see. In that sense, Italian politics may never be the same again.

The Movimento Cinque Stelle's use of the internet to challenge the establishment will be tested this spring. After denying this past September that he would not run for PM again, Berlusconi announced this week that he will seek a fourth term. He also proclaimed quite confidently that he would win. Of course, he controls most of Italy's media, meaning what most Italians see and hear and read.

Grillo intends to prove that there is a new sheriff in town. Whether or not the Movimento Cinque Stelle can deliver effective, efficient and, above all, clean government is for history to decide.



Trieste. A city few Italians know, which was the scene of post WW II conflict, Trieste is really one of Italy's most beautiful cities.

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La Boca, Buenos Aires.

La Boca was established by Italian immigrants, mostly fishermen, in the late 19th c. It was a lowerclass ghetto, but it was here that some musicologists believe that the Argentine tango was born, fusing elements of Italian, Spanish, and Native American song and dance. Today, most everyone in La Boca speaks Spanish, but the district houses some of the best tango bars in Buenos Aires and some of the best Italian restaurants. For over 50 years some of its cafés have also been favorite gathering places for Argentina's best known artists and writers.

While very few Italian-Argentines know their ancestral language anymore, they haven't forgotten some of the skills of their ancestors. Argentine ham, *jamón* and sometimes *jambon*, is every bit as tasty as *prosciutto di Parma* or *San Daniele*. And a ham and cheese sandwich which in Portland is likely to cost more than \$6.00, still goes for a dollar! The whole spectrum of Argentine salumeria is also every bit as good as anything I've found in Italy. The Gallegos and not the Italians, however, seem to have left their mark on Argentine cheese.

In 1910, an estimated 75% of Argentina's population had been born in Italy. Today the descendants of the original Italian immigrants speak Spanish, and many have intermarried with descendants of English, German, and Spanish immigrants, but their influence on the Spanish language and culture of Argentina (and neighboring Uruguay) are unmistakable.

Ray Verzasconi, editor