

LUISS



Department of Political Science
Master's degree in International Relations

Chair of Comparative History of Political Systems

**From Reconstruction to Recognition: The Origins
of Italy's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy**

Prof. Rosario Forlenza

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Antonio Varsori

CO-SUPERVISOR

Ruggiero Pellegrino

CANDIDATE
ID No. 655192

Academic Year 2024/2025

Table of contents

<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Chapter 1</i>	7
<i>The new image of the Italian Republic</i>	7
<i>1.1 Italy's new international stance</i>	8
<i>1.2 The Italian economic miracle</i>	16
<i>1.3 Design and "Made in Italy"</i>	23
<i>Chapter 2</i>	31
<i>Italy's cultural diplomacy</i>	31
<i>2.1 The early stages of the Republic's cultural diplomacy</i>	31
<i>2.2 The Instruments of the Italian Cultural Diplomacy</i>	41
<i>2.3 Italy and UNESCO</i>	48
<i>Chapter 3</i>	55
<i>Cinema as soft power</i>	55
<i>3.1 Neorealism and post-war Italy</i>	55
<i>3.2 The new Italy of "La Dolce Vita"</i>	62
<i>3.3 DC and PCI, cinema politics</i>	68
<i>Conclusion</i>	75
<i>Bibliography</i>	79
<i>Abstract</i>	85

Introduction

When the Italian Republic emerged from the ashes of the Kingdom of Italy, the country had lost all of its ambitions of becoming a world superpower. It had to face a new reality of resized aspirations while finding an international role befitting its past heritage. In the Second Afterwar period, Italy, prioritized its foreign policy efforts in rebuilding its image in the international arena, using all the tools at its disposal for this objective. Nowadays the country heavily relies on its international image and allure, as trade and tourism play an increasingly important role in its economy. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the path towards the creation of the new Italian image and soft power, in the decade that goes from the end of the Second World War (1945) to the entrance of the country in the United Nations (1955). The main objective is to try to provide an interpretative key for the current international position of the Italian Republic by retracing the premises, reasons and objectives behind the birth and development of the Italian soft power. During the research for the writing of this thesis, primary sources, such as administrative documents, magazines, articles, video recordings of *Istituto Luce* and the Historical Diplomatic Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as secondary sources were used. The work behind this paper comprised of initial research on secondary sources and existing literature to build a framework which was a starting point for further analysis through documents and primary sources.

The image of a nation is always changing, as time progresses, reflecting the transformations of society, thus framing the evolution of the Italian image is not a simple endeavour. There are many factors to consider and to take into examination, for instance, intentional political actions to influence the perception of Italy from a foreign perspective. A state can orient policies for the shaping of its image, and that was one of the goals of the Republic. There are also unintentional factors, such as the measurable impact of economic progress, which reflected in a vastly improved footprint in world affairs. Moreover, the image of a country is difficult to measure, as it involves the perception of countless individuals that compose foreign societies. Ultimately, the image of a country is a vast object of study for the countless variables which can influence it and for this reason, this paper considers three main aspects of study, the first one will be about political and diplomatic action from the Italian government, the second on the impact of economic progress while the third will revolve around cultural influence. These threads will be developed in three chapters:

The first chapter focuses on the political and economic reconstruction of Italy, internally and externally, the first part will be comprised of an analysis centred on Italy's foreign relations, from the Paris Peace treaty to the final normalization of Italy's international role with the admission inside the United Nations. Retracing the steps taken by the government through the most important milestones

of Italy's foreign policy, such as the alignment with the West and the creation of the Atlantic Pact, and the first attempts of European integration. In determining Italy's foreign affairs decisions, the 1945 – 1955 decade proved to be of fundamental importance, as the country managed to be reintegrated in a sphere of alliances while little by little distancing itself from the fascist regime. In doing so, Italy entered many international organizations which represented new opportunity of action, especially for what concerned the Atlantic pact, Council of Europe, European Coal and Steel Community, UNESCO and lastly, the United Nations. Eventually, Italy could be considered a reliable ally in the Western bloc, following a multilateral approach with its partners, promoting the respect of international law. This was facilitated by the lack of colonies, having lost them after the War, upholding the principle of auto determination of peoples, leading to an overall improvement of the perception regarding the boot shaped country around the globe.

The second part of the chapter concerns the effects of the economic growth on the country, and how the production of goods and services affected its perception by foreign peoples. As the historical period taken into examination (1945-1955) touches for a few years the economic boom, an overall summary of the effects of the latter on the image of country is included in this thesis. From the early 1950s to the early 1960s, the Peninsula recorded impressive GDP growth which changed the landscape of the country and the Italian society. The increase in wealth was not equally distributed across the nation, being higher in the north than in the south, but it changed patterns of consumption, societal habits and it introduced a modern economy, while bringing the country nearer to other Western European nations. This period was called by historians “the Italian economic miracle” or “the economic boom”, and its effects were not only limited to internal growth of wealth, but its ripples reflected on the image of Italy and its people.

A part of the chapter will be centred on the effects produced by the economic progress. On one side, the country underwent deep internal transformations. Home appliances such as fridges and televisions had a clear impact on the everyday lives of Italian families, the latter was instrumental in the diffusion of the Italian language, especially in the rural areas where dialects and regional languages still prevailed. Vehicles became more affordable, and highways were built, allowing for a better connection of the country from north to south. Thanks to the reach of the above-mentioned machines, Italians developed new habits. The tv programs contributed to the creation of a shared collective imagery and the now more accessible means of transportation further unified the country. On the other side, the increased production led to an improvement of the Italian image internationally. Thanks to the economic progress, Italians became known more in the world thanks to their products exported globally which appealed to the wider public, and the image of the country enjoyed from the recognition of its brands. Italian designs were recognized for their quality, innovation and aesthetics,

projecting many brands in the international markets. Soon, the label “Made in Italy” grew and arose in popularity, with famous firms in the automotive sector such as Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati and Piaggio, with its famous *Vespa* which would become a symbol of the period, depicted in many movies staged in Italy. Italian design was not just restricted to one or few sectors, in fact, the production of designer goods was substantially varied, spanning from home appliances and furniture to vehicles and clothing. About clothing, the Peninsula established itself as one of the largest powerhouses in this sector, competing with France for designer or high-fashion clothing. Many of the brands enjoy today great fame along the masses, the likes of Gucci, Fendi, Prada and more. These companies-built Italy’s reputation as a producer of luxury goods.

The second chapter will be entirely dedicated to the analysis of the Italian cultural diplomacy in its effort of modernisation and action in major arenas. Indeed, the Italian government soon understood that the country had the potential of exerting a deep fascination on people thanks to its cultural legacy, and it adopted a diplomatic strategy which fostered the diffusion of Italian culture, using it as a mean of soft power capable of influencing others. Starting from 1945, the Italian Republic reorganized its cultural diplomacy establishing relationships with other countries in the world. The Italian cultural institutes abroad were reopened, and other important non-governmental institutes resumed their activity. Cultural diplomacy became an important tool for the improvement of the image and appreciation towards the country. It was the direct measure employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to narrate a different picture of Italy, with the aim of creating the premises of a new future foreign policy, which would move away from the fascist dictatorship’s dreadful memory. The new Italian cultural diplomacy would be set on dialogue and exchange, rather than pushing for the supremacy of Italian culture, as it occurred under Mussolini’s regime. Italy eventually found in cultural diplomacy a chance to claim a role in the international stage, as it lacked the prerequisites to affirm itself through economic or military means like the great powers, it looked for prestige in the recognition of its cultural values. It was evident that Italy possessed a valuable asset in its culture and history, one that contributed to the progress of Europe and the world, making the country influent, as during the Roman age, the Renaissance and for its role as the centre of Christianity. On these premises, a cultural diplomacy was relaunched, using cultural agreements, Italian schools and universities abroad, cultural institutes and more.

One of the most noteworthy non-profit organizations for the aid of Italian diplomacy is the *Società Dante Alighieri*, a non-state, autonomous association which was founded in 1889 by Giosuè Carducci with the aim of promoting the Italian language and culture abroad. A second part of this chapter will revolve around the reorganization and action of this non-profit institution which works similarly to the British Council and the Alliance Française. Lastly, the second chapter will focus on its role inside

the most prestigious entity for international cultural and scientific matters, UNESCO. In 1947 Italy was admitted inside the Organization and in 1950 the Italian National Commission for UNESCO was founded. UNESCO was especially important for the Italian effort as Italy's intense activity led to the country being the one with the highest number of world heritage sites, and one of the largest contributors to the budget.

The third chapter will explore the role of culture in shaping the country's international reputation in the first decade of the Second Afterwar, in particular, focusing on the role of cinema and its influences on the country's image and cultural diplomacy. Cinema is a form of art that effectively describes the broad transformation in the peninsula in the period selected for the analysis. In the first ten years of the Italian Republic, cinema captured the effort of the reconstruction through the eyes of the common people. The movies developed in those years revolutionised the field of the seventh art, winning the enthusiasm of many critics that named this new current of realist cinema as "neorealism". Since the première of Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* (27 September 1945), the style of neorealist movies was set. Despite the lukewarm domestic reception, the movie obtained an important international recognition, especially in France and in the United States. Other film directors such as De Sica, with *Sciuscià* and *Ladri di Biciclette* and Visconti, with *Ossessione*, arguably the first neorealist film, and *La Terra Trema*. Inside the umbrella of neorealism many films and directors were included over the years.

Cinema could be considered as the first, far-reaching, art form of the Italian after-war to be diffused internationally and appreciated by the broad audience. In the years following the end of the war, Italy emerged from the defeat as a new actor, but it still needed to gain the trust of the international community, and particularly that of the main victors of the war. Neorealist cinema with its representation of the dire life and moral conditions sustained by the Italian population was an important instrument for cultural diplomacy, with the objective of normalising the relationships between Italy and former enemies. Other than being a useful diplomatic tool, neorealist cinema was also an efficient medium to divulge awareness and knowledge about the true everyday life of the Italian people. This provoked contrasting opinions in the governing party *Democrazia Cristiana*, as some leading figures believed that these movies damaged Italy's image and reputation since they depicted the poverty and backwardness of the Italian society. Among those, Giulio Andreotti ideologically opposed the diffusion of neorealist movies abroad, stating that it would have been best «not to air your dirty laundry in public» (*I panni sporchi si lavano in casa*), meaning that neorealist movies were a disservice to Italy, pointing out that the country's problems had to be dealt with internally without being made public.

With the growth of GDP and improvement of general welfare, neorealism lost most of its source of inspiration. Another form of cinematography followed, with a series of movies depicting the new lifestyle of the economic boom. Among those, Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* is an interesting case for the effects produced by a single film on the image of an entire country. The movie became a symbol of the economic boom, the new Roman high life and the international jet set, it contributed building a myth around an Italian lifestyle full of glamour and relaxed living, one that fascinated many around the world.

Overall, having left behind its negative reputation derived from two decades of authoritarian and nationalist propaganda, heritage of fascism, the boot shaped country acquired a new international image. Nowadays, even though on one hand, Italy's reputation is tarnished by its frequent political instability, corruption scandals, organised criminality, public debt and general economic performance, on the other, an idealised image was created around the country, one of beauty and pleasure, desirable lifestyle for its fashion and sought-after products, historical art cities and movies. For the development of this status, government intervention and independent factors contributed greatly. In essence, the stereotypical image of the Italian can be understood as a product of reinterpretation of the American glamour which was introduced in Italy through cinema and magazines in the postwar period. The lifestyle of Hollywood stars and starlets created in the Italian consumer a desire to emulate a living standard that was very distant from the dramatic poverty which the majority of the population in Italy suffered by the end of the war. Thanks to the economic progress of the late 1950s, the Italian manufacturing industry could provide Italians goods and services that constituted an Italian reinterpretation of the American consumerist model, comprised of fashion and fast cars, designer goods or cosmetics and all the luxury products which are sold by Italy globally. Over the course of this paper, the main elements behind the creation of Italy's external image will be examined, analysing the political elements but also the economics and cultural ones related to the development of this phenomenon.

Chapter 1

The new image of the Italian Republic

Following the end of World War II, the Italian Republic was born on June 2, 1946. The consequences of the conflict were harsh and severe, and the newly created republic had to undergo profound internal changes in order to reorganize itself and identify a new economic model to relaunch the peninsula in the present and future. The Italian unsuccessful participation in the war had revealed its bluff as a world superpower, and now the country had to carve out an international role for its place as a medium sized power.¹

The fascist regime had left a scar on the image and reputation of Italy. After the war, the most widespread idea about the fascist rule in Italy was that of a dictatorship which had limited the rights and freedoms of its citizens and whose incompetent leaders had led an unprepared country to a thorough defeat. A colonial empire which had no respect for international law, having subjugated Ethiopia in 1935-36, the only African country at that time to be part of the League of Nations.

Mussolini's government had carried an intensive propaganda which was mostly directed to Mediterranean countries, for the presence of Italian settlement and colonies, and to counter the British presence in the near East. The idea of the regime was to assert its influence throughout the Mediterranean, as a reminiscence of the Roman *Mare Nostrum*.² To start anew from this legacy was not an easy task.

During the years between 1945 and 1955 Italy left behind the ruins and rubbles of the war and rehabilitated the image of the country step by step, first, for what concerns high politics, by joining the main western international alliances, and then through public diplomacy, and especially cultural diplomacy, promoting the Italian cultural heritage in the world. This type of diplomacy was not new to the Italian administrative apparatus, as a cultural diplomacy had been conducted from the liberal kingdom of Italy and then during the two decades of fascist rule. The element of novelty of the activity of the Italian republic was mainly its different approach from the past. The cultural diplomacy of the fascist regime had a nationalistic scope of asserting Italian cultural supremacy and was unilateral in its relationship with the receiving country, while the republic privileged a dialogue between countries, with a multilateral view of cultural exchanges.³

¹ A. VARSORI, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*. Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1998, p. 48.

² L. MEDICI, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*. CEDAM, Padova, 2009, p. 18.

³ *Ivi*, pp. 15-20.

Alongside the diplomatic initiative another element contributed strongly to the development and enhancement of the country's image, that is the birth of the myth of Made in Italy. Thanks to the aid of the Marshall plan together with the effort of reconstruction of the Italian industry which had built a perfect environment for the blossoming of the economy, leading to a large expansion in the decade spanning from 1953 to 1963. The growth of the GDP fostered a commercial boost and a surplus of the balance of trade of the country. The products sold by Italian companies were often perceived as of high quality, and they were especially esteemed for their design, for example in sectors such as automotive and fashion, further improving the image of Italy in the world.

In order to retrace the evolution and transformation of the Italian image through cultural diplomacy and development of soft power it's important to contextualize Italy's international stance in these transitional years, and the foreign policy which brought the country from being considered an enemy of war to a "peer" ally. Firstly, this chapter will reconstruct the main aspects of Italy's foreign policy related to the rehabilitation of the country in international politics. Secondly, it will focus on the economic miracle and how Italy became a commercial power. Finally, the following pages will discuss the influence exerted by the Italian rise in the field of industrial design, between 1953 to 1963, exploring the sectors which made it recognizable worldwide.

1.1 Italy's new international stance

Following the Allied invasion of Sicily, Italy surrendered as a defeated enemy. Only later on it obtained the status of cobelligerent from the Allies as a consequence of the armistices of Cassibile, the 3rd of September (announced publicly the 8th), and Malta, the 29th of the same month. After the end of the war, the Italian ministry of foreign affairs, focused for two years, 1945-'46, its efforts on the peace treaty, which was presented in 1946 by James F. Byrnes, Ernest Bevin, Georges Bidault and Vyacheslav M. Molotov, respectively the four foreign affairs ministers of the United States, United Kingdom, France and Soviet Union, and then signed the following year during the Paris peace Conference.⁴

The process which led to the final drafting of the document required many years and involved several international conferences. The starting point could be identified with the Potsdam Conference, which took place during July and August of 1945, as the meeting was the last of the war Conferences. The protagonists were Iosif Stalin, Harry S. Truman and Clement Attlee. At this stage, the discussions about Italy were very vague, as it was just the beginning of a very long diplomatic process, but one

⁴ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*. Bologna: Il Mulino. 2022. p. 17-73.

statement is worth noting: the Allies recognized that Italy's position was different from that of the other German allies such as Finland, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, mainly for being the first country to exit the war and for the aforementioned co-belligerency status, following the armistice. For the Allies, Italy had demonstrated some degree of cooperation which would differentiate the country from the rest. Nonetheless, it was agreed that a new conference would be necessary, and practical decisions were postponed to later meetings.⁵

The discussions on the Italian surrender resumed in the London foreign ministers conference in September '45. This Conference held discussions concerning Germany's complex position, but the Allies decided to prioritize and focus on the peace treaties with the other defeated countries, including Italy. Thereafter, the talks continued a few months later at the Moscow Conference in December. This event was particularly significant because it led to the final decision that the Italian peace treaty would be drafted by the four ministries of foreign affairs of the major Allies during Spring and Summer of 1946, in Paris. Throughout the discussions, the status of Italy changed again. The spheres of influence were already defined, and the Soviet Union was contrary to the special treatment reserved to Italy in contrast to countries which were under the umbrella of the Soviet bloc such as Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. After a series of talks, the result was that Italy would have to endure the same treatment of the other German allies. As previously agreed, the foreign affairs ministers met in Paris in the Spring of 1946, where they produced the final draft of the document of the Italian peace treaty. In the course of this conference, unlike the previous ones, the French took part to the effort, having a major involvement in the discussions concerning Italy. After this, the final draft of the treaty was ready, but it still lacked the formal approval from all of the states which had been at war with Italy, thus, during Summer of the same year, the twenty-one powers gathered in Paris to finally approve the peace treaties of the German allies. Countries which had a limited involvement in the conflict with Italy, such as Australia and Canada, took part to the discussions but did not have real influence on the negotiations, their role was to be mainly observers, then to confirm and accept the final treaty.⁶

When all the details were devised, the four major allies held a Conference to present the text of the peace treaty in New York in Autumn of 1946. In this occasion, the Italian foreign affairs ministry employed a large diplomatic effort with the aim of influencing the final outcome of the treaty with contacts, meetings and lobbying activity, having, despite this, little to no results, as the document remained largely as it had been drafted. Lastly, the peace treaty was signed the 10th of February 1947

⁵ E. DI NOLFO e M. SERRA, *La gabbia infranta. Gli Alleati e l'Italia dal 1943 al 1945*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010. p. 240-260.

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 250-270.

during the peace Conference in Paris and later on ratified by the Italian constituent assembly in July of the same year.⁷

The punitive content of the peace treaty was mainly focused on three domains: reparations of war, territorial losses and military limitations. Italy had to compensate the assaulted countries with 360 million dollars, with the majority of it going to Yugoslavia, Greece and USSR. The territorial losses regarded all of the colonies and territories obtained during the fascist period, with a postponed decision for what concerned the colonies achieved by the liberal kingdom of Italy, while the mainland Italian territory suffered the loss of the towns of Briga and Tenda to France, the Istrian peninsula and the dalmatian coast to Yugoslavia, with the territory of Trieste being split in two zones, A and B. The former under allied administration and the latter of the Yugoslavs. About the Italian armed forces, they suffered heavy limitations on their size and capabilities, with the navy split and seized by the victors, many of whom later returned the vessels to Italy. Only after the creation of NATO and the Korean war some of the military limitations were lifted.⁸

The signing of the treaty marked the conclusive step to the complex transformative period which started at the end of the war with the liberation of the country, the change of regime from monarchy to the Republic with the June 2nd referendum, and the adoption of a new constitution on January 1, 1948. From that point onwards, the Italian state could start to rebuild, little by little, its economy and international image. With the implementation of the treaty the Italian state broke away from its fascist past and could set a new foreign policy. In that regard, a fundamental turning point for the new Italian foreign policy would be the visit of the prime minister De Gasperi to the United States in January of 1947, strongly encouraged by the Italian ambassador at Washington, Alberto Tarchiani. The visit was highly successful, on one hand, for the aid which Italy received for reconstruction purposes, and on the other, for the establishment of a privileged relationship between De Gasperi and the American administration. In June of the same year, the US secretary of state Frank Marshall gave a famous speech at the Harvard University, addressing the pressing issue of the European economy, fearing that the diffuse destruction and poverty across Europe could reinforce the communist parties, supported by the USSR.⁹ Providing aid to the reconstruction of the European economy would realize to be more than just mutual aid between the two shores of the Atlantic, but one of the first steps of Truman's containment policy. For Italy, the Marshall Plan was the first stone of the political and economic reconstruction, allowing the peninsula to integrate its economy with that of the other European countries, including winners of the war such as France and the UK. Furthermore, the Americans urged

⁷ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*. p. 17-73.

⁸ M. SALVADORI L. *Storia d'Italia*. Torino: Einaudi. 2011 p. 329-330.

⁹ A. VARSORI, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*. p. 52.

the European countries, recipients of the aid, to cooperate and foster economic integration, leading to the creation in April of 1948 to the Organization for European Economic Co-operation which can be considered the first nucleus of European integration.¹⁰

In the meanwhile, the tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States were increasing, and the relationship of the two countries rapidly deteriorating. As the Cold War started to define itself, Italy became one of the centers of the tensions in Europe, with the line of the iron curtain spanning from Stettin in the Baltic Sea to the city of Trieste, which became one of the symbols of the conflict, as its divided territory neatly represented the ideological division between the Western bloc and the Soviet bloc. This rapidly changing international context reflected inside of Italy's domestic politics, dividing the population which was now polarized in two factions: the moderate forces of the center, led by the party "*Democrazia Cristiana*" and the socialist-communist coalition "*Fronte Democratico Popolare*". On the 1st of January of 1948 the new constitution entered into force and the first political elections of the new republic followed on the 18th of April of the same year. The result of the elections was decisive and clear: with a turnout at the polls around 92%, the Christian Democrats won a relative majority of the votes with an absolute majority of the seats in the parliament. The elections proved to be essential in defining the country's political orientation not just domestically, but also internationally. The Italian government, guided by the Christian Democrats, aligned itself with the Western bloc, entering one by one all of the main western alliances and international organizations.¹¹

While the Anglo-American armed forces left the European mainland to return back home, the Red Army remained in the territory of Eastern Europe which the Soviet Union had conquered while defeating the Axis powers. Stalin had gradually and steadily proceeded with the Sovietization of all of the countries on the eastern side of the iron curtain, rising preoccupations in the former allies who grew increasingly concerned about the danger of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. The British foreign affairs minister Bevin, then proposed a plan for the creation of a military alliance for all of the Western allies, trying to also involve the United States. At this stage, Washington was still reluctant to join military alliances in a time of formal peace, thus, with the drafting of the Brussels pact, the Western Union was created without the US. For what concerns Italy, it was not involved in the negotiations, and after an attempt at joining the Brussels pact the country was not admitted due to a British opposition. The British in fact feared that Italy's involvement could lead to a potential attempt by the boot shaped country to regain control of its former colonies, some of which were administered by the UK, such as part of Libya and Somalia. In the same year, after the Prague coup d'état by the communist forces in February 1948, the French and the British sought more guarantees

¹⁰ M. SALVADORI L. *Storia d'Italia*. p. 338-340.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 341.

of security from the United States. Following the Vandenberg resolution by the Congress in June 1948, which enabled the US to create or enter military alliances in times of peace, a negotiation with the aim of creating a defensive alliance started between the US, Canada, UK, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Ultimately, those negotiations brought to the creation of the Atlantic Pact, signed on the 4th of April 1949.¹²

In this circumstance, the diplomat and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Sforza, played a major role in steering the country towards the direction of the western alliance. On many occasions, Sforza advised De Gasperi to take a position alongside the western alliance, as appears from Sforza's diaries. The January 1, 1949, De Gasperi visited the foreign affairs minister: «De Gasperi da me a casa per decidere circa comunicazione agli S[tati] U[niti]». The prime minister seemed worried about the decision to take about Italy's adherence to the Atlantic Pact, and he sought Sforza's advice.¹³ Some of the strongest opposition came from the communist party and the socialist party, which were openly in contrast with the involvement of Italy in the Alliance, since in their views, it represented the most evident imperial instrument of the United States in opposition to the Soviet Union. But the Italian diplomat realized the importance of the Atlantic Pact as a route towards the normalization of the relationship with the United States and the other western European countries. The Alliance not only represented a solution for the security issues that were arising from the Soviet Union, but also the most reasonable launching pad for a project of European integration.

Thanks to De Gasperi and Sforza's fundamental effort, Italy was one of the twelve founding members of the Atlantic Pact, which, the following year, would create the military structure of the NATO. Italy would not be allowed to participate in the negotiation for the creation of the Atlantic Pact, accepting the final result. Despite this, NATO would grant for Italy the chance to play a more active role in the international scenario, and the transatlantic relationship would be set in stone from this moment onwards as one of the main pillars of the Italian foreign policy. Sforza understood the importance of this choice for Italy, as evident from his speeches, through which we learn about some of his final thoughts on the Alliance: «il Patto nord-atlantico costituirà uno dei più nobili e generosi avvenimenti della storia umana se tutti i suoi membri dimostreranno, entro il Patto e fuori del Patto, che la malinconica storia dell'Europa ha insegnato loro questa suprema lezione: che nessuna nazione

¹² O. A. WESTAD, *The Cold War: A World History*. London: Penguin Press, 2017. p. 71-98.

¹³ C. SFORZA e V. SFORZA. *Gli anni della scelta europea e atlantica dell'Italia (1° gennaio 1947 – 7 settembre 1952)*. Edited by Maria Grazia Melchionni. *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 89, 2022. p. 401-402. English translation: "De Gasperi visit at my house to decide about the communication to the United States".

al mondo può sentirsi sicura della sua prosperità e della sua pace se tutti i vicini non marciano con uguale fede verso mete comuni di prosperità e di sicurezza».¹⁴

While the negotiations for the Atlantic Pact were underway, almost at the same time another international organization was coming to life. Following the 1948 Hague Congress, where several projects of European integration were discussed, the Council of Europe was founded on May 5th in London, as an assembly comprised of representatives from the parliaments of the member states endowed with consultive power rather than legislative authority.¹⁵ The Council of Europe could be considered, together with the Organization for the European economic cooperation, as a first impetus of European integration.

Despite being an international organization which promoted democracy, cooperation and human rights, the Council of Europe was not a supranational organization, as it did not have binding power over the member states. A leap forward, in that sense, was the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, as an intergovernmental organization with some supranational characteristics. The origin of the ECSC goes back to the year 1950, when the French minister of foreign affairs, Robert Schuman, following an idea of Jean Monnet, publicly declared the French intent of developing an organization with the scope of sharing the coal and steel resources between countries to accelerate the reconstruction efforts. The organization was open to all European countries, but the German presence was fundamental in order to make use of its resources, abundant especially in the Ruhr area.¹⁶

From the beginning Italy was interested in the initiative. Sforza recognized that the ECSC would provide an opportunity for the Italian Republic to be one of the founders of an international organization on an equal partnership, representing a step forward towards the objective of overcoming its status as a defeated country. Despite being a political opportunity, serious doubts remained about the economic implication of opening the markets of the coal and steel industries. The private sector of the steel industry was worried about the potential harm that the German and French firms could do to the Italian markets, as the Franco-German steel was cheaper than the Italian one. Italy had scarce natural resources, but it had a growing steel industry which was in part owned by the government through the *Istituto di Ricostruzione Industriale* (IRI) and in part privately owned.¹⁷

¹⁴ Carlo Sforza, *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi: La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*. Rome: Atlante, 1952. p. 241-242. English translation: The North Atlantic Pact will represent one of the noblest and most generous events in human history if all its members demonstrate, within the Pact and beyond, that the sorrowful history of Europe has taught them this supreme lesson: that no nation in the world can feel secure in its prosperity and peace unless all its neighbours march with equal faith toward common goals of prosperity and security.

¹⁵ E. DI NOLFO, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*. Bari: Laterza. 2008. p. 738.

¹⁶ A. VARSORI, *La politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra*. Milano: Ambrosiana. 1993. p. 349

¹⁷ E. DI NOLFO, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*. Bari: Laterza. 2008. p. 780-781.

The Italian delegation to Paris, guided by Paolo Emilio Taviani, managed to conciliate the national economic interests with the political aspects during the negotiation, achieving a five years derogation to develop its steel industry at the level of the competition, and a bilateral agreement with the French government to access the Algerian steel resources. The Italian delegation also pursued free movement of workers across the member states, achieving this objective only partially, as it was limited to only skilled workers in the coal and steel sectors. In the political body of the organization, the High Authority, Italy secured one representative, Enzo Giaccherio, alongside two representatives each of France and Germany.¹⁸

Italy could enjoy many benefits from the participation in the ECSC, from an economic viewpoint, certainly, but also from the political one. The western European countries, committed to the reconstruction endeavour, little by little created interdependent economies which made cooperation indispensable. In this context, Italy's participation allowed the country to establish healthy relationships with the former enemies. Furthermore, as one of the founders of both NATO and ECSC, Italy could play a role, albeit marginal, as a partner of the western alliance.

In the meanwhile, outside of Europe, in June 1950 the Korean war broke out and the conflict with the Soviet Union raised a security problem that needed to be answered. The European Defense Community project was an attempt to tackle this issue, creating a strong community of European states to protect the old continent from the possibility of a Soviet invasion. For this reason, the Americans wanted to exploit the German military capabilities in their confrontation with the Eastern bloc by allowing a German rearmament albeit inside the framework of a European military alliance. After the end of the Korean War, the motivation towards this project decreased as the European countries were not ready to give up a portion of their sovereignty for the creation of a European army.¹⁹

For what concerns Italy, the country was now fully integrated into the Western bloc and involved in most of the major organizations and alliances of the so called "free world". The government of the country was solidly in the hands of the Christian democrats who favoured the political relationship with the United States and pushed for increasing cooperation and integration in Europe. Italy urged the creation of a political integration of European states with increased federalism in the wake of the European federalist thought, promoted by Altiero Spinelli in the "*Manifesto di Ventotene*", the Italian government recognized that Italy was still behind industrial powerhouses such as Germany and France, and that it could achieve a more important role in Europe by accelerating the political integration agenda. For this reason, during the negotiation of the project for the European Defence

¹⁸ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*. pp. 154-155.

¹⁹ O. A. WESTAD, *The Cold War: A World History*. pp. 99-120.

Community, De Gasperi proposed an article inside the draft of the EDC to guarantee the creation of a political community intended as a step towards a federal Europe. Ultimately, the EDC failed due to a lack of commitment from the UK and France, and with it, the political project.²⁰

Despite this, the old continent still needed the German participation in the defence effort, and it is for this purpose that the British proposed an enlargement of the 1948 Brussels treaty to recognize Germany's sovereignty, and with it, Bonn's future involvement inside of NATO. The negotiations started in London, September 1954, less than a month after the failure of the EDC. The works continued in Paris during October, leading to the modified Brussels treaty, which meant the entrance of Germany and Italy inside of the Western Union, which would be now called, Western European Union. The government of Rome was not fully satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations, while the participation in the Western European union was an important recognition, the political integration aspect which was one of the main objectives of De Gasperi's foreign policy failed together with the EDC project.²¹

The years 1954 and 1955 hold a special significance for Italian history as during this period some long lasting questions found a final solution. The professor and historian Antonio Varsori states about these two years: «Between the end of 1954 and 1955, several international issues were resolved, marking for Italy the end of the long post-war period, which had been characterized by the consequences of defeat and the constraints of the peace treaty».²² Indeed, these two years saw for Italy the conclusion of two important matters: the first one being the Trieste question, with the London Memorandum, the return of the A zone along with Trieste to the Italian administration. The solution found with the London Memorandum did not require from Italy a formal recognition of the Yugoslav authority over the B zone, and this matter would be solved later on with Yugoslavia with the Osimo treaty in 1975. The second important achievement was the admission of Italy to the United Nations Organization the 14th of December 1955. Italy had previously tried to join the organization, but in that instance, it faced the opposition of the Soviet Union. The opposition was at that time a retaliation for the western veto towards the candidatures of Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, but after the death of Stalin in 1953, Italy was now free to join the UN. On the one hand the admission in the UN held a symbolic value, as the government of Rome finally had completed the mending of its political role in the international arena. On the other, from a practical perspective, it meant that Italy was now free to pursue an independent foreign policy.²³

²⁰ E. DI NOLFO, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*. Bari: Laterza. 2008. pp. 780-781.

²¹ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*. Bologna: Il Mulino. 2022. p. 182-183.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

1.2 The Italian economic miracle

In ten years, the Italian political image was rehabilitated both domestically and internationally, and the economy could enjoy the benefits and reap the fruits of a good management of the country. In the early 1950s and 1960s the Italian economy enjoyed an outstanding level of growth, positioning Italy as one of the most industrialized countries in the world. This period would be remembered by historians as the “economic miracle” or the “economic boom”, for its unprecedented transformation of the peninsula’s productivity, leading to an average GDP growth rate of 7.5% in the years between 1955 and 1958 and 6.5% between 1958 and 1961.²⁴ As the production of goods and services grew at a fast rhythm, Italy became a large exporter, spreading the Made in Italy label all across the world. Italian products became more and more sought after, and the increased demand led to a positive increase of the balance of trade. Several brands which would later on become renowned for their quality were created in this period, other, older companies, would seize the opportunity and launch their products globally. This improvement of the general welfare of the population would reflect on the overall image of the Italians abroad, thanks to the several industries which contributed to the creation of an Italian excellence, mostly, appreciated for their innovative design, making some of the brands easily recognizable. A quotation from the Italian art critic Giulio Carlo Argan describes the nature of Italian design: «Per il designer, l’arte non è più rappresentazione di oggetti, ma è l’oggetto stesso, anzi la perfezione dell’oggetto».²⁵

The importance of the economic miracle for the purpose of this paper is quickly stated. This historical period ushers Italy into modernity, creating the premises for the contemporary image of the Italian peninsula, sowing the seeds of soft power through the nation branding of made in Italy. For this reason, the following are some historical notes on the country’s economic evolution during those years.

First, to better understand the proportion of the production growth it is necessary to describe the economic situation at the end of the war. In 1945, the production of the country was strongly reduced, the infrastructures in ruins and the population lived in extremely difficult conditions. The population could feed itself and consume an average of 4-5 kg. of bovine meat per year, compared to the 9 kg. of the years preceding the War. Only in the mid-1950s consumption returned to the still poor and

²⁴ V. CASTRONOVO, *L’Italia del miracolo economico*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005, pp. 20-30.

²⁵ I. BARBERINI, U. CASIRAGHI, F. ETNASI, V. MONTAGNA, V. SEBASTIANI, L. VISANI. *Il miracolo economico*. Roma: Datanews Editrice. 2003. p. 33. English translation: “for the designer, art is no longer the representation of objects but the object itself, indeed, the perfection of the object”.

autarchic prewar level, while after the boom consumption more than doubled, rising to 20 kg. in 1966.²⁶

The magnitude of the change between 1954 to 1964 can be expressed with a few indicative numbers provided by the historian Guido Crainz: In 1954, the net national income, calculated at constant prices, was 17,000 billion liras which rose to 30,000 billion liras by 1964, nearly doubling in a decade, while the per capita income increased from 350 000 liras to 571 000. In the same period of time, the investments in the manufacturing sector went up to 6,3% of the gross national income from an initial 4,5% and the industrial productivity rose up to 84%. The continuous transformations also brought changes in the general workforce structure, marking the transition of Italy from a predominantly agricultural economy to a manufacturing and service based one. In those ten years, the workers in the agricultural sector decreased from 40% of the total workforce to 25%, while the employees in the second sector increased, going from 32% to 40%. The same goes for those working in the third sector, going up from 28% to 35%.²⁷

Despite the remarkable positive trend of the economy, southern Italy remained far behind the rest of the country, emphasizing and exacerbating a divide between north and south which lasts until today. To improve their life conditions, masses of southern Italians, around 1,7 million, emigrated to center and northern Italy or abroad, providing a contribution to the improvement of the balance of payments of the country with their remittances.²⁸ Nonetheless, the government tried to stimulate the economy of southern Italy with several aimed policies, which, however, did not meet the expected results. The main lines of public intervention included subsidized credit for the companies of the targeted regions, with policies binding the publicly owned companies to locate at least 60% of the new productive facilities, with at least 40% of their total investment in the south. While these policies led to the opening of factories, southern Italy's economy did not receive the expected boost. In fact, these new centers did not integrate into a pre-existing social economic fabric in the territory, proving less effective than desired. Some of the most important facilities such as the steel factory of Taranto or the Anic of Gela, were called "cathedrals in the desert" as they were isolated factories amidst a territory lacking significant economic activity. The reasons for the inefficacy of the government policy reside in a mix of factors: the "cathedrals in the desert" were most of the times factories with a predominant use of capital as a factor of production rather than workforce, thus, not suited for a spread of industrialization in the territory as intended. The manufacturing activity was still for the

²⁶ G. CRAINZ. *Storia del miracolo italiano: culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta*. Roma: Donzelli Editore. 1998. p. 84.

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 83.

²⁸ M. SALVADORI L. *Storia d'Italia*. p. 373.

majority semi-artisanal, and it lacked private initiative in the field of small-medium enterprises, while the building sector and public procurement were often infiltrated by mafia and riddled with corruption.²⁹

While the economy enjoyed a positive momentum, the 1950s marked a period of internal political struggle. The results of the second general political elections in 1953, did not meet the expectations of the Christian Democrats who could not reach the requirements of the so called “*Legge truffa*”, an electoral law which would have given 380 seats out of 590 in the chamber of deputies for the party that would have reached 50% of the valid votes. The coalition led by the Christian Democrats obtained 49,2% of the votes, missing the target by a little margin. Then, De Gasperi formed a government which lasted for just 32 days, as it could not hold the majority of the parliament for the confidence vote. The subsequent governments were short lived and deprived of political strength, formed through coalitions with the republicans, the liberals and the social democrats. To find a solution to the situation, Christian democrat leaders Amintore Fanfani and Aldo Moro realized that an opening towards the left was necessary to find a new reformist impulse to the government coalitions. In the meanwhile, the socialists led by Pietro Nenni, had distanced himself and his party, from the Italian Communist Party and the Soviet Union after the repression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, becoming closer to the social democrats’ position. This separation from the intransigent communist forces made it possible for the Christian democrats to establish a collaboration with the socialists, with the approval of the US president John Fitzgerald Kennedy. In 1962 the Socialist Party was involved in the parliamentary majority of the government, and in 1963 a new government was created with the socialists contributing with five ministers. The centre-left coalition, however, found severe limitations in its government experience, as the conservative soul of the Christian democrats could not easily cohabit with the reformist ideal of the socialists.³⁰

Focusing now on the origins of the economic boom, several factors can be traced, some of which will be explored in this text without the intention of being exhaustive. First of all, the reconstruction efforts, concluded in 1954-55, accelerated with the aid of the Marshall Plan, provided the requirements for the growth in the years that followed. Italy was one of the main beneficiaries of the US aid, spending most of its funds on infrastructural development. Then, several industrial incentives and measures such as the agrarian reforms improved the productivity of the factors of production. Furthermore, the already mentioned emigration of the Italian workers moving from the south provided the workforce for the northern factories at a low cost. In fact, even though the tendency of the overall productivity in Italy was rising, the salaries were still under the average of the most

²⁹ V. CASTRONOVO, *L'Italia del miracolo economico*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005, p. 92-94.

³⁰ M. SALVADORI L. *Storia d'Italia*. pp. 375-390.

advanced European countries, making the Italian industry even more competitive and fostering exports.³¹ The adoption of advanced industrial technologies and production techniques such as assembly lines borrowed from the Ford factories in the US, strongly contributed to the expansion of the industry. Not to be overlooked is the international factor, as those years saw the rapid development of many countries, the likes of west Germany and Japan. This favourable international conjuncture, together with the birth in 1957 of the European Economic Community, facilitated trade between member states, leading to an increase in exports.

To provide a brief picture of some of the main starting events of the developing economy, it is noteworthy to mention the reorganization of Finsider by Oscar Sinigaglia³², who brought the Italian steel industry to rise from its ashes, lowering the prices of steel and offering raw materials to the mechanical industry.³³ Alongside the steel industry, three key developments, all occurring in 1953, can be considered influential: the founding of ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) by Enrico Mattei, who aimed to reorganize AGIP (Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli) to develop the Italian energy sector with bilateral agreements with African countries and by exploring domestic capabilities (in those years an oil field was found in the Po valley), bringing an initial 727 million of cubic metres of oil to 7 billion in 1961. Subsequently, the 300 billion liras investment by Fiat for the construction of the new Mirafiori factory, which will produce the first “*Seicento*” in 1955 and lastly, the adoption of the law for the development of industrial credit in southern Italy and islands, which would later on develop into the 1957 law on incentives and industrial objectives for the same area.³⁴

As the economy improved considerably, the Italian population also experienced a profound societal and cultural transformation. These years are marked by the influence of modern instruments, some of which radically changed the Italian way of life, among the others, the television and the diffusion of private means of transportation, such as “*Seicento*” Fiat cars and the “*Vespa*” Piaggio scooter, (the latter patented in 1946 but widely diffused in the early 1950s). Starting from 1954, the tv as a communication medium signed a decisive rupture with the past. With significant impact on several aspects of the Italians’ lives, the tv changed social habits, patterns of consumption, and the people’s perception of the world around them. The third of January of 1954, the first tv program was broadcasted by RAI (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*), with a lukewarm reception. The signal covered only a third of the territory of the country and the images were in black and white, RAI had the monopoly

³¹ M. SALVADORI L. *Storia d’Italia*. p. 372.

³² Oscar Sinigaglia (1877-1953) was an Italian engineer and entrepreneur, known for his role in developing the national steel industry. In the 1930s and 1940s, he promoted the modernization of Italian steel production, focusing on vertical integration and the use of domestic minerals. His expansion plan for the IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) was crucial for the growth of steel production in the post-war period, supporting the economic boom.

³³ M. BALCONI, *La siderurgia italiana (1945-1990)*. Bologna: Il Mulino. 1991. pp. 82-135.

³⁴ G. CRAINZ. *Storia del miracolo italiano: culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta*. p. 112-113.

of the broadcast, and the audience was yet limited. While the development of the Italian television was slow at first, in the years that followed it exploded, reaching millions of people.³⁵

With a population mostly living in rural areas and with low level of education, the tv helped in reducing the illiteracy across the peninsula. Spreading educational broadcasts, entertainment programs and newscast, it created awareness in the people by providing access to the knowledge of the world's current affairs. Furthermore, a unified, widely diffused communication medium, accelerated the creation of a national identity, bringing closer the Italians by overcoming the geographical barriers from north to south. In this context, entertainment programs contributed to create a common popular reference and a collective imagery. In particular, the educational television programs showed depictions of the country, the modernization of the industry, and the change in landscape of the cities. A program from 1958, "*Italia in cammino*" provides a complete picture of the television content in the years of the economic boom: the broadcast, curated by the information service of the presidency of the council of ministers, shows the transformations of Italy, constantly changing and never resting. «Difficile fare un ritratto del paesaggio italiano. Si tenta di fissare il suo volto, ed ecco che questo muta» (It is difficult to paint a portrait of the Italian landscape. One tries to capture its face, only to see it change).³⁶ With these words, the speaker begins the program, and a visual representation of the country's urban, economic, and cultural reality unfolds before the viewer. During the roughly twenty minutes of length of the program, different parts of Italy are shown, the countryside and the cities, the new factories and the new buildings, framing a picture of the country. It is noteworthy to mention the Cornigliano steel factory, and the industrial facilities of Ravenna, both demonstrating different aspects of the industrial advancements of the time, with production assembly lines, and images of the final products such as steel sheets and engines for car manufacturers. About the engine, a fascinating line perfectly describes the enthusiastic feeling towards these feats of technology: «non è disumano il motore, pur nella sua fredda apparenza, ha la bellezza composita dell'arte moderna». (The engine is not inhuman; despite its cold appearance, it possesses the composite beauty of modern art).³⁷ Even the cities underwent significant transformations, with new buildings developed in a new architectural style. In Milan the broadcast shows the construction of "*Metanopoli*" a completely new district which embodies the modernity of the economic capital of Italy. A vertical development changed the skyline of the city, as the skyscrapers appeared for the first

³⁵ I. BARBERINI, U. CASIRAGHI, F. ETNASI, V. MONTAGNA, V. SEBASTIANI, L. VISANI. *Il miracolo economico*. pp. 18-22.

³⁶ Giovanni Paolucci, production, *Italia in cammino*, cinematography by Fulvio Testi, musical score by Raffaele Gervasio, general organization by Cesare Taurelli (Istituto Luce, 1958), <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000051027/1/-2219.html>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

time. «Il centro urbano si estende, sorgono nuovi centri residenziali autonomi come Metanopoli, con i parchi i giardini e le attrezzature atte a facilitare la vita associativa dell'uomo di oggi». (The urban center expands, with new autonomous residential areas such as Metanopoli emerging, featuring parks, gardens, and facilities designed to facilitate the social life of today's man).³⁸

Other than the educational purpose, the television was also a for-profit business, and soon it became a tool to convey advertisements, exerting an influence on the behaviour of consumers. At the beginning, the Italian television relied solely on the revenue from its limited number of subscribers, but a few years after the first tv broadcast, commercial spots were introduced to promote new products and lifestyles, reflecting the aspirations of the middle class amidst the growing economy. Among the numerous commercials, the program called “Carosello” gained considerable results. With the first broadcast on February 3rd of 1957, Carosello was a program which made use of short interludes, comic and entertaining sketches that would capture the audience's attention and then direct it towards the presentation of the product by the commercial.³⁹ The first episode contained four advertisements which were subtly introduced during general informational content. The four sponsored labels were “Shell”, “L'Oreal”, “Singer sewing machines” and “Grandi Marche Associate”. The L'Oreal spot is particularly exemplary, as it involved an interview by tv presenter Mike Bongiorno with a successful female lawyer, associating the product, a hair styling line, with successful women.⁴⁰

Other than the television, another fundamental turning point which changed the landscape of the country is the proliferation of the means of transportation. On the subject, Guido Crainz reports the following numbers: the motorcycles were 1 million in 1955, 4 million in 1960, reaching 4.3 million in 1963. They were now surpassed by cars: one million in 1956, two million in 1960, and 5.5 million in 1965.⁴¹ While the railways and train system expanded slowly, the road system of the country improved considerably during the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1959 and 1964, the public investment regarded mostly the transportation sector, with the majority of the invested amount directed towards road and highway means of transportation. To provide an example, in 1959 only 36 billion was spent on railways, while 238 billion was allocated towards the street network.⁴² With the completion of the A1 highway, a new asphalt artery crossed the country, facilitating travel from Milan to Naples. “Eight

³⁸ Giovanni Paolucci, production, *Italia in cammino*, cinematography by Fulvio Testi, musical score by Raffaele Gervasio, general organization by Cesare Taurelli (Istituto Luce, 1958), <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000051027/1/-2219.html>.

³⁹ Carosello, *Storia di Carosello*, accessed March 31, 2025, <https://carosello.tv/storia/>.

⁴⁰ Carosello, *Un personaggio per voi*, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://carosello.tv/serie/un-personaggio-per-voi/>.

⁴¹ G. CRAINZ. *Storia del miracolo italiano: culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta*. p. 101.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 124.

years of work, and today north and south feel closer”, as stated in the closure of the tv spot of the A1 highway inauguration.⁴³

Ultimately, the increase in wealth of the population brought by the economic boom allowed for the flourishing of the Italian lifestyle with its arts, designer goods and fascinating traditions, fuelling the image, albeit with all its contradictions and shadows, of “La Dolce Vita.” This idea of a particular Italian *joie de vivre* aroused interest abroad, starting from the homonymous film by Federico Fellini and the international jet sets gathered in Rome with the so called “Hollywood on the Tiber.” Movies were set in Italy, journals and magazines wrote articles about the new Italian lifestyle. In particular, among the many movies, “Roman Holiday” (1953), achieved considerable success, winning three Oscars. Starring Audrey Hepburn interpreting princess Anne, a young royal on an official European tour, and Gregory Peck, the young American journalist Joe Bradley. The latter offers to the princess the possibility to hide her identity and enjoy Rome as a normal tourist, freed from the stiff protocols that bound her, in exchange for an exclusive story to publish. The two wander through the city, admiring its famous monuments. The movie is an interesting case for the image it offers of Rome and its inhabitants, contributing to shape a stereotype of the Italians as good, cheerful, often naïve people. Another relevant movie for the scope of the analysis is “Three coins in the Fountain”, released in the cinemas the following year. The story follows the romantic adventures of three American women living and working in Italy. Each tosses a coin in the Trevi fountain, hoping for love. As the protagonists navigate contrasting relationships and cultural differences, a charming, idealistic image of Rome and Venice is portrayed, contributing to the fascination of these beloved tourist destinations. The movie also fueled the myth of the magical properties of the Fountain of Trevi, and the classic toss of the coin is still as of today a favourite among the visitors.⁴⁴

Taking into considerations the most relevant magazines, many wrote about Italy as the peninsula enjoyed the growth of the late ‘50s and early ‘60s. Vogue is one of those, in the issue of October 15th, 1960, concurrently with the ongoing Olympiads of Rome, the New York magazine wrote many articles about Italy. The many titles cover different aspects of Italy’s influence, in fashion, arts and other types of consumable goods. To name a few: “Fashion triumphs in a gala Olympic year”, which will be addressed in the next section of this thesis, others such as “Italian wines buyable in the USA” and “Living it up in Italy”. The last one, written by George Bradshaw is a piece full of praise for Italian cuisine and lifestyle, in which the author describes his stay in the country, focusing on the

⁴³ Istituto Luce, *Italia. Inaugurazione Autostrada del Sole*, 1964, video, Archivio Luce.

<https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000041201/2/italia-inaugurazione-autostrada-del-sole.html>.

⁴⁴ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell’Italia repubblicana*. Bologna: Il Mulino. 2022. p. 188-190.

island of Ischia, Rome and Venice. Bradshaw paints a picture of an Italy full of charm and traditions to discover. With a “friendly” and accessible style of communication, the article brings the reader in Italy with the author, who suggests places to visit, restaurants and even recipes of Italian cuisine.⁴⁵

As a consequence of the economic transformations, and thanks to the rich cultural heritage which Italy has always enjoyed, tourism grew considerably. Italy has always been considered as an important travel destination by intellectuals, attracted by the history of its ancient civilizations and by the arts which embellish the country from north to south. Major figures of international literature such as Charles Dickens, Stendhal, Goethe and many others, wrote diaries and narratives about their travels in Italy, which was one of the most important destinations of the Grand Tour around Europe.⁴⁶ In the 1950s tourism in Italy became a mass phenomenon, and it established the country as one of the most visited in the world. To provide a few numbers, in 1953 the tourists visiting Italy were 2.891.000, while in 1963 it arose to 12.558.000, proving the remarkable increase of influence of the country projecting its image in the world.⁴⁷

1.3 Design and “Made in Italy”

While from the domestic point of view the economic miracle improved the life conditions of millions of Italians, from the international one it had an important effect on the overall perception of the Italian image. Its influence can be mostly identified with the rise of “Made in Italy” as a symbol of quality goods across the globe, thanks to the development of the productive capabilities of the country and, in particular, to the excellent designers which created attractive shapes and forms appreciated by the consumers. In fact, in the course of this section of the thesis, the importance of design will become evident, as it is a common point for many of the successful Italian industrial sectors examined.

Through the ‘50s and the ‘60s, numerous manufacturers achieved recognition in the foreign markets and the Made in Italy label spread for its competitiveness and appeal. The automotive industry is a clear example, with companies such as Fiat and Piaggio, which developed their businesses on the production of vehicles for the masses, achieving enormous success, both in the domestic markets, and in the international ones. Many of the vehicles of the time became known and appreciated not only in Italy but worldwide, the “*Vespa*” for example became a symbol of the Italian modern lifestyle, depicted in the aforementioned movie “*Roman Holiday*” with Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn riding the Piaggio scooter in the context of the lovely Roman city centre. The Vespa

⁴⁵ Vogue. “October 15, 1960 Issue.” *Vogue Archive*. <https://archive.vogue.com/issue/19601015/print>.

⁴⁶ Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1817), Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy* (1846), Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (1816).

⁴⁷ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell’Italia repubblicana*. p. 188-190.

was also praised by the New York Times, which defined it as «a wholly Italian product, the likes of which hadn't been seen for centuries since the Roman chariot».⁴⁸

For what concerns the development of the Italian car industry, it owes a considerable part of its success to the talented designers which made the products appealing for the people. Fiat was the largest manufacturer, and it understood the importance of a good design, investing, in 1958, in the creation of the “*Centro Stile Fiat*” (Fiat style centre), with the aim of assisting the technical office, from the refining of already existing models, to studying the design of new cars, curating the bodywork and all the necessary elements for the styling of the product. Four years are required to build a new car despite the careful division of the work, with the formal finishing taking place only after a prototype is produced. The importance of the Centro Stile Fiat cannot be understated also for the influence in the formation of important car designers such as Lucio Fabio Rapi, Pio Manzù and Giorgetto Giugiaro. These figures, together with Aldo Mantovani and Luciano Bosio, founded Ital Design, in 1968 in Turin.⁴⁹ The company is specialized in car design, still operates nowadays and as stated in their official website: «Italdesign offers a wide range of innovative solutions, spanning from prototyping and design to engineering and production. Our services, tailored to meet the needs of the automotive industry and many other sectors, provide flexibility and adaptability, ensuring comprehensive support at every stage of the project and across various industrial fields».⁵⁰ Throughout the decades, this firm defined the aesthetics of countless cars in collaboration with various brands such as Fiat, Alfa Romeo and Volkswagen.⁵¹

This period also saw the diffusion of the luxury car companies such as Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini. The Maranello based company in particular became one of the most recognizable Italian brands, obtaining a worldwide success and recognition, thanks to its captivating designs and the association with a winning mentality, derived from its sport racing activity. The firm, founded by Enzo Ferrari in 1947, climbed the ladder of the sport car industry, showcasing the popularity of Italian products and taste. The company built its reputation as a top car manufacturer with two elements: sports and design. For what concerns the sport racing side, Ferrari competed from its early days in the most important races, from its first win in 1947 with the model 125 S, at the Rome Grand Prix, to becoming the most successful Formula 1 team. As previously noted, success in motorsport established a strong identification between the team and the idea of victory, creating the elite status which the

⁴⁸ La Repubblica, “Vespa, tutta la storia per immagini,” *La Repubblica*, April 22, 2016, accessed April 14, 2025, https://www.repubblica.it/motori/sezioni/moto/2016/04/22/foto/vespa_un_avventura_lunga_70_anni_che_mostra-138134566/1/.

⁴⁹ R. DE FUSCO, *Made in Italy: Storia del design italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007), p. 121-122.

⁵⁰ Italdesign, "Italdesign Official Website," accessed April 10, 2025, <https://www.italdesign.it/it/>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

company still enjoys today. The second fundamental factor of the success of the brand is owed to the brilliant designers which worked for the company, among whom most notably is Pininfarina, car designer founded by Battista Farina in 1930, which shaped some of the most famous automobiles, working with many renowned companies, other than the aforementioned Ferrari, the likes of Fiat, Lancia, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, and many other international car manufacturers. Born from the collaboration with Fiat and Lancia, in the 1950s, worthy of mention are the “*Berlinetta 1100 ES*” and the “*Aurelia B20*”. By the end of the decade, the company built a new facility in Grugliasco, near Turin, which allowed for a transition from a mainly artisanal production to an industrial one.⁵² In Grugliasco, many Ferraris were outlined, such as the 212 (1951), 250 GT (1954), 275, 365, 308 and the “*Testarossa*”.⁵³ The association with Ferrari and the fortune of the many models designed, made of Pininfarina one of the most influential Italian car designers.

The appeal of Italian products was not only limited to vehicles, but it was also a widespread appreciation of the Italian manufacturing. The sector of home appliances effectively showcased the capability of the Italian firms to join form and utility in an object. Entrepreneurs like Renzo Salvarani⁵⁴ and Rino Snaidero⁵⁵ managed to make a name for themselves in this sector, both starting with limited means, they went on to create established companies specialized in the production of house furniture. Another example was Giuseppe Brion and his wife Rina, who opened Brionvega, a small workshop founded in Monza for the production of electronic components. The company later on moved to Milan and converted the manufacturing to complete radio receivers, and from 1953, televisions. The success of the design of its radios, stereos and portable televisions earned the company the honour of having some of its models exhibited in the Museum of Modern Arts in New York.⁵⁶

One of the most widely recognized examples of Italian excellence, which has certainly influenced the perception of the country to this day, is the fashion industry. The firms operating in this sector, as many others during this period, underwent a thorough modernization. The growth of the economy brought an expansion of the domestic clothing market, which was now complemented by the international ones. By employing techniques from the United States, such as industrial-style manufacturing, and incorporating new low-cost synthetic fabrics like nylon, viscose, and rayon,

⁵² R. DE FUSCO, *Made in Italy: Storia del design italiano*, p. 121-122.

⁵³ Pininfarina, “Heritage,” accessed April 11, 2025, <https://pininfarina.it/about/heritage>.

⁵⁴ Renzo Salvarani was an Italian entrepreneur. Born in Parma, 1926, he founded “Salvarani” a firm specialized in furniture production. In 1972 the Salvarani “Long Line” cuisine was showcased at the MOMA in New York. In 2011 the production of the company, now integrated in the “Feg Group”, was interrupted. Renzo Salvarani died in Parma, 2021.

⁵⁵ Rino Snaidero (1920–2004) was an Italian entrepreneur and founder of the Snaidero company, established in 1946. Known for revolutionizing kitchen design in post-war Italy, he combined functionality with modern aesthetics, playing a

⁵⁶ V. CASTRONOVO. *L'Italia del miracolo economico*. p. 68.

Italian enterprises were able to combine traditional sartorial methods with boutique prêt-à-porter fashion. This fusion allowed for industrial-scale production while maintaining the prestige of renowned labels. The high volume of the production and the lower costs led to a democratization of the textile industry, which was now accessible to the masses and not only to the elite.⁵⁷

At the base of the success of the fashion industry was the Italian textile production. Italy had a long history in the production of quality fabrics, but following World War two, the Italian textiles became competitive in the international markets. As reported by a journalist from Houston: «Although 90% of the fabrics used by French designers are woven in Italy, the Italian original model prices are from 30 to 50% lower than the French. Highlighting the importance of the Italian fabrics in the French industry».⁵⁸ The Italian textile manufacturing was organized in a series of industrial districts which comprised of a territorial net of small and medium enterprises, often family led, which were specialized in the production of a single component such as yarn production, stitching, and garment manufacturing. The specialization of the district was characterized by the fiber produced. Como, for example, was famous for its silk production, Legnano and Gallarate, for the cotton, while Biella was known for the wool. The districts were also differentiated by the end product: Carpi for knitwear, Tuscany for leather goods, and the Marche region for shoes and denim garments. At the center of the industrial districts lay Milan, benefitting from the proximity to the industrial districts, the city established itself as the capital of prêt-à-porter fashion, being the hub for design, production and distribution of clothing made in Italy.⁵⁹

Thanks to the favourable economic context several small clothing enterprises also raised their level in the market competition. This is the case with Fabio Inghirami, who, in 1949, established one of the most popular shirt companies, or that of Achille Maramotti, who founded Max Mara in 1951. The latter would then become a large conglomerate operating in the fashion industry.⁶⁰ Other, already affirmed brands projected their products globally, such as Ferragamo, who opened its first American store in New York in 1948. Its garments became so widely recognized that Audrey Hepburn wore his ballet flats and Marilyn Monroe the iconic red stiletto heels.⁶¹ Many brands are still internationally successful such as Fendi, Gucci, and Prada. Thanks to the blossoming of its textile companies, Italy became a synonym of quality in the textile industry, so much so that many companies around the world would design their garments elsewhere and then manufacture them in the peninsula, just to put

⁵⁷ L. SAVI. *A New History of Made in Italy: Fashion and Textiles in Post-War Italy*. 2023. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts. p. 79.

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 124.

⁶⁰ V. CASTRONOVO. *L'Italia del miracolo economico*. p. 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the Made in Italy label on their products. Some known brands which employ this practice include Christian Louboutin and Manolo Blahnik.⁶²

Founded in 1945 in Rome, Brioni established itself as a leader in the male fashion sector, thanks to its mix of industrial production and artisanal tailoring, the Roman company managed to affirm its brand internationally. With the 1951 fashion show, which Brioni claims to be the first male fashion show in the world, the company achieved great recognition thanks to its innovative suits and evening dresses.⁶³ Inside the Sala Bianca of Palazzo Pitti in Florence, the Brioni models showcased the fashion lines of the company, capturing the attention of many global resellers, which translated into a 52% increase in the sales after the show. The appreciation was particularly high from the United States, where Brioni captured the interest of the department store B. Altman, who bought the whole evening collection following the fashion show.⁶⁴

The Italian apparel sector became in this period appreciated for its designs and the quality of its fabrics, attested by the spread of the Made in Italy in the world and by the many articles in fashion magazines such as Vogue, which in occasion of the 1960 Olympics in Rome celebrated Italian design in one of its articles. The opening of the article describes the feeling of the time towards Italian garments and designs: «The Olympic Games were the star attraction in Italy this summer, but far from the only one. A few weeks earlier, another blazing good show had been put on by Italy's spirited fashion designers, in the two strongholds of Italian couture, Rome and Florence. Now in their tenth triumphal year - in nine years, their annual exports have happily tripled - the Italian designers have all their original freshness and bounce, disarming and delightful».⁶⁵

To determine a unifying element in the success of the Italian products, the role of design becomes especially prominent. As the Made in Italy became more and more sought after and the volume of trade increased, the design behind the product achieved a wide recognition. Particularly significant in this context is the exhibition of the Museum of Modern Arts: Olivetti design in industry, 1952. With its masterfully crafted products and captivating design, Olivetti obtained an enormous success, especially for its portable typewriters such as the “*Lettera 22*” and calculators like the “*Divisumma 14*”. In the catalogue of the MOMA exhibition, the praise for the company is not subtle: “The Olivetti Company, many critics agree, is the leading corporation in the western world in the field of design. For patronage in architecture, product design and advertising, it would indeed be difficult to name a

⁶² L. SAVI. *A New History of Made in Italy: Fashion and Textiles in Post-War Italy*. p. 159.

⁶³ Brioni. *History*. Accessed April 16, 2025. <https://www.brioni.com/en/ww/history>.

⁶⁴ L. SAVI. *A New History of Made in Italy: Fashion and Textiles in Post-War Italy*. p. 59.

⁶⁵ Vogue. “*Italy: Fashion-Triumphs in a Gala Olympic Year.*”, October 15, 1960. <https://archive.vogue.com/article/1960/10/italy-fashion-triumphs-in-a-gala-olympic-year>.

second.”⁶⁶ Following this exhibition, the *Lettera 22* and the *Lexikon 80* became part of the MOMA’s permanent collection. Another important recognition for Olivetti was the list of the 100 greatest designs of modern times, made by Fortune in 1959, which featured the *Lettera 22* as the number 1 product. Even in 2020, Olivetti still maintains a spot in the list, with the successor to the *Lettera 22*, the *Lettera 32*, designed by Marcello Nizzoli in 1963. To justify the choice, Fortune states: “While typewriters have been superseded by personal computers, the *Lettera 32*’s portability and ease of use make it an enduring classic.” The same list awarded an iconic Italian product, the Bialetti “*Moka*”, designed by Alfonso Bialetti in 1933, it was celebrated by Fortune, which explained the choice as follows: «As essential as the beverage it brews, it took espresso from coffee shop to stove top».⁶⁷

A second, but not least important MOMA exhibition was organized in 1954 on the topic “The Modern Movement in Italy: Architecture and Design”. The exhibition offered a broad review of Italian innovation in architecture and design from the 1920s through the postwar period. The press release described the Italian artists with flattering words: «fine decorative sense, feeling for colour, material and pattern, and willingness to experiment and invent have characterized the Italian contribution to postwar architecture and design».⁶⁸ Organized in sections, the first explored early modernist pioneers like Terragni and Figini, whose work laid the foundations for modern architecture in Italy. The role of government projects during the Fascist era was the topic of the second section, showing how public commissions were translated into architectural trends and functionality. Another section focused on Pier Luigi Nervi’s revolutionary use of reinforced concrete. A major portion was dedicated, once again, to the Olivetti Company’s integrated design program, which combined product design with graphic identity and architecture. The exhibition also celebrated Italy’s contributions to display and exhibition design through figures like Albini and Gardella. Lastly, it concluded with examples of postwar architecture and industrial design, showcasing the country’s revival through new housing, public buildings, furniture, and everyday objects.⁶⁹

During the 1950s, in addition to the international praise, the enthusiasm towards the world of design grew in Italy, and several magazines, festivals, and associations, all revolving around design, emerged. Noteworthy is the architecture and design magazine, “*Domus*”, created in 1928 by Gio Ponti, which published in the issue n.28 of 1952 an article which can be considered as a defining milestone for the history of Italian design from that moment onwards: the manifesto of Italian

⁶⁶ Museum of Modern Art. *Catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art: 1952 Exhibition*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1952. https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2741_300159054.pdf.

⁶⁷ Bentley, Daniel. “*The 100 Greatest Designs of Modern Times*.” Fortune, April 2020. <https://fortune.com/longform/100-best-designs/>.

⁶⁸ Museum of Modern Art. *The Modern Movement in Italy: Architecture and Design*. Press release, August 18, 1954. https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325955.pdf.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

industrial design. The manifesto contained some meaningful words which described the essence of Italian design: «è il momento del disegno industriale, per il gusto, per l'estetica della produzione, lo è per la cultura e per la tecnica; lo è per la civiltà e per il costume; lo è soprattutto per la nostra Italia, la cui materia prima, la cui vocazione, è sempre stata (e meravigliosamente, e sempre sarà per grazia divina) quella di, ci si perdoni l'espressione vecchio stile, creare il bello». ⁷⁰ The article also mentioned the names of some of the protagonists of Italian design, such as Pininfarina, Revelli, the Piaggio designers, Vehicle designers such as Renzo Orlandi from Modena and Viberti from Turin, the creators of the Liguigas 'Chariot of Fire' and others.

In this fertile environment, the Triennale di Milano was relaunched after the war, linking its exhibitions with the currents of the “new Italian design”. The Triennale was an important festival created in 1933 with the aim of offering a new modern exposition space where the applied arts and industry could engage in dialogue together.⁷¹ Industrial design became a subject of the Triennale's exhibitions in 1951, on the occasion of the IX international exposition "La forma dell'utile", curated by Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, with the graphic project by Max Huber. The aim of the exhibition was: "to make clear the direction and the limits within which the design and production of everyday objects must be maintained, so that they meet the essential requirements of usefulness, economy, and beauty necessary for their efficiency." The following exhibitions were also centered on design. In 1954, the X international exposition focused on: "the unity of the arts and the collaboration between the world of art and that of industrial production." In the same year, on the 29th and 30th October, the Triennale organized the first international congress of industrial design, with the participation of important names, such as Giulio Carlo Argan, Max Bill, Gillo Dorfles, Lucio Fontana, Augusto Morello, Tomás Maldonado, Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Vittoriano Viganò. In 1957, during the XI Triennale, an international industrial design show was held to uncover the historical and cultural roots of design.⁷²

In the meanwhile, “Associazione per il Design Italiano” was created in 1956 with the aim of linking designers, companies, researchers, teachers, critics, and journalists around design topics: design, consumption, recycling, and education.⁷³ In the same period Emerging from the creative fervor generated by the dynamic development of Italian design in the 1950s, the magazine “*Stile*

⁷⁰ De Fusco, Renato. *Made in Italy: Storia del design italiano*. Roma-Bari: Laterza. 2007. p. 109. English translation: “this is the moment of industrial design, not only for taste and the aesthetics of production, but also for customs and technology; for civilization and lifestyle; and above all, for our Italy, whose raw material, whose true vocation, has always been (and wonderfully, and always will be by divine grace) that of, pardon the old-fashioned expression, “creating beauty”.

⁷¹ Storie Milanesi, *La Triennale di Milano*. <https://www.storiemilanesi.org/approfondimento/triennale-milano/>.

⁷² Marilia Pederbelli, “Una storia brevissima sul design italiano in Triennale,” Triennale Milano, February 26, 2021, <https://triennale.org/magazine/nel-1954-inaugura-la-x-triennale-di-milano-lesposizione>.

⁷³ ADI. *Associazione per il Disegno Industriale*. <https://www.adi-design.org/associazione.html>.

Industria” was founded. Published by Editoriale Domus, the magazine was the result of the visionary intuition of Gianni Mazzocchi and Gio Ponti. With the first number published in 1954, *Stile Industria* was born with the aim of "promoting the aesthetic dimension of the product." In the very same year, Gio Ponti also established the *Compasso d'Oro* Award, created to promote excellence in design products.⁷⁴ The *Compasso d'oro*, considered as the oldest and one of the most prestigious design awards in the world, was organized by the Rinascente department stores until 1958, when it was donated to the *Associazione Design Industriale* which assigned it through a jury of experts. Some of the designs which won the award in the years of the economic boom are the calculator “Elea 9003” by Ettore Sottsass for Olivetti, the first television completely made of transistor “Doney” by Marco Zanuso e Richard Sapper for Brionvega, and the coffee machine "*Pitagora*" by Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Cimbali.⁷⁵

In conclusion, the impact of the social and economic transformations triggered by the growth of the 1950s and 1960s had a long-lasting effect on the image of the Italian Republic, with the consolidation of Made in Italy as a symbol of value in the world. In order to achieve this result, several factors had to interweave together, starting from the reconstruction efforts in the post war, which planted the seeds of the later productivity growth spurt, to the valorisation of the rich cultural heritage which inspired and influenced the designers of the many iconic products of those years. Design had a primary role in this process, thanks to the capable designers which positioned Italy as one of the major innovators in this sector. Other than the industrial success, the peninsula’s cultural appeal increased considerably, thanks to its artistic currents, especially in the field of cinema with neorealism and its renowned directors. International film productions chose Rome as a venue for blockbuster movies such as *Ben Hur*, *Quo Vadis* and *Cleopatra*, fuelling the image of the country as a coveted destination for holidays. As a consequence, tourism skyrocketed. In order to utilize the full extent of the aforementioned qualities of the country, the ministry of foreign affairs conducted a thorough campaign of cultural diplomacy in the world.

⁷⁴ Editoriale Domus. *Stile Industria e Domus all'ADI Design Museum*. May 25, 2021. <https://www.edidomus.it/it/press/2021/05/25/stile-industria-e-domus-all-adi-design-museum.html>.

⁷⁵ ADI Design Museum. “Archivio del Compasso d'Oro.” ADI Design Museum. <https://www.adidesignmuseum.org/compasso-doro/archivio-del-compasso-doro/>.

Chapter 2

Italy's cultural diplomacy

2.1 The early stages of the Republic's cultural diplomacy

The rebirth of the Italian Republic's image and foreign affairs, as previously overviewed, involved the renewal of the country from both a political and economic standpoint. In parallel, Italy resumed its diplomatic relations with the intent of recreating sympathies and slowly regain influence around the world. To achieve this objective, Italy could rely on one of the few available assets still at its disposal, namely, its culture. A branch of diplomacy was centred solely on the promotion and diffusion of the Italian cultural appeal, with the aim of creating bridges between Italy and other peoples. Exploring the role of cultural diplomacy in shaping Italy's foreign policy in the first decade of the Republic will be the object of this chapter, analysing the instruments and scopes employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its action around the globe. First, a definition of what is cultural diplomacy, as stated by the Institute for cultural diplomacy: «Cultural diplomacy may be defined as the deliberate and strategic exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other cultural elements with the aim of fostering mutual understanding, strengthening relationships, advancing socio-cultural cooperation, and promoting national or international interests. It may be conducted by governmental bodies, private entities, or civil society organisations, each contributing to the broader objective of building trust and dialogue across cultural divides».⁷⁶

The central point is the reciprocal understanding between peoples, which is pursued through an exchange of ideas, traditions, customs, literary and artistic production, with the aim to communicate the essence of a nation. The very definition of Cultural diplomacy is not precisely outlined, and it is common to find interpretations that assign a broader or narrower meaning to the term depending on the context. Moreover, the expression is often coupled with that of the broader “public diplomacy”, which is employed by states to sway public opinions in their favour by communicating not with other states representatives, but directly with the foreign masses. Public diplomacy is a term coined in the mid-1960s by former U.S. diplomat Edmund Gullion, to «inform and influence audiences overseas for the purpose of promoting the national interest and advancing foreign policy goals». Gullion wanted to distinguish the term propaganda from that of public diplomacy, as the former had been

⁷⁶ Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, “*What Is Cultural Diplomacy?*” Cultural Diplomacy Archive. https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy.

used by nations as an unscrupulous and unprincipled mean to achieve specific goals by influencing the people of foreign countries, acquiring a clear pejorative meaning.⁷⁷ Essentially, cultural diplomacy is a narrower term, which includes all the initiatives organized by a foreign country regarding the diffusion of the arts, language, heritage, gastronomy and all the other cultural expressions of a people, while public diplomacy has a wider meaning related to the act of communicating with a foreign audience, not strictly limited to cultural exchanges.

Which were the features and characteristics of the Italian action in this field of diplomacy? For what concerns the Italian cultural diplomacy during the fascist regime, it functioned as a form of propaganda characterized and imprinted with nationalism, with the scope to assert Italian interests on targeted countries. Italian schools abroad and University courses, for instance, were largely employed in this increasingly propagandistic effort. For instance, teachers and professors who worked in the cultural institutions overseas had to swear an oath of loyalty to the country: «to integrate the work [...] as an educator with that of a citizen, by actively promoting and propagating Italian identity and, above all, fostering concrete harmony, so that within the colony a single unified will may be formed one entirely devoted to Italy's economic prosperity and to enhancing its political prestige in the world».⁷⁸ Furthermore, the tools of cultural diplomacy were gradually expanded and new media for the diffusion of the fascist message were created. Among those that are worth noting there were centres for cultural studies and think tanks, such as the Institute for Eastern Europe and the Institute for the East, founded in 1921, the Institute for the middle and far East, and the Institute for the studies of International Politics founded respectively in 1933 and 1934.⁷⁹ But the most important addition to the instruments of the regime, was the creation of the Cultural Institutes in 1926, with the law of 19th December, n. 2179, written by Giovanni Gentile, Minister of Public Education and founder of the National Institute for Fascist Culture. Mussolini indeed thought that Cultural Institutes would be more effective in spreading the high Italian culture than Italian schools and university courses abroad, personally fostering the opening of these new institutions.⁸⁰

At first, the objectives of the fascist cultural diplomacy were not much different than those of liberal Italy. The regime tried to achieve three points: first, promoting the role of Italy as a fundamental player in the Mediterranean Sea, for the North African colonies and its geographical centrality, the second was to protect the Italian identity of all the communities of Italian emigrants

⁷⁷ USC Centre on Public Diplomacy, "What Is PD?", accessed July 16, 2025, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-is-pd>.

⁷⁸ L. MEDICI, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*, p. 9. Translated in English by the author.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 12-15.

abroad, and lastly, to cultivate the Italian arts and sciences abroad to achieve more sway and recognition, serving the country's political interests. Later on, in 1930, when Mussolini declared the universality of fascism, an additional objective became primary for the country, to export the fascist ideology in the world and foster the diffusion of like-minded regimes, with Italy as its centre.⁸¹ It was particularly during the second half of the 1930s that the power politics of the regime increased considerably and cultural relations were exploited for spreading the image of fascist Italy. The Ministry of Popular Culture, in this frame, was involved in cultural diplomacy, implementing a state censorship on all artistic productions, and with the appointment of Pavolini in 1939 as the head of the Ministry the tight control became even harsher. For the execution of the regime's purposes, and to surpass the already existing institutions dedicated to cultural diplomacy, a need for a new administrative body arose, thus in 1938 the Institute for Cultural Relations Abroad (IRCE) was created. IRCE was an executive body which had the task of promoting Italian culture and coordinate the efforts of the regime's cultural policy.⁸²

Following the deposition of Benito Mussolini, the governments chaired by Pietro Badoglio, Ivanoe Bonomi and Alcide De Gasperi had the task of reorganising the administrative apparatus, assessing the destruction caused by the war, and managing the few resources still available. On July 15th, 1944, with a ministerial decree signed by Badoglio, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was restructured in three general directorates, Political Affairs, Economic Affairs, Staff and General Affairs, and a general secretariat. The General Directorate for the Italians Abroad was not present in the new order and the competences regarding cultural relationships abroad were given to the first office of the Service General Affairs and it was established one year later on April 6th, 1945, by Alcide De Gasperi.⁸³ Even though the administrative structure was established, the situation concerning Italy's cultural relations was critical. Due to the war, many of the Italian schools abroad were closed, others lacked the funds to carry on with the activity and the number of cultural institutes declined. At the start of the war, the cultural institutes were 25, of which 16 in Europe and 9 in other continents, when the conflict was over, only 9 were still open, but deprived of the necessary funds.⁸⁴ A first effort to identify and locate the surviving branches abroad was made in the first months of 1945, when the General Directorate of Italians Abroad made a list of the existing schools and cultural institutes, limited though to the

⁸¹ L. MEDICI, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*, p.18.

⁸² *Ivi*, pp. 59-63.

⁸³ L. V. FERRARIS, *L'amministrazione centrale del Ministero degli Esteri italiano nel suo sviluppo storico (1848-1954)*, Firenze: Rivista di studi politici internazionali. 1955. pp. 653-656.

⁸⁴ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, Tesi di dottorato, Università di Pisa, Scuola di Dottorato in Storia, Orientalistica e Storia delle Arti, XXIV ciclo, p. 11.

countries which had normal diplomatic relations with Italy (Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tangier, Turkey). The report did not specify which of the institutions were still active, in fact, the problem arose as the Ministry had lost communications with its institutes abroad following the fall of Rome.⁸⁵

In the first years of the Afterwar, the main diplomatic objective of the new Italian Republic was to limit the consequences of the war, as the content of the Peace Treaty was still yet to be defined. The administration painted the image of a reformed, democratic country promoter of cultural cooperation, in order to facilitate Italy's reintegration into the global community and obtain a special treatment in the Peace Treaty, insisting on its status as a cobelligerent nation. In this context, cultural diplomacy was considered a powerful tool to push the Italian requests, with the objective of spreading awareness and grow sympathies for the Italian situation. In particular, public diplomacy was directed towards the states which had relevant weight in the outcome of the Paris Peace Treaty, namely the winners of the war. Despite this, at first the Italian diplomats found some difficulties, as the cultural relations with the great democracies of the West were almost non-existent due to the fact that during the fascist regime they were neglected for political reasons, thus in many cases they had to be built from zero.⁸⁶

During the years from 1944 to 1947, the Italian State resumed its cultural relations, with all of the limitations posed by the dire conditions which the country was facing. Many institutions had to close for the lack of funds, and in others the personnel were reduced. De Gasperi, which held the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Parri government, had to struggle with the Treasury to obtain the needed financial resources to maintain the activities. On many occasions, *La Farnesina*, had to cut branches. In Spain and Portugal, for example, cultural institutes and elementary schools were closed to save resources as they were deemed "not politically relevant", and the government intended to prioritize the institutions present in the victorious countries, to push the Italian interests in the drafting of the Peace Treaty.⁸⁷ In the same years, the Institute for Cultural Relations Abroad, IRCE, heavily contributed to the restart of the cultural relations. When the head of IRCE, Carlo Antoni, resigned in March '47, he summarized, in a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the content of the activity which the Institute carried out in the previous years. In many countries, IRCE facilitated the contacts between Italian and foreign scholars, it distributed bibliographical information, it diffused films, photographs, and publications, while in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland it organized many events such as book fairs and art exhibitions in coordination with the

⁸⁵ L. MEDICI, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*, pp. 80-82.

⁸⁶ *Ivi*, p. 83.

⁸⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 76-81.

Ministry, constituting overall a large part of the Italian cultural diplomacy effort. After Antoni's resignation, IRCE's programs continued for a few months, but at the end of 1947 the competent ministers decided to discontinue its activity. The closure of IRCE sparked many debates in the political world, as many believed that the Institute could have been rearranged and used for other purposes. At last, the ministers agreed that IRCE was no longer of use, and that its functions could be taken over by the new structure responsible for cultural diplomacy: the General Directorate for Cultural Relations (DGRC), established on the 20th of December 1946, this new apparatus comprised three branches, the first for "General Affairs", the second for the Cultural Institutes and the third one for the schools. Almost at the same time, the General Directorate for the Italians Abroad was abolished, substituted by the new formation.⁸⁸

A fundamental turning point in the resumption of Italy's cultural diplomacy was the country's admittance in UNESCO. Italy was encouraged by the United States to make a formal request to join UNESCO and on December 10th, 1946, Italy entered the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Since 1947, UNESCO became pivotal for the Italian multilateral cultural diplomacy, in fact, the *Farnesina* dedicated conspicuous resources towards its activity inside the organization, founding in 1950, the Italian National Commission for UNESCO. The Italian participation in this international organization will be explored later on in this chapter.

For what concerns the formulation of the new cultural diplomacy, the administrative elite was aware that for a defeated country culture could represent a peaceful medium to maintain some relevance in international affairs. De Gasperi, Sforza and other officials expressed themselves on many occasions on the value of cultural diplomacy for Italy and how the action should be directed. In this regard, some interesting considerations on the matter were expressed by the Ambassador to Moscow, Pietro Quaroni:

[...] Noi dovremmo anche organizzarci per diventare, per questi Paesi, un centro culturale; le nostre scuole, le nostre università, i nostri istituti scientifici sono, in molti rami, assai indietro in paragone a quelli delle altre maggiori nazioni del mondo. Ci siamo specializzati nel mandare in giro dei «propagatori dell'universalità di Roma» che non interessa nessuno. Ma è da sperare che il problema di rimettere in piedi la nostra vita culturale sarà affrontato e in qualche modo risolto. Se sarà così, anche in questo campo si aprono per noi delle interessanti possibilità, poiché, a parte la vicinanza geografica, per ragioni di clima, di sistemi di vita e molte altre, uno studente arabo o persiano può trovarsi molto più a casa sua in Italia che non in Inghilterra o in America.

⁸⁸ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, pp. 21-22.

Noi abbiamo fatto in questi Paesi, per alcuni anni, una politica di grande Potenza imperiale che è andata a finire in modo disastroso. Dovremmo tentare ora una politica di collaborazione nel campo culturale ed economico, seria, dignitosa, senza esagerazioni in un senso od in un altro; una collaborazione seriamente misurata alle nostre possibilità ed ai nostri interessi, silenziosa, senza inutili réclames, vanterie, programmi. Una politica senza politica, vorrei dire, ma che se fatta seriamente può, in un certo numero di anni, crearci realmente una situazione solida.⁸⁹

Quaroni expressed these far-sighted thoughts in a message directed to De Gasperi, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, on September the 30th 1945. The lucid analysis of the Ambassador offers, with great pragmatism, a view of the importance of cultural diplomacy for the Italian diplomatic relations with the world of colonies. Quaroni understood in advance that the colonial age had come to an end, and Italy, no longer a colonial power, could set a path towards a cultural diplomacy which would be, in his words, “politics without politics”. Thus, the new Italian diplomacy had to be stripped of its short-sighted propagandistic goals which had been common during the fascist regime. Almost anticipating Joseph Nye’s studies on soft power, Quaroni envisioned a strategy of long-term cultural exchanges with no political intent behind them, strengthening schools and universities to attract foreign students with the objective of becoming a cultural centre of the world. Eventually, by gathering the sympathies of foreign people and having bolstered its position in the world, Italy could also benefit from a political spillover.

Following these principles, the activity of the DGRC in the countries that won World War two sought to promote the images of the Italian resistance to Nazi-fascism, showing the suffering endured by the Italian people during the civil war and the Italian campaign. The lines of the Italian cultural diplomacy tried to paint a picture of a country which was a victim of fascism rather than its perpetrator. The cultural institutes distributed neorealist movies such as *Paisà* and *Roma Città Aperta* by Roberto Rossellini, films which depicted the brutality of war, but also people’s humanity and the courage of those who opposed the regime. In France, after the projection promoted by the embassy

⁸⁹ Italian Diplomatic Documents. The Ambassador to Moscow, Quaroni, to the Foreign Affairs Minister, De Gasperi. Telespr. 846/374. Mosca, 30 settembre 1945. English translation by the author: [...] We should also organise ourselves to become, for these countries, a cultural centre; our schools, our universities, our scientific institutes are, in many fields, far behind those of the world’s leading nations. We have specialised in sending around 'propagators of the universality of Rome', which interests no one. But one can hope that the issue of restoring our cultural life will be addressed and somehow resolved. If that happens, interesting opportunities may open up for us in this area as well, because — aside from geographical proximity — due to climate, lifestyle, and other factors, an Arab or Persian student may feel much more at home in Italy than in England or America.

For several years, we pursued in these countries a policy of great imperial power, which ended in disaster. We should now attempt a policy of cultural and economic collaboration — serious, dignified, and without excesses in either direction; a collaboration realistically aligned with our means and our interests, discreet, without unnecessary publicity, boasting, or grand programmes. A politics without politics, one might say — but if carried out seriously, it could, in the course of a number of years, truly establish a solid position for us.

in Paris, Rossellini's movies were met with positive and enthusiastic feedback by the critics. Moreover, many publications about the partisan activity were spread, and in general, a strong focus was directed towards the ideal picture of the Italian resistance against the oppressor. Books like *Cefalonia* by Giuseppe Moscatelli, and the bulletin of partisan action were distributed to foreign embassies. On the same note was the exhibition held in Paris in '46 about the Italian resistance, organized by a group of *Corpo Volontari della Libertà*, to "represent, in the eyes of the world, the starting point of our work of reconstruction". After Paris, the exhibition was held in other capitals, with 135 panels narrating the "Partisan Epos" and the contribution of the Italian armed forces to the conflict after the 8th of September.⁹⁰

Turning the focus to bilateral diplomacy, Italy's first cultural agreement could be considered the De Gasperi-Gruber treaty of 1946, which contained some cultural clauses, along the political ones, that protected the language and traditions of the German speaking population of Sud Tyrol. Though, as the scope of the De Gasperi-Gruber was rather political despite some cultural aspects, the first bilateral agreement to be fully dedicated to culture will be the one signed with Belgium in November 1948. This treaty is considered by some scholars as a model for the subsequent bilateral agreements of the Italian cultural diplomacy, and in particular the article 10 of the treaty which states the following: the Contracting Governments shall grant each other mutual assistance in order to ensure, in each country, a better knowledge of the other's culture, by means of: a) books, periodicals and publications, reproductions of works of art; b) lectures and concerts; c) exhibitions of fine arts and similar events; d) dramatic performances; e) broadcasting, films, recordings, and other mechanical means. From that point onwards, an article containing more or less the same clauses would be used in many of the bilateral agreements that followed.⁹¹

In the restoration of Italy's relations with European countries, an important focus was dedicated to the rapprochement with France. As a neighbouring country which shared many cultural values with Italy, a cooperation was of interest for both parts, so much so that the Italian government tried to push for a swift recovery of the relationship on equal terms. Quaroni, now Ambassador to Paris, worked with dedication towards this end. Since 1947, the conclusion of a cultural agreement and the creation of a customs union with France were two objectives of the *Farnesina's* foreign policy. In 1949, the interests of the two Republics aligned and the works for the cultural agreement started.⁹² In the Italian

⁹⁰ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, pp. 28-30.

⁹¹ U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*. Roma: Edizioni Bizzarri. 1970. pp. 62-65.

⁹² Italian Diplomatic Documents, Meeting of the Italian Foreign Minister, Sforza, with the French Foreign Minister, Schuman, at the Quai d'Orsay, 27 March 1949, from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

Diplomatic documents, it is evident that the cultural agreement was a pressing matter for the Government, as emerges from the transcript of a meeting between Sforza and Schumann: (Parodi, Fouques-Duparc, Quaroni and Guidotti were also present).

Accordo culturale: Fouques-Duparc riferisce che si è d'accordo sulle linee generali e che si tratta solo di mettere a punto alcune questioni delimitate. Quaroni osserva che sarebbe bene far presto perché lo sviluppo delle relazioni culturali è giunto a tal punto che la mancanza di un quadro giuridico entro cui si possa svolgere ne ostacola il funzionamento. Nel quadro delle relazioni italo-francesi vi è un anello importante che manca. Schuman rileva che però è solo da poco tempo che le trattative sono iniziate. Quaroni osserva che questo è esatto e non esatto allo stesso tempo: le trattative effettive sono iniziate da poco: ma sono più di due anni che se ne parla senza decidersi a iniziarle. I due ministri si dichiarano d'accordo nell'impartire agli uffici competenti delle istruzioni di sollecitare la conclusione dell'accordo culturale.⁹³

On the 4th of November, the agreement was signed by the representatives. The content of the treaty ranged over many topics, which included the definition of the number of cultural institutes, fixed at four, for Italy in Paris, Marseille, Nice and Lion. For France in Florence, Naples, Rome and Milan. The treaty also mentions the international schools, the *lycée Chateaubriand* and *liceo Leonardo Da Vinci*. An important focus is dedicated to the exchange of lecturers and contacts between universities, and the recognition in both countries of the respective university degrees. The two parts of the agreement also committed to facilitate the exchange of books, newspapers, magazines, musical publications, artistic reproductions, phonograph records and documentary films intended for institutions of an educational and cultural nature. Furthermore, article 10 establishes the creation of a mixed commission to foster the application of the agreement.⁹⁴

The relaunch of Italy's cultural diplomacy continued and on June 24th, 1950, a ministerial decree marked the opening of 31 cultural institutes around the globe, some of which were closed during the war, while others were completely new.⁹⁵ Some of these were opened in West Germany in the cities of Cologne, Hamburg and Munich, strengthening the cultural relations of the two countries which

⁹³ Italian Diplomatic Documents, record of the meeting between Schuman and Sforza. Paris, 1st of April 1949. English translation by the author: Cultural Agreement: Fouques-Duparc reports that there is agreement on the general principles and that it is only a matter of finalizing a few specific issues. Quaroni notes that it would be advisable to act quickly, since the development of cultural relations has reached such a point that the absence of a legal framework within which they can take place is hindering their proper functioning. Within the framework of Franco-Italian relations, there is an important missing link. Schuman points out, however, that negotiations have only recently begun. Quaroni observes that this is both true and not true at the same time: the actual negotiations have indeed started only recently, but discussions about them have been going on for more than two years without any decision to begin. The two ministers agree to instruct the competent offices to expedite the conclusion of the cultural agreement.

⁹⁴ *Cultural Agreement between Italy and France*. November 4, 1949. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Accordo_culturale_1949.pdf.

⁹⁵ Decreto Ministeriale 24 giugno 1950 n. 2707: Decreto di fondazione degli istituti italiani di cultura all'estero.

grew closer thanks to a shared mutual desire for an increased European integration. Despite the efforts, though, the Italian cultural diplomacy still trailed behind with respect to the comparable European countries, in fact, for Italy, the 1950-51 biennial budget allocated to cultural diplomacy amounted to 2 billion liras, while France's was around 5 billion liras, Spain's and the UK's budget was superior, and even Belgium comparatively allocated more resources to cultural relations.⁹⁶

An important milestone in the recovery of diplomatic relations with the great European democracies was reached with the conclusion of the cultural agreement with the United Kingdom on November 28th, 1951. The cultural convention, signed by Alcide De Gasperi and Anthony Eden, disciplined more or less the same areas of the Italy-France agreement, but it is worth noting that overall, the treaty presents a more complex structure and is longer. The aim of the agreement was that of obtaining an "understanding in their respective countries of the intellectual, artistic and scientific activities as well as of the ways of life of the other country", with a particular attention to university exchanges in lecturers and scholarships. Article two sets the regulation for the cultural institutions: "The Italian Government recognise the right of the British Government to maintain and develop or support British Institutes and British Council Centres in Rome, Milan. Turin, Genoa. Venice. Bologna, Florence, Naples and Palermo. The Government of the United Kingdom recognise the right of the Italian Government to establish and develop its own Institutes in the same number of cities in the United Kingdom".⁹⁷

In the years that followed, Italy concluded a series of cultural agreements with many countries, increasing its bilateral cooperation and fostering its cultural heritage around the globe. From 1951 to 1955, the peninsula signed cultural agreements with Turkey (signed on 17 July 1951), Denmark (5 December 1951), Ecuador (7 March 1952), Austria (which was finally concluded on 14 March 1952), Bolivia (31 January 1953), Japan (31 July 1954), Greece (12 September 1954), Norway (14 June 1955) and Spain (11 August 1955).⁹⁸

Focusing on the American continent, at the end of the war, while the relations with many of the south American countries restarted with a renewed interest in the Italian culture and traditions, in the US the situation proved to be more difficult to manage, as a general hostility towards Italy still persisted. During the war, the courses on Italian language were prohibited in schools, associations and even in the little Italies. The *Dante Alighieri* society, one of the most important institutions for

⁹⁶ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, p. 102.

⁹⁷ *Cultural Convention between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Italy*, Treaty Series No. 28 (1953). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, May 1953. <https://treaties.fcdo.gov.uk/data/Library2/pdf/1953-TS0028.pdf>.

⁹⁸ M. AMICUCCI, *La diplomazia culturale come via di politica estera italiana tra guerra fredda e periodo post bipolare*. Tesi di Dottorato, Università di Bologna, 2023. pp. 55-56.

the diffusion of the Italian language, was deemed as “un-American” for its fascist propaganda, and it was rehabilitated only in the 1960s. Most exemplary of the difficulties met by the Italian administration in fostering a cultural diplomacy in the US was the fact that there was no cultural institute in the country until 1961, when it was opened in New York, while in other cities the wait would be longer, lasting until the 1970s and 1980s. The slow start of the cultural relationship between Italy and the US would accelerate in the 1960s with the economic boom and the diffusion of a charming image of Italy, as depicted in “Hollywood on the Tiber” movies and *La Dolce Vita* by Federico Fellini.⁹⁹ Starting from that period, Italian products invaded the US markets and the beautiful postcards of the boot shaped country would diffuse an idealistic view of the country which the Italian authorities for cultural diplomacy would wisely exploit later on.

For what concerns Eastern Europe, the Italian diplomats did not find an easy path towards cultural cooperation. In the first years after the end of the war, the relations with Eastern European countries slowly restarted, most notably in Poland, where the cultural institute was reopened in 1945, in Hungary and Romania, where the fascist propaganda had been most intense for obvious reasons of political affinity. This first impulse did not last for long, as with the exacerbation of the cold war the pro-Soviet governments closed all the institutions for cultural exchanges, making it arduous for Italy to keep contact with the countries on the other side of the iron curtain. Also, with regards to the exchanges with the Soviet Union, the superpowers’ conflict would often resolve to the use of cultural diplomacy as a propagandistic tool and to continue the fight without weapons, increasing diffidence which vastly reduced cooperation and exchanges between the two blocs. Italy was fully committed to the Western alliances, and the US as head of the alliance gave clear directives with the objective of contrasting communism with all the necessary means, this emerges from a communication between the *Capo di Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito*, Marras, and the Minister of defence, Pacciardi:

Il generale Wedemeyer è persona di grande influenza, molto ascoltato dallo stesso presidente e inviato frequentemente in ispezioni anche in lontani teatri di operazione. Dopo aver rilevato che nelle sue risposte lo S.M. americano aveva voluto essere molto franco, anche nella parte che poteva non rispondere alle nostre richieste e alle nostre aspettative, ha messo in rilievo che per sua disposizione nulla era stato celato. Ha tenuto a sottolinearmi che in Italia esiste circa il 30 per cento di comunisti, i quali rappresentano indubbiamente un pericolo. Ha aggiunto che a suo avviso il comunismo deve essere contrastato essenzialmente nel campo politico, economico e anche culturale e psicologico.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ M. PRETELLI. *Italia e Stati Uniti “Diplomazia culturale” e relazioni commerciali dal fascismo al dopoguerra*, https://www.reteparri.it/wp-content/uploads/ic/IC_241_2005_8_r.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Italian Diplomatic Documents. The Chief of Staff of the Army, Marras, to the Minister of Defence, Pacciardi. Roma, January 2nd, 1949. English translation by the author: General Wedemeyer is a person of great influence, much listened to by the President himself and frequently sent on inspections even to distant theaters of operation. After noting that in its replies to the American General Staff had wished to be very frank, even in those parts that might not correspond to our

Pressured by the Americans, the struggle against communism was a top priority for the Italian government, especially internally, where the Italian Communist Party had collected a considerable support. For these reasons, the cultural cooperation between the Soviet Union and Italy did not thoroughly develop after the intensification of the Cold War. Only for a few years, from 1945 to 1946, with the diplomatic direction of Ambassador Pietro Quaroni, a feeble exchange of films and publications was held. In this frame, the *Associazione Italiana per i Rapporti Culturali con l'Unione Sovietica*, played a major role in mediating the cultures of both countries, becoming the sole interpreter of the cultural relations until the sign of the cultural agreement for which Italy would have to wait until 1960.¹⁰¹

2.2 *The Instruments of the Italian Cultural Diplomacy*

Throughout the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s, the Italian cultural diplomacy employed various tools, either part of the public administration or private entities with public subsidies, to promote its culture around the world. Its organization was characterized by a primarily centralized administrative apparatus, which allowed for decisive action, while at the same time being limited by the rigidity of public offices. For a general understanding of Italian cultural diplomacy, here is a review of the major institutions and agencies involved in its functioning. First and foremost, the starting point should be the central administration of the State and in particular, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The formation which was mainly responsible for cultural relations is the General Directorate of Cultural Relations, divided into branches and offices which dealt with many tasks, such as the management of bilateral cultural agreements, the exchange of professors and teachers, the organization of congresses, as well as theatrical, artistic and sporting events. Others promoted the diffusion of literary and scientific work abroad, carried out cultural activities at the multilateral level, oversaw the cultural institutes, administered scholarships and Italian schools abroad. Following Italy's entrance into UNESCO, another service, which later on became the third office, was added, with the task of managing Italy's multilateral cultural cooperation inside international organizations such as the mentioned UNESCO, but also NATO, Council of Europe and others.¹⁰²

requests and expectations, he emphasized that, by his order, nothing had been concealed. He made a point of stressing to me that in Italy about 30 percent of the population are communists, who undoubtedly represent a danger. He added that, in his view, communism must be countered essentially in the political, economic, as well as cultural and psychological fields.

¹⁰¹ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, pp. 39-43.

¹⁰² U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*. pp. 36-37

But the *Farnesina* was not the only ministry involved in the action, the Ministry of Public Education directly participated with its General Directorate for Cultural Exchanges and the Special Service for Antiquities and Fine Arts¹⁰³, the two helped in the diffusion of the Italian culture with the countries which Italy had agreements with. Under the umbrella of the Ministry of Public Education, it is worth mentioning the Italian Centre for Educational Travel, responsible for the organizing of study experiences abroad for Italian students.¹⁰⁴

To compose the mosaics of public offices involved in cultural diplomacy, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers deserves a mention, with its Information Service and the Office for Literary, Artistic and Scientific Property.¹⁰⁵ The Information Service in particular, drafted and published a review named *Documenti di Vita Italiana* in four foreign languages, English, French, Spanish and German, every two months the Service would send the review to the Italian diplomatic delegations, to the cultural institutes, and to the editorial teams both foreign and Italian abroad. The Service also curated the diffusion of tapes and radio transmission in Italian and other languages. The Office for Literary, Artistic and Scientific Property had the task of protecting intellectual property, promoting the Italian participation in multilateral organizations and the development of bilateral agreements with other countries notably with the aim of extending copyrights.¹⁰⁶

Of fundamental importance was the Italian National Commission for UNESCO, created with the interministerial decree of February 11th, 1950. The role of the Commission is self-explanatory, as it functioned as the intermediary between Italy and UNESCO, becoming one of the most important organs for the Italian multilateral cultural cooperation. As stated by the establishment decree which sets the Commission's objectives and purpose:

Articolo 2: la Commissione a ha il compito di contribuire allo sviluppo di iniziative di carattere scientifico, culturale ed educativo ed alla conoscenza, da parte del l'opinione pubblica italiana, degli scopi, dei programmi e delle attività dell'UNESCO: a) da pareri o formula raccomandazioni al Governo ed alle Amministrazioni pubbliche sul programma sulle attività dell'UNESCO; b) collabora con gli organi competenti per l'esecuzione delle decisioni della Conferenza Generale dell'UNESCO; c) promuove, al di fuori del suo ambito, riunioni e convegni degli enti e delle persone che svolgono attività in campo culturale, scientifico ed educativo; d) adempie a tutte le funzioni che le siano affidate dal Governo; e) esprime il proprio parere sulla scelta dei membri, sia delle delegazioni alla Conferenza Generale dell'UNESCO, sia

¹⁰³ The names of the public offices in Italian are the following: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale per gli Scambi Culturali, Servizio Speciale per le Antichità e le Belle Arti and Centro Italiano Viaggi Istruzione Studenti.

¹⁰⁴ *Ivi*, p. 37-39.

¹⁰⁵ The names of the public offices in Italian are the following: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Servizio per le Informazioni, Ufficio della proprietà Letteraria, Artistica e Scientifica.

¹⁰⁶ U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*. pp. 37-39.

delle delegazioni ad altre riunioni manifestazioni in materia culturale, scientifica ed educativa, promosse dall'UNESCO e ad essa collegate.¹⁰⁷

If the commission for UNESCO was one of the main bodies for multilateralism, turning the focus to bilateralism, the schools abroad and the cultural institutes were the two essential executive bodies for the cultural relationships between Italy and the rest of the world. The schools were of two types, managed directly by the state or subsidized by the state and managed by religious or lay orders. They were established in 1880 for assisting the families of those who emigrated and traditionally had three main functions: the first was to provide the students with titles recognized in Italy and with the same educational programs, granting the possibility to have an Italian education. The second was to ensure that the sons and daughters of Italian emigrants, fully integrated in the receiving country, maintained a cultural or spiritual connection with Italy. The third and last one was to spread the Italian culture in the host country, and for this end the schools accepted both students of Italian and foreign origins. For what concerns the cultural institutes, they were first created in 1926 for the diffusion of “high culture”, by promoting and organizing events related to the Italian tradition and contemporary production, in fields that may vary from the arts to the sciences. The activity program of cultural institutes often includes shows, exhibitions, film projections, concerts and lectures, all held by known names of the Italian cultural milieu.¹⁰⁸

Other than the main public bodies listed above, there are others which had, from time to time, a contribution to the Italian cultural diplomacy, such as the *Ministero del turismo e dello spettacolo*, the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* and the national broadcasting body, *Radio-Televisione Italiana*. These bodies, while not as relevant as those mentioned before, were involved in the diffusion of publications, research, films and other types of materials which could vehicle the Italian culture.

Moving away the attention from the public administration, it is noteworthy to dedicate a space to institutions, both private and autonomous public bodies, which were highly influential for the Italian cultural diplomacy. One of these is certainly the *Biennale di Venezia*, founded in 1895, it's a cultural foundation which organizes, every two years, the famous international exposition centred on the arts.

¹⁰⁷ U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*. p. 45. English translation by the author: (art. 2): the Commission is tasked with contributing to the development of scientific, cultural, and educational initiatives, as well as to fostering public awareness in Italy of the aims, programs, and activities of UNESCO. a) provides opinions and makes recommendations to the Government and public administrations on the program and activities of UNESCO. b) cooperates with the competent bodies in carrying out the decisions of the UNESCO General Conference. c) promotes, beyond its own scope, meetings and conferences of bodies and individuals engaged in cultural, scientific, and educational activities. d) carries out all functions entrusted to it by the Government. e) gives its opinion on the selection of members both of the delegations to the UNESCO General Conference and of the delegations to other meetings and events in the cultural, scientific, and educational fields promoted by UNESCO and related to it.

¹⁰⁸ U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*, pp. 51-53.

From 1930, until 1997, it was a subject of public law, making it a tool in the hands of the state for projecting its cultural influence globally. The government employed the *Biennale* not only inside the Italian territory, but also to hold expositions abroad. The president of the Biennale was appointed by the President of the Republic on a proposal made by the President of the Council of Ministers together with the Ministers of Public Education and of Tourism and Spectacle, from a roster of important names in the field of the arts, chosen by the mayor of Venice. Furthermore, the invitation to the event held in Venice every two years was sent through the conventional diplomatic communication channels, which highlights the officiality of its nature.¹⁰⁹ The first exposition since the end of the war was held in 1948, the XXIV *Biennale*, following a six-year interruption since the last one. The president of the foundation was the architect and designer Gio Ponti, who inaugurated the event dedicating a few words to the value of the arts, which unified peoples and went “beyond national frontiers, beyond ideological barriers”. The invited nations were 14, and each one brought artists and works of art from both past and present. France sent Chagall and Braque, The United Kingdom Turner and Henry Moore’s sculpture, and overall, the event saw the participation of many names of the contemporary art, among the others Klee, Delvaux, Ensor and Magritte. The exposition hosted a wide display of art, from impressionism to the avant-garde of the Peggy Guggenheim collection, presented by the art historian Giulio Carlo Argan. It’s interesting to note that in those years the government had fundamental involvement in the assignment of the awards, as many editions of the Venice based exposition had an award titled “*Premio Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*”, along with the award assigned by the city of Venice and the one by the Presidency of the *Biennale*. Ultimately, in 1948 the winners of the *Premio Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* were the French painter Georges Braque, and the British sculptor Henry Moore.¹¹⁰

A major role for the Italian cultural diplomacy was also played by think tanks, research centres for the comprehension of different cultures, and organizations which promoted the diffusion of the Italian language. Starting the list of the institutes for the comprehension of other cultures, the *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO)*, was founded in 1933, becoming a subject of public law in 1947, its purpose was to study the traditions, customs and all cultural expressions of the peoples of the East, both near and far, promoting the exchange of ideas, books and artistic expressions between Italy and foreign nations. Umberto Gori states that the institute had an important contribution and it committed a considerable effort in the diffusion of Asian cultures and languages in Italy, almost to

¹⁰⁹ U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*, pp. 41-42.

¹¹⁰ Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), *Annali delle Attività – Arti Visive: Biennale d'Arte 1948, La Biennale di Venezia*. <https://asac.labiennale.org/attivita/arti-visive/annali?anno=1948>.

the point of neglecting the diffusion of the Italian culture abroad which was also one of its primary objectives. The institute merged in 1995 with the *Istituto Italo-Africano* forming the *Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, which ceased all of its activities in 2012.¹¹¹

The last institution examined, and a fundamental corner stone of the Italian cultural diplomacy is the *Società Dante Alighieri*, a society with a long history, founded in 1889 by Giosuè Carducci, it is an autonomous non-profit organization which has the purpose of promoting the Italian language abroad. The aim of the society is «to carry out its activity through the promotion of culture and art, for the protection and diffusion of the Italian language and culture throughout the world, strengthening the ties of compatriots abroad with their homeland and fostering among foreigners a love for Italian culture, civilization, and language».¹¹² The society was created with a clear intention to distance itself from politics, but with the aim to serve the cultural unity of the nation in the context of the liberal Italy when the society was founded, thus the reference to Dante Alighieri, a symbol which could unify the nation as a whole. The *manifesto* of the society represents a historical document of the values of the Italian *Risorgimento*.

Italiani! intenti a compiere l'unità politica della nazione, noi italiani paremmo finora dimentichi che la patria non è tutta dentro i confini materiali dello Stato. Di tale dimenticanza ci fecero accorti gli stranieri, additandoci con l'esempio la necessità e il modo di ripararvi.

Tedeschi, Slavi e Francesi adoperandosi a tutelare e diffondere nei paesi di confine o disgiunti dalla madrepatria, la lingua, la cultura e il sentimento di essa, ci insegnano che dovunque suona un accento della lingua nostra, dovunque la civiltà nostra lasciò tradizioni, dovunque sono fratelli nostri che vogliono e debbono rimanere tali, ivi è un pezzo della patria che noi non possiamo dimenticare. Non solo, ma quanto quei fratelli nostri, per le condizioni particolari dei luoghi nei quali dimorano corrono maggior rischio di perdere, con la cognizione e l'uso della lingua italiana, la coscienza della patria, tanto noi abbiamo maggiore obbligo di accorrere in loro aiuto.

Istituzione di scuole, incitamenti a frequentarle, diffusione di libri aiuti ed incoraggiamenti ad ogni altra qualsiasi opera animata dagli stessi propositi, sono i mezzi che quelle nazioni straniere usarono e usano per conseguire il loro intento: e quei mezzi vogliamo usar noi.

Invitando a ciò gli Italiani ci è sembrato che nessun nome potesse consacrare più degnamente l'impresa nostra che il nome di DANTE ALIGHIERI.¹¹³

¹¹¹ U. GORI, *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*. p. 49.

¹¹² Dante Alighieri Society, *Statuto*, article 1. Translation provided by the author.

¹¹³ Dante Alighieri society, *Manifesto*. English translation by the author: «**Italians!** While intent on accomplishing the political unification of the nation, we Italians have until now seemed forgetful that the fatherland is not contained entirely within the material borders of the State. Foreigners made us aware of this neglect, pointing out to us by their example both the necessity and the means to remedy it. Germans, Slavs, and French, striving to protect and spread, in the borderlands or in territories separated from the mother country, their language, culture, and sense of national identity, teach us that wherever a word of our language is spoken, wherever our civilization has left traditions, wherever there are our brothers who wish and must remain such, there lies a part of the fatherland that we cannot forget. Moreover, the

The organization has been autonomous since its inception, becoming one of the first entities which promoted the Italian culture abroad. In the 1920s and 1930s, like many other autonomous institutions, it underwent a process of “fascistization”, as the regime attempted to control every cultural instrument of political interest with the aim of imposing its fascist ideology and to overlap it with the Italian spirit as a whole. In 1931 this process became evident with the publication of a new statute which marked an authoritarian turn, setting a political agenda for the regime’s action of propaganda. During the war, the society spread fascist ideology and it exerted influence on the Italian immigrants abroad making the governments of foreign countries hostile towards it, consequently, the majority of the committees of the *Dante* were closed or left unused and every communication with the central office stopped. In the years following the end of the war, an important effort of reorganization and recovery was employed to set the society back on track, once again inspired by liberal ideas of the Italian *Risorgimento*. The society wanted to distance itself from the presumptuous fascist rhetoric full of overly emphatic gestures by promoting a sober vision of the Italian, the *Uomo Dantesco*, referring to *Dante Alighieri* as its model.¹¹⁴

Since 1945, the lead of the society was entrusted to Umberto Calosso, socialist and antifascist, he envisioned for the society a return to a pacific model of cultural relations, to this regard he stated, “instead of an Ethiopian empire we will have a civil and cultural empire”. His efforts in this direction continued in 1946, when he decided to change some articles in the statute, modifying, among other things, the name of the organization, restoring it to *Società Dante Alighieri*, by removing the adjective *Nazionale* which had been added by the previous regime. In his renovation, he also opened the society to foreign people and attempted to create working class committees to approach more closely a larger number of people. Calosso wanted to widen the horizons of the *Dante Alighieri* by introducing, alongside the core activity of language teaching, other types of cultural expressions, in particular, he insisted on the importance of music, as a conspicuous number of people that studied the language was among the musicians and singers, passionate about the long Italian tradition in this field.¹¹⁵

greater the risk that these brothers of ours, owing to the particular conditions of the places where they dwell, might lose, together with the knowledge and use of the Italian language, the consciousness of their homeland, the greater is our duty to come to their aid. The establishment of schools, encouragement to attend them, the dissemination of books, and support and incentives for any other undertaking inspired by the same purposes are the means which those foreign nations have used and continue to use to achieve their aim, and these same means we wish to employ. In inviting Italians to this task, it seemed to us that no name could more worthily consecrate our undertaking than that of **Dante Alighieri**».

¹¹⁴ L. FOTIA, *La ‘Società Dante Alighieri’ come strumento di diplomazia culturale e la ricezione dell’opera dantesca nella cultura argentina*. Roma: Roma Tre Press. 2023. pp. 316-317.

¹¹⁵ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell’Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un’immagine (1945-1960)*, pp. 47-50.

The reconstruction of the society's activity proved to be difficult at first. All of the foreign committees were closed during the war except for those based in Argentina, and even for the few which remained active the Government did not valorise the potential role that they could have played in the recovery of the cultural relations with foreign countries. In fact, little by little the committees' functions were replaced by cultural institutes, which provided the language courses previously offered by the *Dante*, creating the necessity of differentiating the tasks of each institution. In countries which were former enemies, the situation was complicated, in Paris for example, the building where the society held its activity had been expropriated by the French government, the same happened in Tunis, due to the propagandistic function of the institutes under fascism. The British on their part were suspicious of the society's reopening in Egypt but allowed it on the condition that it would limit itself «to the cultural sphere only», and without receiving financial aid from the state.¹¹⁶

After Calosso, the presidency of the society was assumed by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, a prestigious figure of the liberal Italy who assumed the leadership of the organization in the complicated years of recovery. Having taken office in 1946, Orlando worked towards the restoration of all the activities of the society, often meeting various forms of opposition, and at the end of the year, assessed the situation in a letter to the presidents of the Italian committees. He stated that the year had been one of hard work and of encouraging reconstruction, and that after the destruction caused by the war, the society had reopened, or were under reorganization, 46 foreign committees, among which 31 were in Europe and 10 in central and south America. While in the US the *Dante* would meet more resistance, as the society was listed as a “subversive association” for the past activity during the fascist regime, making it impossible, for many years, to reopen a committee in the country. In the meanwhile, a new statute was adopted, marking several administrative changes, such as a prolongation of the mandate of the presidency and that of the central council. Under the lead of Orlando, the society continued to progress in its effort of recovery and by the end of 1948, not without difficulties, the first results started to emerge. Over the following years, in many cases the state-controlled cultural institutes and the autonomous *Dante Alighieri* began coordinating their work, in some instances even sharing the building where the two institutions took office. Eventually, the *Dante*, now recognized as an *Ente Morale*, (similar to non-profit organization), started working closely with diplomatic offices sending reports to the General Directorate of Cultural Relations while also receiving indications. In 1953, the foreign committees had become 112, while in 1946 they amounted to only 15. The committees were scattered across the globe, the majority being in Europe, with 72 seats, followed by the American continent, 20 seats, mainly in the southern part. Africa

¹¹⁶ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, pp. 47-57.

counted 12 committees, Asia 5 and lastly Oceania with 3, two of which in Australia and one in New Zealand. Further assessment revealed that the approximative number of people enrolled in the Italian courses held by the society were around 8000, and that the society owned a library heritage of 80000 volumes.¹¹⁷

The complicated recovery of the *Dante Alighieri* society played a major role in the restart of the cultural relations between Italy and the rest of the world. The work of the *Dante* further spread the Italian language and heritage while also protecting the roots of the emigrated communities overseas. Having to deal with the difficult task of restoring the trust lost by the action of the fascist regime, it accomplished remarkable results in facilitating the Italian cultural diplomacy with its apolitical approach and independence from the public institutions. As a private association, for the first years of its reconstruction it employed only private finances, and, although its work was intertwined with that of the public institutions, its supplementary role cannot be understated. As Giannini, vice president of the *Dante* stated, the purpose of the Society in the postwar period was to put itself forward to establish schools abroad wherever the State did not provide them “that is, on four-fifths of the face of the earth”, with lower expense for the Treasury and with a greater number of attendees.¹¹⁸

2.3 Italy and UNESCO

In the attempt of reconstructing the broader picture of the Italian cultural diplomacy, the role of UNESCO is of primary importance. As the main international organization oriented towards the protection of the different cultural expressions in the world, UNESCO is the most relevant centre for multilateral cultural cooperation, and it represented a fundamental space for the Italian action in this field. Since the end of the First World War, the idea of an international organization with tasks related to the protection of culture was in the air, and a few years later, as a branch of the League of Nations, the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation was created, with the opening ceremony taking place in Paris on the 16th of January 1926. The internal organizational structure was divided into six operative sections: General Business, University Relations, Scientific Relations, Artistic and Literary Relations, Legal Section and Information Section. The effort of the Institute met its end with the breakout of the second global conflict, but the ideas behind an international organization with similar characteristics never died. Thus, with the creation of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization was founded shortly after in November 1945. The organization took office in Paris, substituting the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation in its tasks and

¹¹⁷ A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, pp. 189-225.

¹¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 227.

duties.¹¹⁹ From the outset, the Italian government understood that the newly constituted organization could represent a major chance for the country to play a protagonist role in an important institution for multilateral cooperation. Overall, After the war had cancelled Italy's military relevance, the country's heritage and history were one of the few cards in the hand of the Italian government to recover a space in the global community. Following these premises, Italy tried to join UNESCO immediately at the London Conference, but the times were not yet ripe, and the country could only participate as an observer. Only following the sign of the Peace treaty Italy could join UNESCO in 1947, following a plenary assembly which approved the request of admission with a unanimous vote. Once Italy had been admitted, the first objective was to constitute a national commission, as expected by article seven of the UNESCO statute. This task required more time than foreseen, and in the meanwhile an interim commission prepared the work for the Italian participation.¹²⁰

On the 8th of November 1947, Italy sent a delegation to Mexico City, finally joining UNESCO. The delegation was formed by Guido De Ruggiero, Edoardo Amaldi and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli. De Ruggiero, president of the delegation, wrote a report to the Minister Carlo Sforza, informing the head of the *Farnesina* of the prevalent orientations inside the organization. In the report he also mentioned that Italy's participation was particularly welcomed, as the country's weak international political position made relationships easier, since nobody feared from Italy an instrumentalization of culture for political ends, while the same could not be said for the UK and France, to whom the small nations looked with diffidence. It's important to note Edoardo Amaldi's remarkable contribution, as the Italian representative for the scientific world, he had established important contacts with members of the interested parties, and he understood the mechanism of UNESCO's decision making. Amaldi had two main priorities to pursue, to push for the development of astronomical observatories in the Mediterranean area, and to propose the Italian *Istituto Nazionale per le Applicazioni del Calcolo* as a first nucleus for an international body with the same characteristics. For these objectives, Amaldi made contacts with important personalities, also belonging to the International Council of Scientific Unions, an intergovernmental organization which would turn out to be an important channel for the executions of many UNESCO projects. Thanks to the work of Amaldi and the French Pierre Auger, many years later, in 1954, the *Conseil européen pour la recherche nucléaire* (CERN) was created, with the constitutive convention signed at the UNESCO headquarters the previous year. Bianchi Bandinelli on his part, worked towards the

¹¹⁹ M. P. AZZARIO CHIESA, *L'Italia per l'UNESCO: 50 anni della Commissione Italiana*. Roma, Armando Editore, 1999. pp. 11-13.

¹²⁰ M. L. PARONETTO VALIER, *L'Italia e l'UNESCO*. In *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali: Diplomazia multilaterale nel Novecento*, a cura di L. Tosi, 127-148. Padova, Cedam, 1999. pp. 230-240

safeguard of the monuments and cultural heritage, offering to UNESCO the expertise of the Italian *Istituto Centrale di Restauro*, which later on became a model for the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property.¹²¹

From the beginning, the Catholic Church and the groups close to it were interested in UNESCO's activity and potential. Many thought that the Church could provide aid to the organization's programs thanks to its cultural efforts such as the mission of alphabetization around the world. Thus, in 1947 the Centre for the Catholic Coordination at UNESCO was created. In the following years, the Church was allowed as a permanent observer at UNESCO, and the Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Roncalli, future Pope John XXIII, was named as representative. The role of the Catholic society inside of the organization was prominent, and some of Italy's delegation members for UNESCO came from this cultural background. In particular, Stefano Jacini and Vittorino Veronese became two of the most relevant figures for UNESCO.¹²²

In 1948, UNESCO held in Beirut its third General Conference, the first official participation of the Italian delegation. The official National Commission still had not formed, and a provisional commission was created with members chosen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that of Public Education. The role of delegation's head was assumed by the Professor Stefano Jacini, followed by renowned names such as Eugenio Montale, Vittore Branca, Francesco Gabrieli and Luigi Fantappiè. The delegation was held in high esteem, and Jacini was appointed as one of the members of the Executive Council. The preparation for the Conference was rushed and arranged with little time, nonetheless, it was effective and productive. In this regard, Fantappiè and Branca were particularly successful. The first one entertained contacts with the US delegation and together pushed for the foundation of an International Computing Centre which will be opened some years later, the latter promoted the project regarding the translation and publishing of classics of world literature. The Italians also supported the initiative proposed by Egypt and Brazil on the creation of a committee for the preservation of monuments, historical sites and artistic heritage, following in the same spirit the work carried on by Bianchi Bandinelli in Mexico. The fourth General Conference was held in Paris, of short duration, from the 19th of September to the 5th of October. Jacini was president on this occasion too, and Fantappiè participated as well, proposing together with Pierre Auger the opening of international scientific laboratories. Another contribution came from the active participation by Giuseppe Vedovato who proposed pragmatic actions and posed interesting questions in an articulated speech.¹²³

¹²¹ M. L. PARONETTO VALIER, *L'Italia e l'UNESCO*. pp. 238-240.

¹²² *Ivi*. pp. 242-243.

¹²³ M. L. PARONETTO VALIER, *L'Italia e l'UNESCO*, pp. 243-245.

Only after three years since Italy had joined UNESCO, on the 11th of February 1950, the Italian National Commission for UNESCO was officially formed. The Commission was organized in five commissions: Education commission, Natural and Exact Sciences, Social Sciences, Cultural Activities, Information commission. Every commission was then divided into technical committees which dealt with a specific subject. The role of President of the Commission was assigned to Senator Alessandro Casati, assisted by Professor Vittore Branca who was named as Secretary General. The members of the Commission were chosen jointly by many institutions, mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Education in an effort to create a wide array of names which could represent both the central administration of the state and the many sectors of the cultural milieu. With regards to the creation of the National Commission, the President of the Council of the time, Alcide De Gasperi, was not convinced by the effectiveness of the newly constituted Commission, burdened by a complex structure and a high number of effective members, he stated that he signed the Commission's constitutive document without conviction in it. The high number of members of the Commission, though, was not much different from that of the United Kingdom's Commission or the French one, and the subdivision of the commissions into technical committees made it so that only one or two people worked on each specific subject.¹²⁴ With the creation of the Italian National Commission, its primary objectives were defined. Despite the lack of sufficient resources, the Commission pursued a "crusade against illiteracy", promoting programs to spread in the world the ability to read and write, a topic of relevance in Italy for the high number of illiterate people present in the country. A second and third objective was to give its contribution to the reconstruction of schools destroyed by the war, and the restoration of the contacts and cooperation of the scientific and intellectual community. Lastly, to foster with its work the legitimization of Italy's name in the arena of international cooperation, in need of rehabilitation after the defeat in the war.¹²⁵

Thanks to the highly appreciated work carried out during the first three years of the Italian participation, it was decided that the fifth UNESCO General Conference would be held in Italy, specifically in Florence inside the elegant halls of *Palazzo Pitti*. The honour of holding the General Conference was welcomed as a prestigious reward for the work done by the Italians in the organization, being one of the first internationally relevant events held in Italy since the end of the war. The Conference was well prepared by the Italian officials, and it resulted in interesting debates and dialogues full of proactive ideas to direct the work of the organization respecting the particular properties of all member state's cultures, while also recognizing UNESCO's international scope,

¹²⁴ L. MEDICI, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*, pp. 197-199.

¹²⁵ M. P. AZZARIO CHIESA, *L'Italia per l'UNESCO: 50 anni della Commissione Italiana*. p. 17.

ultimately, it was considered by many as a success. Italy brought 31 projects to the Conference's table and many important personalities of various sectors which presented proposals of action in their respective field of expertise. Among the others, the pedagogist Maria Montessori who spoke about themes related to education, Cesare Brandi for what concerned the restoration of historical and artistic objects and Branca achieved the publication of three series of classics, one of which on Italian authors. But they were not the only ones, the mathematician Francesco Severi and the engineer Gustavo Colonnetti, brought projects related to the sciences, in particular a proposal to organise a meeting among the National Research Council of the member states, while Francesco Vito suggested the opening of an International Centre of Social Sciences, a field of study that was at the time still relatively new. Lastly, the jurist Massimo Pilotti presented the draft of a document of international law about the protection and safeguard of cultural property which later on became the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Thanks to the success of the Conference, Stefano Jacini was elected as the President of the Executive council, which he held until his death in 1951.¹²⁶

Following the death of Stefano Jacini, the Italian Government decided to candidate Vittorino Veronese to complete Jacini's term in the Executive Council. Veronese was born in 1910, he was an intellectual close to the catholic society, graduated in 1930 in law with a thesis on the law of Vatican citizenship, he was involved in many of the Italian catholic movements, becoming in 1947 President of the *Azione Cattolica Italiana*. Interested in UNESCO, Veronese joined the Italian National Commission in 1948, soon becoming the intermediary between the organization and the Catholic world. After having served in the Executive Council from 1952 to 1954, he was re-elected the same year during the eight General Conference in Montevideo. Veronese's *cursus honorum* inside UNESCO would continue in the following years reaching the highest positions of the organization.¹²⁷

Following the fifth General Conference, for a few years, UNESCO was slowed down by a series of problems which shed light on the structural inefficiencies of the organization itself. Many critiqued the massive bureaucracy and the overly idealistic aims of the organization, calling for more pragmatism. In response to the dissatisfaction, General Director Torres Bodet resigned in 1952, accused of "elitism" and "excessive idealism". Maria Luisa Paronetto Valier provided a valuable perspective from inside the organization, leaving us some insightful remarks: «Within UNESCO we can find the weakness of an artificial structure, abstractly completed in all its parts, bureaucratically organized, and the weakness of an aesthetic and pragmatist morality, vaguely utopian and optimist, that is often reduced to a mechanism of words and concepts [...] Besides, the inadequacy of means

¹²⁶ M. L. PARONETTO VALIER, *L'Italia e l'UNESCO*. pp. 245-246.

¹²⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 247-248.

causes bitter disillusion also to the big public, that expects from UNESCO a more coherent adjustment to its noble education programs». From the words of Paronetto Valier it is possible to understand that many considered UNESCO's structure not aligned with the expectations and possibilities in regards of an organization of its importance. Despite the shortcomings, UNESCO managed to execute important programs and missions, such as the opening in 1951 of the International Centre for Fundamental Education and the creation of the 1952 Universal Copyright Convention, while also carrying out the translation in many languages of important literary, scientific and philosophical texts. The Paris based organization was also involved in the support during the crises of the Korean war, taking care of the reconstruction of the schools destroyed during the conflict.¹²⁸

In the same years, the Italian National Commission continued its work, obtaining several recognitions. First, in 1951 the Italian representatives managed to achieve that the new International Computation Centre would have its headquarters in Rome, a symbol of the importance of the Italian work inside the organization. Secondly, one year later the country was awarded the honour to host the Conference on Letters and Arts in Venice, on that occasion, the International Association of Plastic Arts was founded. On this occasion as well, the Italian authorities chose to include not only functionaries but also prominent figures from the arts in the committees, appointing Giuseppe Ungaretti as head of the cultural committee.¹²⁹

The year 1953 marked for UNESCO the election of a new General Director, the American Luther Evans. The new Director had in mind a clear goal to foster the promotion of UNESCO's activity to let the public opinion of the member states have a precise understanding of the organization's programs and results, to this aim he planned visits to the national commissions of many UNESCO member states. Among the others, Evans visited the Italian National Commission in November '53 and was welcomed in Rome at Villa Massimo. The event sparked an interesting exchange between the Director and the Italians about the perception of UNESCO among the Italian intellectuals, as the organization didn't enjoy a good reputation. The Italians explained to Evans that the public opinion was conditioned by a famous critique from Benedetto Croce who viewed UNESCO as a utopian organization which desired to unify the intellectuals of the world without respecting the manifold expressions of cultures and traditions. The Director then reassured the Italians that UNESCO's mission was not to create culture, but only «to protect culture and to facilitate the contact between civilizations and cultures». During the same period, the first quarterly *Bollettino di Informazioni* was

¹²⁸ M. P. AZZARIO CHIESA, *L'Italia per l'UNESCO: 50 anni della Commissione Italiana*. pp. 18-20.

¹²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 20.

drafted and published in November 1953, constituting an important medium to spread the knowledge of the organization's activity, and a valuable source for the historians.¹³⁰

The work of the Italian Commission met a political crisis in 1954, the president of the Commission, Casati, left his position to Ambassador Egidio Reale, and the many difficulties led to an interruption of Commission's functions, resumed the following year in 1955. In February, at Palazzo Venezia in Rome, the International Traveling Exhibition was opened, showing the works of children from 6 to 14 years old. The following years marked for the Italian National Commission for UNESCO a strong revival, with the election of Vittorino Veronese as President of the Executive Council, a term that he will serve from 1956 to 1958, when he will receive the greatest honour inside the organization, the position of General Director. Veronese held the position from 1958 to 1961, when he resigned due to health issues. During those years, he oversaw numerous projects and conferences, one of which was the famous rescue of the Egyptian temples from the flooding caused by the Nasser's dam on the Nile, which would have submerged famous monuments such as the Abu Simbel and Philae temples. Under Veronese, UNESCO coordinated an impressive, never before seen international effort which employed the world's most prominent archaeologists and scholars.¹³¹

The election of Veronese as the General Director of UNESCO was another sign that Italy had regained a certain prestige among the international community and it could hold the most important institutional role in a branch of the United Nations, unsurprisingly, in the organization in which the country could best represent its historical heritage and values. The period of the Italian post-war recovery could be considered complete after a long decade. The positive political reconstruction, the reinvigoration and rejuvenation of the economic miracle led to the country's rebirth which was crowned by a set of international recognitions such as the entrance in the United Nations in 1955, the election of Veronese as General Director of UNESCO in 1958 and the honour of being the host of the 1960 Olympiads.

¹³⁰ M. P. AZZARIO CHIESA, *L'Italia per l'UNESCO: 50 anni della Commissione Italiana*, p. 21-23.

¹³¹ M. L. PARONETTO VALIER, *L'Italia e l'UNESCO*. In *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali: Diplomazia multilaterale nel Novecento*. pp. 248-249.

Chapter 3

Cinema as soft power

3.1 Neorealism and post-war Italy

A third thread of not less importance revolves around the cultural sphere and the influence exerted by the cultural production of the Italian people in the aftermath of the Second World War. Along with the political and economic efforts, Italy's recovery was aided by the world of culture with many Italian authors gaining international echo and becoming forefront ambassadors for their country.

Over the years, the interest in the many artistic and cultural expressions of the defeated Italy reignited a fascination in people from all over the world. The diffusion regarded not only the classic fields of the visual arts and literature but also the multifaceted forms of the popular tradition such as music and cuisine. Freed from the authoritarian regime the Italian peninsula with all of its attractive landscapes and sceneries, historical cities and monuments, generated an influx of tourists eager to see in person what in the past they could only read in specialized books. For a general assessment, the role of the catholic church cannot be overlooked. The central position of the Vatican City and the Holy See in the city of Rome, as the head of one of the largest faiths in the world attracted, both in the past and today, an important mass of people who is connected to a religious institution that is inevitably intertwined with the history of Italy. Little by little, the new Italian Republic could extend the reach of its cultural production, both spontaneously, thanks to the international appeal of the arts, and in a systematic way, through government aid and its diplomatic activity. In other words, Italy started to tap into the conspicuous potential constituted by its long and rich participation in many artistic expressions. Italy's cultural heritage contributed greatly to the restart of the economic activities in the second afterwar, such a thesis was upheld by the Canadian economist John Kenneth Galbraith who provided a reading of the reconstruction period claiming that: "the real reason (of Italy's reconstruction) is that Italy has incorporated into its products an essential component of culture, and cities such as Milan, Parma, Florence, Siena, Venice, Rome, Naples and Palermo, while having very poor infrastructure, display in their standard of living a huge amount of beauty".¹³² Over

¹³² M. DANESI, *The Role of Culture Heritage in Commercial Development and Tourism*. Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management 2017, no. 3 (2017). <https://symphonya.unicusano.it/article/view/2017.3.05danesi/11506>.

the years, Italy's cultural resources were recognized and in some instances the peninsula was defined by media and political figures as a "cultural superpower".

As a fundamental asset of the Italian state, culture represents one of the main components of its "soft power", a concept theorized by the American professor Joseph Nye as "the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment".¹³³ In that regard, it could be said that Italy managed to influence the tastes of peoples all over the world with its aesthetic models developed through the ages. In this context, many artistic forms contributed to the projection of Italy's soft power. Without a doubt literature and visual arts, music and theatre; in this respect, it is difficult to find a field of the arts without a notable Italian contribution. For the sake of this thesis this chapter will focus on cinema, one of the arts which contributed greatly to the development of the international image of Italy in the reconstruction period.

The use of cinema as a form of propaganda or simply as an instrument to capture the sympathies of a foreign population was employed by the information services of the great powers during and after World War II. Italy was the recipient of the United States cinema policy which projected a notable influence on the peninsula since the landing on Sicilian shores in July 1943. The Americans were concerned about opinion movements, and in order to direct them in their favour the Office of War Information spread American democratic values by showing the heroic allied effort in fighting Nazi fascism freeing Italian cities. Cinema would be the perfect medium to convey these messages. At first, during the allied occupation the Americans had to carry out a preliminary work of removal of the obstacles for a free film market in Italy, as the fascist government had strong central control over the film industry through a series of laws that limited the free circulation of movies. While the diplomatic representatives and the military administration offices worked with the Badoglio and the Bonomi governments to reach that objective, another body, the Psychological Warfare Branch, was responsible for the diffusion of films in the country. Documentaries, short and full-length films were shown in the theatres. One of the first attempts was carried out in Tanger on the 17th of August 1944, when a cinema screening was organized in an Italian colony, receiving from the audience encouragingly positive feedback. The Italian general Consul noted that not even a visit from the *segretario del fascio* provoked such a response from the public. The program of that day comprised of films on the liberation of Rome, an animated movie by Walt Disney, a visit by Tito to De Gaulle and a long documentary titled "steel at the service of men".¹³⁴

¹³³ J. S. NYE, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. 2004, New York: Public Affairs.

¹³⁴ G. P. BRUNETTA, *Il Cinema Neorealista Italiano, Storia Economica, Politica e Culturale*. 2009, Bari: Editori Laterza. pp. 150-155.

Following the requests of the American officials to abolish the fascist laws on the limitations of the film market, Bonomi stated: “there do not appear to be any valid reasons why the revival of this industry should be opposed today. From an economic standpoint, our film production, now that the monopolistic conditions of the past have fallen, will be able to find, on a level field of fair competition, its natural conditions for life and development, without imposing heavy and futile financial burdens on the State”.¹³⁵ Later on, Parri’s government with the law of 20 September 1945 freed film imports from the fascist constraints.

While the American film industry captured the interest of the Italians that flooded the theatres, at the same time some films, in a much inferior number, were exported from Italy to the United States. Among the others, some films found success and appraisal oversea, this thread was called by many critics: “neorealism”. Since Visconti’s *Ossessione* of 1943, the term was used to describe a series of movies linked by a certain affinity for the depiction of common people’s everyday life. Neorealist cinema perfectly describes the atmosphere and context of post-war Italy, as the period of diffusion of this current is set between 1943 and 1955, twelve years that run from the armistice to the economic miracle. Among the noteworthy figures, the protagonists were Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Vittorio De Sica, film directors that were deeply marked by the war, event that changed their approach to the seventh art.¹³⁶

As with most of the arts, the Second World War had a profound impact on Italian cinema. The suffering and harsh reality of human condition during and after the war constituted a fertile soil for directors to propose a sharp cinema, emptied of the regime’s pompous rhetoric, with a straightforward directing style that aimed at removing any layer of fiction between the film and the spectator. Freed from the bounds of fascist ideology, the directors can now depict the true everyday reality of the Italian people. The characters are usually common people that struggle to make ends meet, described with all their faults and merits. The actors are often non-professionals taken from the streets and masterfully directed towards the creation of a picture that remains as close to real life as possible. On the role of the actors in defining neorealism is Rossellini himself that interviewed by Mario Verdone states: «[...] the formula, if we can call it that, of Neorealism gradually took shape through the spontaneous creations of its actors: Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi in particular. Who could deny that it was these actors who first embodied Neorealism? [...] Neorealism was born, unconsciously, as

¹³⁵ E. DI NOLFO, *Documenti sul ritorno del cinema americano in Italia nell'immediato dopoguerra*, in *Gli intellettuali in trincea: Politica e cultura nell'Italia del dopoguerra*, ed. by Saveria Chemotti. 1977, Padova: CLEUP. p. 135. Excerpt translated from Italian.

¹³⁶ On Neorealist cinema see the works of Gian Piero Brunetta: *Storia del cinema italiano*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993. *Storia del neorealismo italiano*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1982.

a dialect film; it then acquired awareness in the midst of the human and social problems of the war and the postwar period».¹³⁷

Possibly the first film which truly embodies neorealism, *Roma Città Aperta* (Rome open city) by Rossellini, was projected in the theatres on the 27th of September 1945, a few months after the end of the German occupation of Rome. The screen writers, Rossellini, Fellini and Amidei started writing the movie before the city's liberation, drawing from fresh experiences they painted a picture of partisan resistance and fight against the Nazi oppressor. The plot of the movie revolves around the struggles of Manfredi, a partisan leader, who seeks help from the priest Don Fabrizio and Pina, a working-class woman, to evade capture. The tragedy of the movie is centred on the cruelty of the German invader and the hardships of war, showing the nobility of spirit of simple people who resist against the gestapo, and the moral corruption of the weak that betray the protagonists, leading to their deaths. Rome Open City is a movie that did not receive high praise in Italy when it first was distributed in the cinemas, possibly the memory of the occupation was still too fresh in the minds of the Italians, but it was met with enthusiasm abroad, especially in the United States and in France.¹³⁸

Following the example of Rome Open City other pictures of neorealist cinema were applauded internationally by the critics. Rossellini followed Rome open city with many other films. Among them *Paisà* and *Germania anno zero* are generally considered together with Rome open city as the “war trilogy”. Apart from Rossellini, Visconti and De Sica, many film directors contributed to the development of neorealism. Some noteworthy names include: Alberto Lattuada, Renato Castellani, Luigi Zampa, Alessandro Blasetti, Aldo Vergano, Giuseppe De Santis and Pietro Germi.¹³⁹

With the diffusion of the Italian cinema abroad the image of the Italians improved significantly. The films' capability to inform and entertain at the same time was a powerful instrument to create sympathies for Italy in many countries. In the years from '45 to '47 cinema offered an effective medium to convey more information than what a centralised diplomatic effort could have done. A characteristic of some early neorealist films was their ideological neutrality, as the focus of the director was on the representation of the effects of war and poverty on lower classes which were victims of the political ideas of the elites. Rome Open City constitutes an example, as the picture includes two figures, Manfredi and Don Fabrizio, the first being a communist and the latter a catholic priest, they are ideologically distant, but tolerant of each other. Gian Piero Brunetta affirms

¹³⁷ Mario Verdone interviews Rossellini.

¹³⁸ Barrett, Alex. “*Rome, Open City: Roberto Rossellini's Great Leap for Realism on Screen.*” BFI, May 15, 2024. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/rome-open-city-roberto-rossellinis-great-leap-realism-screen>.

¹³⁹ G. P. BRUNETTA. *Il cinema neorealista italiano: Da “Roma città aperta” a “I soliti ignoti.”* 2009, Roma: Laterza.

this idea while commenting Rome, Open City: “in practice, there is no longer any need to impose an ideology in an authoritarian way. In Rome, Open City, multiple worldviews confront one another without any of them necessarily having to overpower the others. The margin of tolerance, political openness, the sense of solidarity, and the shared effort in the anti-fascist struggle come before ideological differences and, in a certain sense, prevent them from being perceived as a dividing element”.¹⁴⁰

For this impartiality and vivid depiction of life without political lenses Italian cinema was appreciated by countries of western and eastern blocs alike. During the brief period of exchanges between Italy and Poland, before the intensification of the Cold War and eastern Europe’s closure, the diplomatic documents showed a certain interest from the Polish authorities towards Italian films:

Il suo sottosegretario è stato ancora più esplicito. Egli mi ha detto che, indipendentemente da quelle che possono essere le attuali transitorie difficoltà, occorre intensificare le nostre relazioni, oltre che commerciali anche e particolarmente culturali. Il signor Berman è sceso in dettagli, parlando del successo che alcuni film italiani avevano avuto in Polonia ed auspicando uno scambio non solo nel campo cinematografico, ma anche in quelli del teatro e della letteratura. Mi ha detto che avrebbe sollecitato il Ministero della cultura polacco di preparare opportuni elementi in relazione alla visita che io farò colà in un secondo tempo.¹⁴¹

Mr. Berman refers to the commercial success that Italian cinema was having in Poland in 1948, asking for more cultural cooperation in general. Poland was not the only country to show this kind of appreciation about Italian cinema; the feeling was diffused in other country of the eastern bloc. In Hungary, for example, the communist authorities were particularly enthusiast about De Sica’s *Ladri di Biciclette* (Bicycle thieves). The movie, released in the cinemas in 1948, tells the story of a family man, Antonio Ricci, and his young son Bruno. Antonio manages to find a job as a bill sticker, but in order to be assigned the job owning a bicycle was a mandatory requirement. After pawning the family blankets to obtain the bicycle, Antonio starts working to finally earn a salary. During the first day at work, a thief steals Antonio’s bicycle, who starts to desperately look for it around the corners of Rome. During the unfortunate journey alongside his son Bruno, Antonio finds the thief, but unfortunately,

¹⁴⁰ G. P. BRUNETTA. *Il cinema neorealista italiano: Da “Roma città aperta” a “I soliti ignoti.”* 2009, Roma: Laterza, p. 301.

¹⁴¹ Italian Diplomatic Documents, TELESPR. URGENTE 16/05. Warsaw, 18 January 1948, ambassador De Astis to the foreign affairs minister Sforza. English translation: «His Undersecretary was even more explicit. He told me that, regardless of the current temporary difficulties, it is necessary to intensify our relations, not only commercial ones, but especially cultural. Mr. Berman went into detail, speaking of the success that certain Italian films had enjoyed in Poland and expressing the hope for an exchange not only in the field of cinema, but also in those of theatre and literature. He told me that he would urge the Polish Ministry of Culture to prepare appropriate materials in connection with the visit I will make there at a later date».

he does not have proofs against him and a policeman tells him that he cannot do anything about it. Ultimately, without any hope left, Antonio tries to steal another man's bicycle, but he is caught and shamed by the crowd of bystanders. The film reflects on the sad reality of the poor people who have to resort to criminality for necessity, and the unforgiving environment of the post-war Rome which turns people against each other in a *mors tua vita mea* competition to survive.¹⁴²

The Hungarian communist party interpreted this proletarian struggle as the demonstration of the ruthlessness of the capitalist free market and welcomed the movie as a reminder of the inadequacy of the capitalist society and western model. It appears from the diplomatic documents that in May 1950, *Bicycle thieves* was projected in nine Budapest theatres at the same time. In that occasion, the Hungarian communists attached at the end of the movie some scenes of Togliatti's political rallies in Rome, Milan and Naples, accompanied by a propagandistic text which affirmed that what was depicted in the movie would not repeat again thanks to the efforts of Togliatti and the Italian communist party. Furthermore, the chant of the red flag was played during the last scenes of the movie. Over the days that followed the newspapers commented the movie dwelling on the effectiveness of the picture in showing the oppression exerted by the capitalists and the Catholic Church on the Italian population.¹⁴³

Turning the focus to France, the Italian pictures obtained considerable success and were warmly welcomed by the French population. Italian neorealism could find on the other side of the Alps a fertile ground made of a longstanding tradition in the field of cinema. The diffusion of the films was aided by the work of several critics who recognized the value of the Italian pictures. Among them, André Bazin and Jean George Auriol had a significant impact on the introduction of Italian cinema into French theatres. Bazin wrote numerous articles and pieces reviewing neorealist movies pointing out that the origin of this prolific production emerged from the ashes of fascism, in fact, he referred to the current of neorealism as "the Italian school of liberation". Among the others, Bazin wrote for journals and magazines such as *Esprit*, *Le Parisien libéré* and *L'Observateur*. He is also the founder of the cinema specialised magazine, *Cahiers du cinéma* (1951). The French critic was particularly interested in the way neorealist cinema created a new language, a different one compared to American cinema which was characterised by a predominant use of montage: «Italian neorealism contrasts with previous forms of film realism in its stripping away of all expressionism and in particular in the total absence of the effects of montage. As in the films of Welles and in spite of conflicts of style,

¹⁴² See, Vittorio De Sica, *Ladri di Biciclette*. Produzioni De Sica, 1948.

¹⁴³ L. MEDICI, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*. CEDAM, Padova, 2009, pp. 188-189.

neorealism tends to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality».¹⁴⁴ Jean George Auriol's involvement was also fundamental in the diffusion and recognition of Italian cinema in France. Auriol lived between Paris and Rome for many years, fascinated by the Italian film industry, he worked to create bridges between the French and Italian cinematic communities. After the war he founded a cinema magazine, the *Revue de cinéma*, where he wrote articles on the seventh art dedicating considerable space to the analysis of neorealism. Worthy of mention is the issue of May 1948, entirely dedicated to Italian cinema, as he considered that "In Europe, if not in the world, the head of cinema is to be found in Rome". Auriol was active in the diffusion of many pictures, he organised many projections inside the large network of French cine-clubs and he was particularly known for his vivid interest towards Alessandro Blasetti and Renato Castellani's works.¹⁴⁵

Another influential actor in the diffusion of Italian cinema in France was the ambassador Pietro Quaroni, protagonist of post-war Italian diplomacy. Quaroni recognized the appreciation by the French for Italian movies and understood the potential use of this art in the promotion of Italian cultural diplomacy, as one of the few instruments that could help for a rapprochement between Italy and France in the years that followed the war. Quaroni stated that after the arrival of neorealism in the cinemas his mission became easier and that he could perceive an improvement in the overall feeling of the French society towards Italy. The ambassador also collaborated with French critics for the diffusion of the pictures in the country, for example, he was present at the French *première* of the movie *è primavera...* by Renato Castellani. In that occasion, the film was accompanied by a comment of Jean George Auriol who celebrated the picture.¹⁴⁶

Ultimately, neorealism was the protagonist of Italian cinema during the period of reconstruction, painting a faithful image of the country's social, economic and moral struggles. Other than its artistic value, it emerged as an impactful element for the Italian cultural diplomacy. Indeed, many films were effective in conveying the dramas of poor people and managed to successfully create a sympathetic bond between the viewer and the protagonists. These movies presented a different image of Italy, one that was in stark contrast with the magniloquent rhetoric that was pushed by the fascist regime which tried to force a narrative based on the alleged cultural superiority of Italy. While the fascist idea of grandeur could be off-putting, neorealism portrayed a humbling representation of the Italian society in a historical period in which many countries were suffering with the consequences of the war. This contributed to a spread in awareness of the situation that was occurring in Italy and provide a sense

¹⁴⁴ A. BAZIN, *What Is Cinema?* Vols. 1–2. 1967–1971. Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁴⁵ Gheller, Enrico, and Laurent Husson. *Jean George Auriol (1907-1950), a Critic Mediator between Rome and Paris*. *Cinergie – Il Cinema e le altre Arti* 12, no. 23 (2023): 25-35. <https://cinergie.unibo.it/article/view/16388/16575>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

of desolation that could cool down the latent resentments which lingered on in countries that were former enemies.

3.2 *The new Italy of “La Dolce Vita”*

Halfway through the 1950s the neorealist film production came to an end. Many critics consider De Sica’s *Umberto D.* (1952) as the last movie of this thread. The reasons for the conclusion of this cinematographic season are many, increasing opposition from the Christian Democrats, the possible exhaustion of arguments and the appeal of new perspectives to be found in the shifts of the Italian society are among them. Some explanations are provided by André Bazin who summarises the epilogue of this cinematographic parenthesis: «By this time, however, postwar neorealism was rapidly waning as the burning social and political causes that had stimulated the movement were to some extent alleviated or glossed over by increasing prosperity. In a society becoming ever more economically as well as politically conservative, nobody wanted to throw away his capital on yet another tale of hardship and heartbreak on the side streets of Rome».¹⁴⁷ Italian cinema reflected the improving conditions of the Italians, changing subjects and turning the focus to other elements of analysis.

The movies that follow *Umberto D.* mark a transition from neorealism to a new form of auteur cinema that expanded the realm of cinematography to the characters’ inner struggles. These movies of transition still maintain certain characteristics of neorealism, but it is already possible to catch a glimpse of a new direction. Films such as *I Vitelloni* by Federico Fellini (1953), or Rossellini’s *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) start with a representation of the exterior condition of the Italian society, developing in a nuanced intimate construction. In *I Vitelloni*, Fellini describes the life in the Italian provinces, where insufficient roads and the lack of communications still excluded portion of territory. This film is already a shift from the neorealist paradigm as the ethical cinema of denunciation of the 1940s and early 1950s is surpassed by Fellini that describes the existential immobilism of five characters. He does so with irony, humour and a poetics of a distant memory. *Viaggio in Italia* by Rossellini had a profound impact on cinema, Jacques Rivette defined it as the movie that invented modern film-making. The movie revolves around a British couple on a trip in the south of Italy, the couple is distant, detached and has problem of communication, but in the end there’s a hint of a possible reconciliation. Fellini focuses on the interior problems of the couple, showing the psychological sides of the nature of his characters.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ B. CARDULLO, *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*. 2011, London and New York: Continuum. p. 27.

¹⁴⁸ J. RIVETTE. *Lettre sur Rossellini*. Cahiers du cinéma, no. 46 (April 1955).

During this period, comedy was also a genre which reflected the nuanced reality of the Italian people. The tragic dimension of movies set in the reconstruction era gives way to a more cheerful atmosphere. Simple life and ragged clothes are not a tragic sign of poverty, but they are now characteristic folklore, or *colore locale*, as described by Gian Piero Brunetta, who describes this genre as follows: «comedy brings their rags ‘into the open air,’ revealing to their eyes landscapes that were new and, until not long before, forbidden. It is a postcard-like Italy, where a crowd of characters and caricatures moves almost in unison, driven by shared desires and by a rapid adaptation to new forms of socialization». ¹⁴⁹ These movies typically depicted scenes that could be seen every day exaggerated for comic purposes, offering images of Italy with landscapes of the countryside and small towns that were until then unknown on the big screen. According to Brunetta, this thread was influenced by the success of American movies like “Summertime” or “Roman Holidays”, which obtained a worldwide fame, strongly contributing to the creation of the charming image of Italy. Italian comedy enjoyed the novelty of the colours on the pictures, innovation which developed in the second half of the 1950s, enhancing the beauty of the landscapes shown in the films. As a consequence, movies such as *Souvenir d’Italie* by Antonio Pietrangeli, *Venezia, la luna e tu* by Dino Risi, *Vacanze a Portofino* by Hans Deppe, *Costa Azzurra* by Vittorio Sala, *Avventura a Capri* by Giuseppe Lipartiti, *Tre straniere a Roma* by Claudio Gora, *Camping* by Franco Zeffirelli could be effective advertisements for what the country could offer, and in these years the flow of tourism increased considerably. ¹⁵⁰

The genre would then develop towards a more ironic blend between comedy and drama in certain works by Monicelli, Comencini and Risi. The intent behind the realisation of some of these films was not simply to induce laughter, but also to be thought provoking and show human struggle, resulting more tragicomic than pure comedy. The first example is *I soliti ignoti* by Mario Monicelli (1958) which is about an inconclusive and arranged group of burglars that want to pull off a heist that would lift them from the struggles of poverty. Along the funny and comic scenes, the viewer is left with a bitter laughter from the awareness that some of the absurd events that happen to the protagonists do not stray too far away from the reality of low-income citizens in those years.

Without a doubt, the most influential movie of this period is Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita*, a film that had such a profound and diffused impact that its images and symbols still linger on today. One, for example, is the figure of the gossip journalist who follows celebrities around their private lives for a scoop, which is personified by the figure of *Paparazzo*, a character that embodied this role so perfectly that the name came to be used worldwide to call a category of journalists. Another

¹⁴⁹ G. P. BRUNETTA. Il cinema neorealista italiano: Da “Roma città aperta” a “I soliti ignoti.” 2009, Roma: Laterza. p. 510.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

symbol, and the most relevant for the scope of this thesis, is the ideal of the easy-going Italian lifestyle, one that would take the name after this movie, and which remains still today. Even after the end of the economic boom, despite economic crises and recessions, around the world Italy is still sometimes remembered as the country of the “sweet life”. The title of the film is an effective formula which concisely summarises the spirit of a nation, often idealised and exaggerated, it became a slogan associated to the peninsula to the point that Italy is sometimes referred to as “the country of *la dolce vita*”.

La dolce vita's first advent on the screen was a source of discussion and controversies, on one side, international critique praised the movie as a masterpiece of Italian cinema, on the other, components of the civil society accused it of being scandalous and immoral. It is evident that the movie sparked discussions and debates around the world and ultimately it became one of the most beloved Italian pictures. The movie follows some episodes of the life of Marcello Rubini, a young journalist who dreams of being a writer, around the private parties of the Roman nightlife. Marcello looks for gossip to write pieces about the capital's social life protagonists, movie stars, aristocrats and artists. As Marcello delves deeper into this glamorous world of pleasures and appearances his internal struggle emerges. He feels the call to look for something less superficial, more profound, but he is captured by the corruptive environment of the frenetic Roman jet set.¹⁵¹

Even though in Italy reviews were not positive at first, the movie was welcomed by the international audience with highly positive feedback and in a few weeks the box office revenues surpassed the production costs. It was nominated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for three categories, and it was awarded the Oscar for the best costume design. The movie received many critiques; one signed by Bosley Crowther was among the first to provide a full review after the release in the theatres. Crowther provides an enthusiastic picture of the movie, describing the episodes and nuances put on screen by Fellini. The piece was published on the New York Times's issue 20th April 1961:

Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" ("The Sweet Life"), which has been a tremendous hit abroad since its initial presentation in Rome early last year, finally got to its American premiere at Henry Miller's Theatre last night and proved to deserve all the hurrahs and the impressive honors it has received. For this sensational representation of certain aspects of life in contemporary Rome, as revealed in the clamorous experience of a free-wheeling newspaper man, is a brilliantly graphic estimation of a whole swath of society in sad decay and, eventually, a withering commentary upon the tragedy of the over-civilized.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Federico Fellini, *La dolce vita*. Riama Film, 1960.

¹⁵² Bosley Crowther, *Fellini Film Lives Up to Foreign Hurrahs*, The New York Times, April 20, 1961.

Other reviews confirm more or less the same interpretation of the movie. Fellini's film was well received, and it sparked curiosity among the viewers for the scandalous scenes represented. Another contemporary review reiterates the controversial nature of the movie. It was published on the Oakland's Tribune and signed by Theresa Loeb Cone:

"La Dolce Vita" or "The Sweet Life." The subject of many heated discussions ever since it was made in Italy early last year, opened in San Francisco yesterday in a two-theater screening at the Clay and Larkin designed to accommodate the hordes of moviegoers expected to attend its showing. Directed by Federico Fellini, whose "La Strada" made movie history both as a work of art and a successful commercial venture. "La Dolce Vita" is, of course, an ironic title to point up the degradation, bitterness, disillusionment and heartbreak experienced by the denizens of Rome's cafe society seemingly at their wits' end inventing new ways to enjoy all the pleasures of the flesh money can buy.¹⁵³

La Dolce Vita's first appearance in the American theatres was a commercial success and in the following days the movie reached a considerable diffusion in the country. Fellini skilfully crafted a story which weaved together intrinsically characteristic elements of the local Roman nightlife with typically American Hollywood actors and the international jet set, providing interesting novelties for the American spectator who is, at the same time, brought back to a more familiar reality. This is explained by Crowther in a piece for the NY Times on the issue 23d April 1961:

To most of us American moviegoers, the authenticity of the episodes and, indeed, of the total demonstration may not be as incontestable and richly appreciated as it has been to audiences in Italy, where events identical to these (or similar to them) have actually occurred and, what is more important, have been elaborately reported in the press. Most recognizable to our people will probably be the episode with the Hollywood star, who is splendidly played by Anita Ekberg with autobiographical overtones. The trenchant sarcasm in this playlet, the howling take-off of a famous sex-symbol who oozes mawkish sentiment and childish platitudes, is certain to hit home with us and light up a self-revealing facet of the image of the American abroad. But anyone who has the slightest knowledge of the nature of the "international set," eminently represented by elements in the United States, cannot fail to credit Signor Fellini's document or grasp the more profound commentary that runs through his film.¹⁵⁴

The success of the movie and the attracted audience signalled an interest towards the worldly life of movie stars, aristocrats and Roman intellectuals, but the ironic undertones of the movie and the social critique for the emptiness of the exterior and superficial life of the Roman élites (similarly to the

¹⁵³ Theresa Loeb Cone, "*La Dolce Vita*," Oakland Tribune (1961), accessed via CineFiles, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, <https://cinefiles.bampfa.berkeley.edu/catalog/18508>.

¹⁵⁴ Bosley Crowther, *La Dolce Vita: Fellini's Urbane Film Looks Askance at Life*, The New York Times, April 23, 1961.

reality of other “over civilized” countries, as expressed by Crowther), contrast with the myth of the “sweet life” as it crystallised and is perceived today. In fact, the sarcastic picture painted by the film was almost ignored by the consumer society, while the glamorous aspects remained. As noted by the British film scholar and historian Stephen Gundle, the origin of the myth of *la dolce vita* (this time not referred to the film but to the lifestyle) is strictly related to the rise of glamour in the 1950s Italy. Gundle’s analysis begins from the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary’s definition of glamour as an elusive, mysteriously exciting and often illusory attractiveness that stirs the imagination and appeals to a taste for the unconventional, the unexpected, the colourful, or the exotic. The concept of glamour is considered as a subproduct of a consumerist capitalist society, and a consequence of material dreams such as images of wealth, beauty, elegance, style, and sex appeal.¹⁵⁵

The economic growth of the 1950s and the rise of consumptions was a prerequisite for the creation of the Italian glamour, luxury firms and companies attracted both the domestic and international public while the cinema industry was an effective tool to convey advertisements. The model for the construction of this phenomenon was the United States, which had exercised a potent allure on the Italian masses during and after the war. Images of everyday comfort with home appliances, fashion clothing, cigarettes and overall better living standards were depicted through American movies. Together with the images of the American everyday life, the high lifestyle of celebrities represented both in movies and in magazines introduced the world of glamour to the Italians. Italian families that were rising from poverty saw images of glossy American stars with perfect hairstyles and charming garments and sought to get closer to those living standards. Italian companies during the economic expansion of 1950s tried to provide to the Italians goods and services that could mimic the American lifestyle. Evidently, the majority of the population could only aspire and look from afar at the vanity and pleasures of the wealthy élites, indeed, while the average spending of the Italian families increased, wide pockets of poverty still persisted in the country.¹⁵⁶

As mentioned earlier, the world of cinema had an influential impact on the development of this process. The success of neorealism in the second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s had introduced postwar Italy to the world, with certain images of the country producing interest abroad. As explained by Stephen Gundle, “the cult of Mediterranean beauty that prospered in Italian films in the 1950s owed something to the global success of neorealism, with its downbeat yet strong heroines and its rejection of the glamorous. But it owed more to the determination of Italian producers and directors

¹⁵⁵ S. GUNDLE, “Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3. 2002. pp. 95-99.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

to apply some of the lessons of Hollywood as they perceived them”.¹⁵⁷ Early postwar cinema communicated the simplicity and sacrifices of the life in Italy, inserted in the beautiful countryside landscapes while also conveying a sincere, genuine atmosphere of authenticity in the overcoming of hardships.

At the same time, Cinema was the medium through which American culture and glamour entered and spread into the Italian peninsula and appeal to the people. Rome in particular became the centre of this modernization further accelerated by the presence of American film productions in the city. In fact, starting in the early 1950s, American film makers and producers moved to Rome’s Cinecittà studios to shoot movies at a cheaper price, this activity was concisely called by the journal “Time”, “Hollywood on the Tiber”, as the title of a piece published in 1950. The article reported on the development of the film “Quo Vadis”, at the time the movie with highest budget ever produced.¹⁵⁸ In the years that followed, many international movies were directed in the halls of Cinecittà, among which there were *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Cleopatra* (1963).¹⁵⁹ Together with the movie production, movie directors and stars started to frequent the Roman nightlife, especially around the area of *Via Veneto*, creating the famed environment captured by Fellini. Newspapers and magazines (e.g. in Italy, *Oggi*, in the US, *Confidential*) started to write about celebrities’ private life, commenting and analysing their clothes, hairstyles, jewellery and everything associated to aesthetic features, it was the years of Marilyn Monroe and Rita Hayworth, influential pop icons of the time. Before long, Italian pop icons started to emerge in domestic cinema following the American model, and after the international success of Italian movies they became known abroad and spread the new Italian way of life. Actresses such as Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren charmed with their beauty and elegance, creating interest towards Italy and Italian cinema, consequently, Lollobrigida and Loren’s travels abroad to promote their movies were also occasions to advertise brands and labels.¹⁶⁰

Overall, Italy did not passively absorb the ideas, models and consumption pattern of the American people, but it shaped them according to its own cultural values and traditions. The Italian model that appealed abroad was that of the Mediterranean beauty, the allure of the ancient mixed with the modern, fashion and fast cars. Fellini brilliantly reproduced on the screen this luxurious, frenetic

¹⁵⁷ S. GUNDLE, “Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3. 2002, p. 105.

¹⁵⁸ Time, *Cinema: Hollywood on the Tiber.*, June 26, 1950. <https://time.com/archive/6795305/cinema-hollywood-on-the-tiber/>.

¹⁵⁹ R. WRIGLEY, *Cinematic Rome*, Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2008. pp. 39-45.

¹⁶⁰ S. GUNDLE, “Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3. 2002. pp. 106-112.

environment at its height, with all of its glamour and emptiness, showing the attraction but also its degeneration. *La Dolce Vita* was an effective summary of a period, of an image which depicted Italy's conversion to a consumerist society, following the United States as its model and elaborating its own idealistic postcard. It is a showcase developed on the historical and cultural baggage of the country with the ultimate aim of selling a product, it is the instrument through which a country established a narrative that increased the perceived value of its products.

3.3 DC and PCI, cinema politics

As soon as cinema started to become a powerful communication tool, it assumed relevant political aspects, and in the Italian afterwar parties exercised their competition on all grounds, especially at the cultural level. The importance of cinema in the diffusion of values, ideologies and beliefs was another point of clash between political movements who sought to use all popular forms of art and entertainment to convey political messages. The two main actors of the so called "Italian first republic" (1946-1994) were the *Democrazia Cristiana* (from here on "DC") and the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (from here on "PCI"), the two parties reproduced inside of the country the ideological split between the Western bloc and the Eastern bloc, causing a conflict which assumed many connotations, among which a cultural one.

Since 1945, the DC held the power with its leader, De Gasperi, as the head of the government. Before the first legislature, the governments formed were supported by a broad coalition of national unity which was interrupted in May 1947, when the outbreak of the cold war led to the ousting of the ministers from the PCI and the socialist party. Then, after the elections of April 18th, 1948, the DC obtained a large majority, while the PCI was excluded from the government and had to occupy the bench of the opposition. Thanks to its solid base, the DC was the majority party for the entirety of the so called "first republic". As the governing party, the DC could exercise its cultural policy through the public administration, which was used to directly influence cinema, in particular, through a public body named *Ufficio centrale per la cinematografia* (Cinema Central Office). In 1947, Giulio Andreotti was appointed as undersecretary to the presidency of the council of ministers with a mandate on the Spectacle department, which comprised the cinema central office. For some Andreotti's work was deemed controversial, on one side he managed to give a new momentum to the Italian cinematography, on the other he operated a centralization of powers in regards of the arts of the spectacle, achieving a fundamental state control on cinema. Andreotti's use of state censorship was nothing new, in fact, the fascist regime was accustomed to the instrument of censorship, which was used to enforce a cinema that would praise the Italian valour. Indeed, the new cinema law of 16th

May 1947, n. 379, was in all accounts similar to that of Mussolini's government promulgated in 1923. Furthermore, a decree in 1945 (5/10/1945 n.678) had granted to the Cinema central office the power to approve the script of movies before the distribution, with the possibility to request cuts when considered necessary. The Christian democrats used this instrument to make sure that new movies did not contain unsuitable or morally corrupted content, most of the times when it violated principles of Christian morality, especially regarding, nudity, infidelity or violence.¹⁶¹ Since the 1930s, the catholic milieu of the Catholic Church, azione Cattolica was active in the cinematographic environment through the *Centro cinematografico cattolico* (Catholic cinematographic centre), an association which published evaluations on movies out in the theatres to inform and orient the Christian society about the moral compliance of the films with Christian values. Andreotti, who was the head of the spectacle department had made sure to direct Italian cinema towards Christian virtuosity, as explained by himself in a letter to Giovanni Battista Montini, Acting Secretary of the Vatican City State. In the letter Andreotti described his efforts towards this aim, which was articulated in many initiatives: the public funding of the Catholic cinematographic centre in 1947, the appointment of Catholic representatives in the jury of the Venice film festival, the approval of the opening of an increased number of parish cinemas and, most importantly, the accurate selection of members in the censorship committee, which on many occasions followed the evaluations published by the Catholic cinematographic centre. The recommendations of the Catholic cinematographic centre other than being observed by the censorship committee were mandatory for all the parish cinemas which constituted at the time an important piece of the circuit, they comprised of five categories: for all, for adults, for adults with reservation, not recommended, excluded.¹⁶²

It has to be remembered that under Andreotti Italy became in 1954 the second country in the world for film production thanks to a series of effective policies among which the law n. 958 of 29/12/1949 which reinforced the Italian industry, as the legal mechanism blocked part of the revenue from the distribution of American movies in Italy, forcing the producers to reinvest in Italian productions. Thanks to the large Cinecittà studios American firms could produce movies in Italy using the revenue

¹⁶¹ The following are examples of the authorization issued by the Cinema Central Office provided by Europeana, financed by the European Union.

Paisà by Rossellini:

<https://proxy.europeana.eu/media/08611/censorship51018/e2e4fd0f34f164b158ebe6a7ed23c5ff?disposition=inline&recordApiUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fapi.europeana.eu%2Frecord>.

Bicycle thieves by De Sica:

<https://proxy.europeana.eu/media/08611/censorship382/29be59c4bcb44d44e5faa2177547794e?disposition=inline&recordApiUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fapi.europeana.eu%2Frecord>.

¹⁶² D. TREVERI GENNARI, S. DIBELTULO, *It Existed Indeed ... It Was All Over the Papers': Memories of Film Censorship in 1950s Italy*, Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies 14, no. 1 (May 2017), <https://www.participations.org/14-01-14-gennari.pdf>

from the Italian distribution and at a cheaper price compared to Hollywood, this model gave way to the Hollywood on the Tiber films.¹⁶³

As seen previously, neorealist cinema was at the time the most influential Italian current, both inside and outside of Italy, and the political parties were attentive towards the effects it produced on the Italian society. From the outset, the DC assumed a rather critical stance towards the movies of this thread, expressing negative opinions and dissent on the attempt to reproduce on the screen the tragedies of the war and of the resistance. The Christian democrats believed that the depictions of neorealist films were only partially true, at times even exaggerated and ideologically oriented, overall, they considered the scenes of poverty and misery harmful for the image of Italy in its effort of reconstruction and opening to the world. Mario Scelba and Luigi Gedda were particularly antagonistic of neorealism (Scelba defined neorealism as *culturame di sinistra*, which could be translated as leftist pseudo-culture), the two Christian democrat directors openly criticized movies and in general many pieces on the Catholic newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* negatively described neorealism. Some titles were self-explanatory; one piece was named *Ghigno amaro* (distortion of the title of a movie *Riso amaro* by De Santis) or *neorealismo ricetta per infingardi* (could be translated as neorealism recipe for the sly).¹⁶⁴ On some occasions, the politicisation of cinema led to forced ideological labelling of movies or directors that wanted to create art beyond political factions without an explicit intent to promote any ideology.

The critique was also shared by Giulio Andreotti, though with a more refined approach. In 1952, the undersecretary wrote a famous article on the Christian democrat journal, *Libertas*, about Vittorio De Sica's latest film, *Umberto D*. The movie revolves around the tragic day to day life of a retired man who is left alone in his struggle by the society around him. In the incipit of the article Andreotti states his initial argument:

Che nel valutare un film si debbano tenere presenti essenzialmente i canoni dell'arte e della tecnica, è poi per noi una norma che non dovrebbe neppure discutersi. Ed in particolare siamo sempre stati contrari agli sconfinamenti più o meno critici della «politica» nel campo cinematografico, reputando assai pericolose le confusioni che determinano tutte le volte che ci si pone dinanzi a ad una pellicola, senza concedere in partenza quelle libertà specifiche che derivano dal carattere di opera di fantasia e non di documentazione che un film spettacolare normalmente deve avere. È però altrettanto indiscutibile che quando una nazione produce, in qualità e quantità, tanto da attrarre in tutto il mondo sia l'attenzione degli esperti che di larghe masse di pubblico-spettatore, la produzione cinematografica (nelle sue espressioni più qualificate) venga ad assumere un'importanza nei valori nazionali che obbliga ad integrare i suddetti canoni con qualche

¹⁶³ G. P. BRUNETTA, *Il Cinema Neorealista Italiano, Storia Economica, Politica e Culturale*. 2009, Bari: Editori Laterza. p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 108-112.

considerazione, o se volete con qualche preoccupazione aggiuntiva. Questo spiega perché in una rivista di natura tipicamente politica noi ci occupiamo oggi dell'ultimo film di De Sica, narrante la vicenda triste di un pensionato. Il nome di Vittorio De Sica è tra i pochi della cultura italiana contemporanea che hanno internazionalmente grande notorietà e forti progressive correnti di simpatia.¹⁶⁵

Andreotti begins by justifying his political analysis (he states that overall politics should not interfere with the evaluation of a form of art) with the wide impact of neorealism on the perception of foreign peoples. The statesman explains that the movie *Umberto D.*, for its international echo assumed a national political relevance. Andreotti's aim was to raise questions about the role of art; he believes that the artist should observe moral responsibilities derived from the influence that a work of art can have on the whole society: «Nessuno si scandalizzi. Non chiediamo davvero a De Sica di ispirare la sua produzione agli scritti di Don Sturzo o alle vicende del Partito Popolare... Domandiamo solo all'uomo di cultura di sentire la sua responsabilità sociale che non può limitarsi a descrivere i vizi e le miserie di un sistema e di una generazione ma deve aiutare a superarli. Missione imprescindibile del dotto è infatti l'insegnamento».¹⁶⁶ In the last part of his comment, Andreotti critiques De Sica for his cold portrayal of the country. It's clear that the politician considers the picture as destructive rather than constructive, he complains about the lack of a moral teaching or an attempt at creating a better social order. The movie even appears to the politician as potentially harmful to the Italian image abroad, as a foreigner could interpret the sad events of *Umberto D.* as the average life of the Italian elders, on the contrary, Andreotti raises the argument that the Italian social legislation is advanced and that Italy is the birthplace of figures the likes of Don Bosco and Forlanini.

De Sica ha voluto dipingere una piaga sociale e l'ha fatto con valente maestria. Ma nulla ci mostra nel film che dia quel minimo di insegnamento che giovi nella realtà a rendere domani meno freddo l'ambiente che

¹⁶⁵ G. ANDREOTTI, *Piaghe sociali e necessità di redenzione*, in *Libertas*, (anno I, n. 7), 28 February 1952. https://www.academia.edu/121883637/Piaghe_sociali_e_necessità_di_redenzione_in_Libertas_anno_I_n_7_28_febbraio_1952. English translation by the author: «That, in evaluating a film, one should essentially keep in mind the canons of art and technique is, for us, a principle that should not even be open to discussion. In particular, we have always opposed the more or less critical encroachments of “politics” into the cinematic field, considering highly dangerous the confusions that arise whenever one approaches a film without granting from the outset those specific freedoms that stem from its nature as a work of fiction rather than documentation, which a commercial film must normally possess. It is, however, equally indisputable that when a nation produces films in such quality and quantity as to attract worldwide the attention of both experts and broad masses of spectators, cinematic production (in its most accomplished expressions) comes to assume an importance within national values that makes it necessary to integrate the aforementioned canons with some additional consideration—or, if you will, with some additional concern. This explains why, in a magazine of a typically political nature, we are today concerned with De Sica's latest film, which recounts the sad story of a pensioner. The name of Vittorio De Sica is among the few in contemporary Italian culture that enjoy great international renown and strong, steadily growing currents of sympathy».

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* English translation by the author: «Let no one be scandalized. We certainly do not ask De Sica to model his work on the writings of Don Sturzo or on the history of the Popular Party... We ask only that the man of culture be aware of his social responsibility, which cannot be limited to describing the vices and miseries of a system and of a generation, but must help to overcome them. Indeed, the indispensable mission of the intellectual is education».

circonda le moltitudini di quanti in silenzio si consumano, soffrono e muoiono. E se è vero che il male si può combattere anche mettendone duramente a nudo gli aspetti più crudi, è pur vero che se nel mondo si sarà indotti – erroneamente - a ritenere che quella di Umberto D. è l'Italia di metà del secolo ventesimo, De Sica avrà reso un pessimo servizio alla sua patria, che è anche la patria di Don Bosco, del Forlanini e di una progredita legislazione sociale.¹⁶⁷

Overall, Andreotti's piece reveals a moderate and measured critique that nevertheless highlights the political importance of cinema in those years of reconstruction and ideological division, when the Christian democrats and the left competed in the field of cinema using art as expression of the party itself. In the field of cinema, the DC tried to confront the cultural hegemony of the left through the offering of centrist Catholic films that could represent an alternative to the otherwise left leaning neorealist movies. About this topic Tomaso Subini, professor of history of cinema at the Milan University, reconstructed the strategy of the moderate forces to contrast the spread of leftist culture. According to Subini, the protagonists of this effort are Felix Morlion, a central figure in the Catholic cinema society, Giulio Andreotti, and the critic Gian Luigi Rondi who is known for his Christian interpretation of neorealist works. In this context, Andreotti and Morlion chose Rossellini to propose a Christian neorealist cinema. Consequently, the director of Rome open city filmed two movies which were presented at the Venice film festival, *Francesco Giullare di Dio* (in competition) and *Stromboli (Terra di Dio)*. Despite the efforts, the two movies did not receive the hoped reception and *Francesco Giullare di Dio* did not receive any award at the ceremony despite a jury with many Christian democrat members. Due to the low interest in the movies, over time the project waned.¹⁶⁸

Moving the focus to the left, it could be said that despite the defeat suffered in the 1948 elections, the PCI and the socialists could celebrate the establishment of a supremacy on cultural matters. From the beginning, the communists spent attention and effort into the cultural sphere which they considered essential in the fight against capitalism. In fact, after the return of Togliatti in Italy in 1944, the PCI followed the Soviet model and embraced the Zhdanov doctrine announced at the Soviet writers' Congress of 1934. The Soviet doctrine considered that art should follow moral obligations to promote socialist values, while art for art's sake was condemned. These canons were at the base of "socialist realism", an artistic production that prioritised reality over the imaginative, with a keen

¹⁶⁷ G. ANDREOTTI, *Piaghe sociali e necessità di redenzione*. English translation by the author: De Sica set out to portray a social blight, and he did so with considerable mastery. Yet the film shows us nothing that offers even the slightest lesson capable of helping, in reality, to make the environment that surrounds the multitudes of those who silently wear themselves out, suffer, and die any less cold tomorrow. And if it is true that evil can also be fought by harshly laying bare its most brutal aspects, it is equally true that, should the world be led—mistakenly—to believe that *Umberto D.* represents Italy in the mid-twentieth century, De Sica would have rendered a very poor service to his homeland, which is also the homeland of Don Bosco, Forlanini, and an advanced system of social legislation.

¹⁶⁸ T. SUBINI, *La doppia vita di «Francesco giullare di Dio»: Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion e Roberto Rossellini*. Milano: Il Libraccio, 2011.

moralist eye towards the construction of the socialist society. The communist conception of art was that of a form of high culture with an intrinsic aim to educate the masses, thus, in stark contrast with artistic productions in capitalist societies that in many cases privileged earnings and aimed for entertainment rather than true art. In particular, the communists opposed works which emphasised individualism over social responsibilities and obligations to the community.¹⁶⁹

In January 1947, Togliatti took a first step forward towards the organization of the party's action in cultural matters with the creation of an intellectual's section as a subcommittee of the party's press and propaganda commission. Then, in January 1948 the party called for the VI Congress, a fundamental point in PCI's cultural strategy. During the event, Togliatti explained the important role that culture played in the fight against capitalism. The communist leader exhorted the artists to follow socialist principles according to the Zhdanov doctrine and he further underlined the concept by announcing the creation of a National Cultural Commission with Emilio Sereni as its head. In the same year, in order to face the constant flow of superficial contents from the USA, the PCI created an initiative called "Alliance for culture", jointly with the socialists and independents, to protect progressive cultural currents from being suffocated by commercial "art" forms. Due to the massive imports from the USA many PCI intellectuals were worried that the large quantity of American cultural products would suffocate domestic culture, for this reason, the party launched a call to protect Italian art from the "extravagant and artificial pursuit of the new and the original". This strong position attracted many of the neorealist directors and screenwriters who signed a manifesto then published on *L'Unità*, 22 February 1948, titled: «*Difendiamo il nostro cinema*».¹⁷⁰

It is important to note that during the first years of the growing appreciation towards neorealist cinema, the left did not try at first to make the cinematographic current a flag of its political identity, but it valued the utility of some films that more than others could be associated with socialist values. It's only later on, when the PCI assumed the role of the opposition, that the party decided to defend neorealism in its entirety from the attacks and the censorship of the Christian democrats.¹⁷¹ Sereni himself on the 25th of May 1949, during a session at the Senate, defended neorealism from the attacks of a Christian democrat member of parliament, Gabriele Semeraro, who upheld the idea that Neorealism was appreciated abroad because "the discovery of our miseries brings joy to others", by stating that neorealist films were sought after and admired throughout the world and that everyone

¹⁶⁹ G. FANTONI. 2021. Italy through the Red Lens: Italian Politics and Society in Communist Propaganda Films (1946–79). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 28-29.

¹⁷⁰ S. GUNDLE, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press. 2000. P. 50

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

talked about Italian cinema, and everyone knew the names of Italian actors and directors.¹⁷² From that point on, the PCI adopted the promotion of neorealism as one of its cultural policy line. The communists endeavour comprised the promotion of domestic cinema, encouraging people to choose Italian films rather than Hollywood ones. On one occasion, the party even helped mobilizing the audience for the relaunch of *Ladri di biciclette* with De Sica personally attending the projection.¹⁷³

Overall, the conflict between the DC and the PCI unfolded on multiple levels, including the cultural one. In this context, the influence of the seventh art on the masses meant its inevitable politicisation and the opening of a new arena for confrontation as culture was an identity element that could move the electoral balance, increase the sense of belonging to a party and encourage political participation. It can be said that in the afterwar, the PCI obtained a considerable advantage in the cultural domain, with the DC failing to propose an alternative model especially as regards cinema, while the communist cultural model would experience a so called “golden age” from 1945 to 1953, declining in 1956 after the facts of the XX Congress of the PCUS and the denunciation of Stalin’s crimes.

¹⁷² A. SPANU, *Il rilancio culturale dell’Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un’immagine (1945-1960)*, Tesi di dottorato, Università di Pisa, Scuola di Dottorato in Storia, Orientalistica e Storia delle Arti, XXIV ciclo, p. 77-78.

¹⁷³ S. GUNDLE, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991*. p. 61.

Conclusion

The Italian Republic's first decade was signed by a thorough restoration of the state on multiple levels, not only on the internal side, but also on the international one. The political, economic, social and cultural reconstruction served the country's resurgence in the international arena, and little by little. Italy found a new legitimization in the global community. The first struggles that the country had to face were primarily related to the conclusion of the Peace treaty. From 1945 to 1947 Italy employed most of the resources of its foreign affairs ministry in order to obtain the best possible outcome from the Peace treaty. From then on, the boot shaped country could finally work towards the full rehabilitation of its international image, in the context of the new Atlantic alliance and the first impulse of a European integration.

The development of a new image for Italy was determined by many factors and on many levels. For what concerned the country's political recognition, the careful governance by Alcide De Gasperi built, piece after piece, the foundation for a cooperation with the western world, restoring Italy's reputation after the events of the war. The participation in the European integration process, first with the European Community for Coal and Steel, and later on with the creation of the European Economic Community could legitimize Rome's involvement in international projects. The reconstruction of Italy's image was a slow but steady process, it was only ten years after the end of the war that the country could enter the United Nations, an event that symbolised the peninsula's full rehabilitation.

On the side of diplomacy, Italy employed an intense effort to promote a new model of cooperation, moving away from the aggressive rhetoric of the fascist regime, opposing unilateral decision and fostering multilateralism. In fact, it could be said that in this context Italy found a new dimension for its international relations. Bilateral relations continued to be relevant, but it was in multilateral forums where the boot shaped country could affirm its contribution. Overall, cultural diplomacy was a fundamental tool for the objective of rebuilding relations which were severed by the fascist regime. Being one of the countries with the highest concentration of art, historical sites and natural beauty, Italy could benefit from a heritage that could be exploited through cultural diplomacy. The bilateral cultural cooperation was resumed with the Italian-Belgian agreement of 1948, followed by the agreement with France in 1949 and the one with the United Kingdom in 1951. In the multilateral context, the most important cultural participation was inside Unesco. Italy joined the UN agency before joining the UN itself, demonstrating that Italy's cultural importance was the key to a political involvement in international organizations. Italy's role inside Unesco was relevant and it led to remarkable contributions such as the foundation of the International Centre for the Study on the

Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, and the *Conseil européen pour la recherche nucléaire* (CERN). It is important to mention that the fifth Unesco general conference (1950) was held in Florence, an acknowledgement of Italy's work in the years prior. Two figures such as Stefano Jacini and Vittorino Veronese were among the most influential inside the organization, the first as president of the executive council and the second as general director.

Along with the political efforts, the rebirth of the Italian economy was fundamental for the establishment of Italy's international role. The industrialisation of Italy reached the level of other developed economies, and, as the GDP of a country rises, so does its weight in global affairs. With the new production model Italy became a large manufacturing centre, specialising in the processing of raw materials with higher added value. Exports increased considerably and Italian products shaped other peoples' perception regarding Italy. The varied Italian exports were appreciated for the ingenuity and especially for the design, a trait that quickly became recognizable as a sign of quality. Bialetti's Moka, Olivetti's typewriters and Piaggio's Vespa were some of the Italian products that were famous internationally, in some cases being also awarded with acknowledgements for their design. At the same time, Italy affirmed itself as an important hub for the production of luxury goods. In the textile sector the Italian tradition constituted a valuable base for the creation of a profitable fashion industry, with many brands such as Max Mara, Prada, Gucci and Fendi as staples of the sector. Over the years, the peninsula also became strongly associated with sports cars the likes of Ferrari, Lamborghini and Maserati which were symbols of the new Italian style. In the years between the 1950s and 1960s, the label Made in Italy acquired a significant reputation that lasts until today. Similarly to French products which could sell for a higher price thanks to the high demand related to its history and association to a status symbol, Italian producers could be competitive against other exporters despite higher prices thanks to the perceived value of Made in Italy products. It could be said that Italian exports represented the most fundamental aspect for the diffusion of Italy's new image, certainly for the reach that trade and sought after products have in a capitalist consumer society.

Lastly, an essential component of the life of a people is its culture, and Italy benefitted from the fertile environment of its rich history. Among the different arts, cinema had a remarkably influential golden age which had noteworthy political implications. The second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s were signed by the current of neorealism, mostly represented by the film directors Rossellini, Visconti and De Sica. The relevance of cinema in the diffusion of Italy's post war conditions cannot be understated, as the films popularity were decisive in forming a favourable public opinion abroad. If on one hand it is doubtful that neorealist films had any weight in the outcome of the peace treaty, on the other they helped in Italy's international reintegration. As the reconstruction of Italy developed, the economy started to grow and cinema transformed as well, focusing on different themes, characters

and topics. The attention of the film directors moves from the exterior aspects of human condition in the afterwar, to psychological and interior analysis. Federico Fellini became a master of this cinema orientation, receiving recognition worldwide for his cinematography. Arguably, his most famous work is *La Dolce Vita*, a movie that entered in the collective imagery and instantly associated with Italy. The movie effectively created symbols that are still today a component of the people's perception about the Italians. The character of Paparazzo is an example, as the name became used to describe a reporter who takes photos of celebrities during private situations to catch possible scandals and even today, the word paparazzi is used in English to describe this profession. Overall, the movie fascinated the broader public for the ideal of an Italian lifestyle full of beauty, glamour and relaxed living. Expressions such as "sweet life" or "sweet doing nothing" are nowadays popular ideas regarding Italy abroad. The movie depicted beautiful landscapes, sceneries, exclusive parties and society life which captivated foreign audiences, while also portraying the life of some social sectors related to the world of cinema and via Veneto, with all of its emptiness and debauchery. The beauty of Rome and the lifestyle remained engraved in the memories, but it seems that the subtle social critique was forgotten.

The attempt of this work was to demonstrate and explore the origins of the modern Italian foreign image, starting from 1945, through the years of the reconstruction until the economic boom. In this period of time, Italy underwent profound transformations that shaped its external image, and recognition in the world. Gradually, the interest towards Italy grew, planting the seeds of its soft power, the ability to influence others without resorting to economic or military coercion. What are some of the core pillars of Italian soft power today? Tourism, as an important measurement of the level of fascination and interest that a country exerts, trade volumes, for the overall attractiveness of Made in Italy products, diffusion of artistic heritage both historical and current, cultural significance, including gastronomy and language. By the time this thesis was written, 2025, the Italian Republic spends a considerable number of resources on the development of its soft power. With many actors involved, the Italian culture will be promoted internationally on multiple levels. The Ministry of culture, for example, announced in October 2025 a 20 million euros plan and 64 projects to spread knowledge about Italian culture, some of the initiatives include the archaeological site of Elaiussa Sebaste in Turkey, to the exhibition on Tarantism as studied by Ernesto de Martino, the underwater archaeological research in Egypt and the international diffusion of Cesare Brandi's restoration theory, translated into Arabic and into English.¹⁷⁴ Assessing the value of these initiatives is not the aim of this thesis, but they show how much soft power is valued by the institutions for the protection of the

¹⁷⁴ Ministero della Cultura, *Comunicato stampa: progetti di promozione culturale all'estero (Comunicato 28128)* (Roma, 2025). <https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/28128>.

Italian national interests. The Italian commission for UNESCO is also an important part of the Italian soft power promotion, proved by the constant proposals of new material and immaterial world heritage. Currently, Italy is the country with the highest number of world heritage sites with China being a close second, this recognition shows how the Italian government has oriented its policy towards the international promotion of Italian culture.

In conclusion, the roots of the Italian soft power are to be found in the same moment of the country's rebirth, the years of the reconstruction. In those ten years, the country's political intelligentsia understood that Italy needed to reposition itself in the international order, changing its stance, seeking with soft power another way to find a space of manoeuvre for its international action rather than hard-power and geopolitical gains. It was in those years that Italy developed the instruments of soft power which are now so evidently affecting its foreign policy. Thanks to its cultural heritage and manufacturing prowess, Italy tried to compensate the lack of political and military relevance with charm and allure. A lifestyle model which is based on the beauty of its natural landscapes, roots, traditions and historical vocation for the arts that became the source of inspiration for its international trade and diplomatic action. As regards trade, the consolidation of the Made in Italy label which allowed Italy to rise prices for the perceived beauty and quality of its products, for what concerns diplomacy by paving the way for multilateralism and cooperation in the international community.

As emerged during this paper, economic progress, diplomatic intervention and cinema contributed to the formation of the Italian soft power. Though, as the scope of analysis is undoubtedly broad, many points of research still remain. For instance, this thesis recognised culture as one of the fundamental pillars of the Italian image, but for reasons of detail and depth the research focused solely on cinema. Although important, as highlighted in the final chapter, cinema is not the sole contributor to the formation of the Italian image. In the last decades, cuisine is becoming more and more influential as a factor of the Italian cultural perception in the world. Thus, this work, to a certain extent, could constitute a frame for further study on the subject.

Bibliography

Books:

- Azzario Chiesa, Maria Paola. *L'Italia per l'UNESCO: 50 anni della Commissione Italiana*. Roma: Armando Editore, 1999.
- Balconi, Margherita. *La siderurgia italiana (1945-1990)*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991.
- Barberini Ivano, Casiraghi Ugo, Etnasi Fernando, Montagna Vincenzo, Sebastiani Virgilio, Visani Lino. *Il miracolo economico*. Roma: Datanews Editrice, 2003.
- Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?* Vols. 1–2. Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: Éditions du Cerf, 1958.
- Biscardi, Marco. *La diplomazia culturale della Repubblica italiana nelle discussioni parlamentari (1948-1963)*. Roma : Aracne, 2015.
- Brunetta Gian Piero. *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2000.
- Brunetta, Gian Piero. *Storia del cinema italiano*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2003.
- Brunetta, Gian Piero. *Il Cinema Neorealista Italiano, Storia Economica, Politica e Culturale*. Bari: Editori Laterza, 2009.
- Brunetta, Gian Piero. *Il cinema neorealista italiano: Da "Roma città aperta" a "I soliti ignoti."* Roma: Laterza, 2009.
- Cardullo, Bert. *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*. London and New York: Continuum, 2011.
- Castronovo, Valerio. *L'Italia del miracolo economico*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.
- Chemotti, Saveria. *Gli intellettuali in trincea: Politica e cultura nell'Italia del dopoguerra*. Padova: CLEUP, 1977.
- Chitty, Naren, e Gary D. Rawnsley, a cura di. *The Routledge Handbook of Soft Power*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Crainz, Guido. *Storia del miracolo italiano: culture, identità, trasformazioni tra anni cinquanta e sessanta*. Roma: Donzelli, 1998.
- Da Empoli, Giuliano. *Il soft power dell'Italia*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2013.
- De Fusco, Renato. *Made in Italy: Storia del design italiano*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007.
- De Santi, Pier Marco. *La dolce vita: scandalo a Roma, Palma d'oro a Cannes*. Pisa: ETS, 2004.

Di Nolfo, Ennio, e Serra, Maurizio. *La gabbia infranta. Gli Alleati e l'Italia dal 1943 al 1945*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010.

Di Nolfo, Ennio. *La guerra fredda e l'Italia (1941–1989)*. Firenze: Polistampa, 2010.

Di Nolfo, Ennio. *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*. Bari: Laterza. 2008.

Fantoni, Gianluca. *Italy through the Red Lens: Italian Politics and Society in Communist Propaganda Films (1946–79)*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Ferraris, Luigi Vittorio. *L'amministrazione centrale del Ministero degli Esteri italiano nel suo sviluppo storico (1848-1954)*, Firenze: Rivista di studi politici internazionali, 1955.

Forlenza, Rosario. *On the Edge of Democracy: Italy, 1943-1948*. Oxford university press, 2019.

Gori, Umberto. *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia (Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali)*. Roma: Edizioni Bizzarri, 1970.

Gundle, Stephen. *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007.

Gundle, Stephen. *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000.

Gundle, Stephen. *Figure del desiderio. Storia della bellezza femminile italiana*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007.

Medici, Lorenzo. *La diplomazia culturale della Repubblica Italiana nel Mediterraneo*. Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica, 2008.

Medici, Lorenzo. *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944-1950)*. Padova: CEDAM, 2008

Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

Rutelli, Francesco. *La diplomazia culturale italiana*. Roma: Giapeto, 2018.

Riccardi, L. *La grandezza di una media potenza: Personaggi e problemi della politica estera italiana del Novecento*, Roma: Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 2017.

Salvadori, Massimo. L. *Storia d'Italia*. Torino: Einaudi, 2011.

Savi, Lucia. *A New History of Made in Italy: Fashion and Textiles in Post-War Italy*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023.

Scarpellini, Emanuela. *Material Nation: A Consumer's History of Modern Italy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Scarpellini, Emanuela. *Italian Fashion since 1945: A Cultural History*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Sforza, Carlo. *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi: La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*. Rome: Atlante, 1952.

Subini, Tommaso. *La doppia vita di «Francesco giullare di Dio»: Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion e Roberto Rossellini*. Milano: Il Libraccio, 2011.

Varsori, Antonio. *Dalla rinascita al declino, storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022.

Varsori, Antonio. *La politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra*. Milano: casa editrice Ambrosiana, 1993.

Varsori, Antonio. *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998.

Vitella, Federico. *Maggiorate. Divismo e celebrità nella nuova Italia*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2024.

Westad, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: A World History*. London: Penguin Press, 2017.

Wrigley, Richard. *Cinematic Rome*. Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd., 2008.

Book chapters:

Medici, Lorenzo. *L'Italia e l'Unesco fra guerra fredda e decolonizzazione*. In: Nazioni Unite e sistema internazionale / a cura di Marco Mugnaini. Milano: Angeli, 2018.

Medici, Lorenzo. *Organizzazioni internazionali e soft power: il caso dell'UNESCO*. In: Nazioni Unite e sistema internazionale / a cura di Marco Mugnaini. Milano: Angeli, 2018.

Paronetto Valier, M. L. "L'Italia e l'UNESCO." In *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali: Diplomazia multilaterale nel Novecento*, a cura di L. Tosi, 127-148. Padova: Cedam, 1999.

Journal articles:

Fotia, Laura. *La 'Società Dante Alighieri' come strumento di diplomazia culturale e la ricezione dell'opera dantesca nella cultura argentina*. Roma: Roma Tre Press, 2023.

Gundle, Stephen. "Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3. pp. 95-118. 2002.

Rivette, Jacques. *Lettre sur Rossellini*. Cahiers du cinéma, no. 46. April 1955

Sforza, Carlo, and Valentina Sforza. *Gli anni della scelta europea e atlantica dell'Italia (1° gennaio 1947 – 7 settembre 1952)*. Edited by Maria Grazia Melchionni. Firenze: Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali 89. 2022.

Vigazzi, Brunello. *De Gasperi, Sforza, la diplomazia italiana e la percezione della politica di potenza dal trattato di pace al Patto Atlantico, 1947-1950*. Storia contemporanea: rivista trimestrale di studi storici, p. 661-685.

Doctoral thesis:

Amicucci, Michele. 2023. *La diplomazia culturale come via di politica estera italiana tra guerra fredda e periodo post bipolare*. Tesi di Dottorato, Università di Bologna.

Spanu, Andrea. *Il rilancio culturale dell'Italia nel mondo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: la reinvenzione di un'immagine (1945-1960)*, Tesi di dottorato, Università di Pisa, Scuola di Dottorato in Storia, Orientalistica e Storia delle Arti, XXIV ciclo.

Online sources:

ADI Design Museum. "Archivio del Compasso d'Oro." *ADI Design Museum*. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.adidesignmuseum.org/compasso-doro/archivio-del-compasso-doro/>.

ADI. *Associazione per il Disegno Industriale*. Accessed April 28, 2025. <https://www.adi-design.org/associazione.html>.

Andreotti, Giulio. Piaghe sociali e necessità di redenzione. In *Libertas*, (anno I, n. 7), 28 February 1952. https://www.academia.edu/121883637/Piaghe_sociali_e_necessit%C3%A0_di_redenzione_in_Libertas_anno_I_n_7_28_febbraio_1952.

Barrett, Alex. *Rome, Open City: Roberto Rossellini's Great Leap for Realism on Screen*. BFI, May 15, 2024. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/rome-open-city-roberto-rosselinis-great-leap-realism-screen>. Accessed October 10, 2025.

Bentley, Daniel. "The 100 Greatest Designs of Modern Times." *Fortune*, April 2020. Accessed April 24, 2025. <https://fortune.com/longform/100-best-designs/>.

Brioni. *History*. Accessed April 16, 2025. <https://www.brioni.com/en/ww/history>.

Carosello. n.d. *Un personaggio per voi*. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://carosello.tv/serie/un-personaggio-per-voi/>.

Carosello. *Storia di Carosello*. Accessed March 31, 2025. <https://carosello.tv/storia/>.

Cinema: Hollywood on the Tiber. *Time*, June 26, 1950. <https://time.com/archive/6795305/cinema-hollywood-on-the-tiber/>.

Crowther, Bosley. *Fellini Film Lives Up to Foreign Hurrahs*. The New York Times, April 20, 1961. <https://www.nytimes.com/1961/04/20/archives/fellini-film-lives-up-to-foreign-hurrahs.html>.

Cultural Agreement between Italy and France. November 4, 1949. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accessed August 15, 2025. https://www.esteri.it/wpcontent/uploads/2023/06/Accordo_culturale_1949.pdf.

Cultural Convention between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Italy, Treaty Series No. 28 (1953). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, May 1953. Accessed August 15, 2025. <https://treaties.fcdo.gov.uk/data/Library2/pdf/1953-TS0028.pdf>.

Danesi, Marcel. *The Role of Culture Heritage in Commercial Development and Tourism*. Symphonya. *Emerging Issues in Management* 2017, no. 3 (2017). <https://symphonya.unicusano.it/article/view/2017.3.05danesi/11506>.

Editoriale Domus. *Stile Industria e Domus all'ADI Design Museum*. May 25, 2021. Accessed April 28, 2025. <https://www.edidomus.it/it/press/2021/05/25/stile-industria-e-domus-all-adi-design-museum.html>.

Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), *Annali delle Attività – Arti Visive: Biennale d'Arte 1948*, La Biennale di Venezia. Accessed September 1, 2025. <https://asac.labiennale.org/attivita/arti-visive/annali?anno=1948>.

Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, “*What Is Cultural Diplomacy?*” *Cultural Diplomacy Archive* accessed July 16, 2025, https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy.

Istituto Italo-Latino-americano (IILA), “*Convenzione Internazionale*,” accessed September 2, 2025, <https://iila.org/it/chi-siamo/convenzione-internazionale/>.

Istituto Luce. *Italia. Inaugurazione Autostrada del Sole*. 1964. Video. Archivio Luce. <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000041201/2/italia-inaugurazione-autostrada-del-sole.html>.

Italdesign. “*Italdesign Official Website*.” Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://www.italdesign.it/it/>.

La Repubblica. *Vespa, a 70-Year Adventure Through Images*. April 22, 2016. https://www.repubblica.it/motori/sezioni/moto/2016/04/22/foto/vespa_un_avventura_lunga_70_anni_che_mostra-138134566/1/.

Loeb Cone, Theresa, “*La Dolce Vita*,” Oakland Tribune (1961), accessed via CineFiles, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, <https://cinefiles.bampfa.berkeley.edu/catalog/18508>.

Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, “Istituto Italo-Latino Americano,” sezione *Americhe, Politica estera e cooperazione allo sviluppo*, accessed September 2, 2025, https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree_geografiche/americhe/default/#:~:text=L'Istituto%20Italo%20Latino%20Americano,Panama%2C%20Paraguay%2C%20Per%C3%B9%2C%20Repubblica.

Ministero della Cultura. *Comunicato stampa: progetti di promozione culturale all'estero (Comunicato 28128)*. Roma, 2025. <https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/28128>.

Museum of Modern Art. *Catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art: 1952 Exhibition*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1952. Accessed April 22, 2025. https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2741_300159054.pdf.

Museum of Modern Art. *The Modern Movement in Italy: Architecture and Design*. Press release, August 18, 1954. Accessed April 28, 2025. https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325955.pdf.

Nulla Osta for *Bicycle Thieves* by Vittorio De Sica (archival media item), Europeana, accessed January 1, 2026. <https://proxy.europeana.eu/media/08611/censorship382/29be59c4bcb44d44e5faa2177547794e?disposition=inline&recordApiUrl=https://api.europeana.eu/record>.

Nulla Osta for Paisà by Roberto Rossellini. (archival media item) Europeana, accessed January 1, 2026, <https://proxy.europeana.eu/media/08611/censorship51018/e2e4fd0f34f164b158ebe6a7ed23c5ff?disposition=inline&recordApiUrl=https://api.europeana.eu/record>.

Paolucci, Giovanni, production. *Italy on the Move*. Cinematography by Fulvio Testi. Musical score by Raffaele Gervasio. General organization by Cesare Taurelli. Produced by Istituto Luce, 1958. <https://patrimonio.archiviolute.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000051027/1/-2219.html>.

Pininfarina. *Heritage*. Accessed April 11, 2025. <https://pininfarina.it/about/heritage>.

Storie Milanesi. *La Triennale di Milano*. Accessed April 28, 2025. <https://www.storiemilanesi.org/approfondimento/triennale-milano/>.

Pederbelli, Marilia. *Una storia brevissima sul design italiano in Triennale*, Triennale Milano, February 26, 2021. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://triennale.org/magazine/nel-1954-inaugura-la-x-triennale-di-milano-lesposizione>.

Pretelli, Matteo. *Italia e Stati Uniti "Diplomazia culturale" e relazioni commerciali dal fascismo al dopoguerra*. Accessed August 15, 2025. https://www.reteparri.it/wp-content/uploads/ic/IC_241_2005_8_r.pdf.

USC Center on Public Diplomacy, *What Is PD?*, accessed July 16, 2025, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-is-pd>.

Vogue. "October 15, 1960. *Vogue Archive*. Accessed May 7, 2025. <https://archive.vogue.com/issue/19601015/print>.

Vogue. "Italy: Fashion-Triumphs in a Gala Olympic Year." Vogue, October 15, 1960. <https://archive.vogue.com/article/1960/10/italy-fashion-triumphs-in-a-gala-olympic-year>.

Abstract

After World War II, Italy was left in shambles. The country had to rebuild itself not just from a material point of view, but also from an ideological and moral one. The reconstruction of the economy was just one part of the many problems the country had to face in order to find a new path forward. The fascist regime and the war had left a profound scar on the Italian people, who now had to revolutionize its state, institutions, production model, and start anew. The years between 1945 to 1948 are a liminal period in which Italy transformed itself into its current social democratic republican shape. The country managed to reform itself and the population embraced a democratic liberal model. Together with the internal dimension there was the external one. A radical change was required in order to keep a spot in the world. Italy was a defeated country, and it wasn't easy for the Italian diplomacy to disentangle itself from the status of former enemy, especially in the first years of the second post-war period. In the period that goes from 1945 to 1955 Italy enters the main alliances and organizations of the western world, obtaining a rehabilitated role in international relations. From this point onwards, a new golden age blessed the peninsula, ushered in by the economic miracle which fully developed the industry of the country, completing the process started at the end of the 19th century. This period marked a flourishing of the made in Italy, expressed by a number of products which became known around the world for their premium quality. We can count among the others car manufacturers such as Ferrari and Lamborghini, or clothing brands which were founded in this period, such as Valentino. Others, like Gucci and Ferragamo which were created before the war, finally had the opportunity to launch their products globally.

Together with the economy, the arts followed the same path of blossoming. A particular example is cinema, which was recognized as one of the artistic avant-garde of the time, especially with the neorealist current starting from the 1940ies, which included in its tally renowned directors. This international projection of the Italian culture abroad constituted the main tools of the Italian soft power. A newly reinvigorated diplomacy seized the opportunity, creating strategies of foreign policy based on soft power. Plans focused on nation branding in order to create a new Italian image to detach the boot shaped country from its fascist past. Italy pursued this objective through numerous initiatives, especially with the creation of the Italian cultural institutes in 1950 and through the already existing Dante Alighieri society to spread the Italian language in the world. Universal expositions were also a perfect launching pad for the promotion of the Italian cultural diplomacy, with the aim of influencing the world and increasing its international status, fuelling the Italian export based economic model.