

## The Institutions & the Piazza

Francesco Maria Talò (October 13, 2008)



Italy's Consulate General is the center of the "Italian Piazza" in New York. In order to reach the whole community, it supports the creation and the development of "virtual piazzas" too.



The concept of the piazza has always been deep-rooted in Italian culture—it reaches all the way back to the Ancient Roman forum and it still is a distinguishing characteristic of Italian cities and towns. Since my arrival in New York, it has been my job to make the Italian Consulate into the city's Italian piazza. This piazza is not limited to the physical location of the Consulate; the virtual aspect of it is also important, since it is a far-reaching link among all Italians and Italian-Americans. It is even more vital to all those who are or would like to become interested in Italy.

In this way, we unite two distinct aspects into one common purpose: that of seeing each other and being together and that of reaching those who are farthest away. We are trying to accomplish this dual purpose through a series of initiatives designed to bring the Consulate to all of the neighborhoods of New York City as well as to the states of New York and Connecticut. To do this, it is necessary to use technology. We not only want to optimize the official website of the Consulate, we also believe that it is important to link ourselves to other websites. Indeed we are entering a new dimension where there are many piazzas that intermingle with each other and multiply. We intend to participate in this communication revolution because it provides the tools that allow us to perform our traditional duties even better. Diplomacy and the consular functions, in fact, are by their own nature ways to unite people and foster the creation of meeting places.

In the spirit of the 'net and of the new so-called "web 2.0" - the new interactive, multimedia, user-driven web of today - we have supported the creation and the development of i-Italy, a virtual piazza with which we have launched a series of common initiatives. One of these is the absorption and strengthening within i-Italy of another site that the Consulate used to manage, "[Italy in New York](#) [2]." We now have an entire section of i-Italy called "Italy in New York" that is available to all organizations and institutions who wish to promote their initiatives and events to a broader public. This information exchange is a vital aspect of the website.

But exchanging information also means exchanging ideas, demonstrating the importance of dialogue. This, too, is a characteristic of the piazza that is best expressed through the introduction of electronic "neighborhoods," such as blogs and forums. We were very happy this past summer to collaborate with i-Italy in launching a new interactive blog, "[Sistema Italia](#) [3]."

A system is also a network, and thus a kind of a piazza because it offers a vision of harmony and togetherness. This is how "Sistema Italia" was born; it is a place where people can dialogue and where members of the Italian community can present ideas and exchange opinions.

This is another expression of one of the piazza's essential characteristics—it is the location of the marketplace, where merchandise is exchanged. And, taking this a step further, we can say that ideas are exchanged in the piazza, as well. If the exchange of merchandise for money is an equal exchange, the exchange of ideas, as someone suggested, is an exchange that enriches everyone. This is a win-win situation, for if I give an idea to you and you give one to me, we both have two ideas. This is our goal, after all: to share ideas and opinions.

I believe that it is important for public institutions to participate in this kind of dialogue, even by means of technology. I can say that a great deal of my daily work consists of creating contacts and making connections—and I have dozens of meetings every day that allow me to unite people in this way.

We don't have many financial resources. Unfortunately, we don't even have much in terms of human resources, but we put all of our energy into uniting others in such a way that a system of contacts is created from which everyone can benefit.

The spirit of our work is making the Italian Consulate General of New York into an even larger piazza for all Italians, Italian-Americans, and all those who love Italy.

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**Related Links:** [http://www.i-italy.org/events?filter2=consulate\\_event](http://www.i-italy.org/events?filter2=consulate_event) [4]  
<http://www.i-italy.org/bloggers/sistema-italia> [5]



<http://www.consnewyork.esteri.it> [6]

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### **Links**

[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/lfpiazzabrooklyn01-col1223909749jpg>

[2] <http://www.i-italy.org/italyinnewyork>

[3] <http://www.i-italy.org/bloggers/sistema-italia%20>

[4] [http://www.i-italy.org/events?filter2=consulate\\_event](http://www.i-italy.org/events?filter2=consulate_event)

[5] <http://www.i-italy.org/bloggers/sistema-italia>

[6] <http://www.consnewyork.esteri.it>