
Research article

The role of the Italic community as a new agent of glocal development in the post-pandemic era

Giuseppe Terranova*

The Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Integration of Migrants in Europe (IntoME), University of Tuscany, Italy

* **Correspondence:** Email: giuseppe.terranova@unitus.it; Tel: +393494126578

Abstract: The pandemic and the digital revolution are changing the global geopolitical landscape. The dispersion of power linked to the new digital decision-making centers is accompanied by a fragmentation of the traditional system of power in the international geopolitical arena. In this scenario, it is difficult to identify who is in charge of sovereignty and governance. A glocal perspective would suggest continuing to look at States, but also at local political entities, such as cities, and super-national cultural identities, such as global civilizations. It is a solution that could allow Italy, and other countries, to avoid what John Agnew called the territorial trap that would push the world system into giving national answers to the growing number of global challenges. In the post-pandemic phase, Italy will face its most important test of resilience since the Second World War. This paper intends to investigate whether and in what terms the Italian State will be able to recognize and make use of the soft power of the Italic community and civilization as a new agent of glocal development. The digital revolution accelerated by the pandemic could in fact transform the digital space into the ideal place for the recognition and strengthening of the global network of Italics around the world. Italic is not simply a synonym for Italian. Italic is someone who appreciates and recognizes the charm of Italy. The Italic does not necessarily have a passport or an Italian bloodline; he can live in Italy or anywhere else. The way of life and the commonality of values is the glue that unites Italics and this can become a soft power of Italy, strengthening the Italian State internally and externally. We refer to that mix of culture, taste, style, quality craftsmanship, fashion, design, high-value manufacturing, electronics, robotics, avant-garde entrepreneurship and gastronomic excellence that gives life to a refined art of living well.

Keywords: Italic civilization; Italics; glocal development; pandemic; digital revolution; geopolitics of Covid-19

1. Introduction, methodology and research objectives

This contribution is intended as the second part of Geopolitics of Covid-19: Global Challenge at national borders published in 2020 in this journal [1], with a focus on Italy. The present contribution is based on a geopolitical analysis method to investigate whether and in what terms the Italian State, in the post-pandemic era, will be able to recognize and make use of the soft power of the Italic community and civilization as a new agent of glocal development. An italic is not simply a synonym for Italian. Italic is someone who loves, appreciates and recognizes the charm of Italy. The Italic does not necessarily have a passport or an Italian bloodline, he can live in Italy or anywhere else in the world. The way of life and the commonality of values is the glue that unites Italics scattered around the globe and this can become a soft power of Italy characterized historically by the integration and hybridization of different cultures. The result is a unique blend of culture, taste, style, quality craftsmanship, fashion, design, high-value manufacturing, electronics, robotics, avant-garde entrepreneurship and gastronomic excellence that gives life to a refined and unique art of living well [2].

The pandemic and the digital revolution have disrupted the international geopolitical chessboard [3]. Policymakers continue to imagine the world as a series of separate boxes, underestimate transnational threats and push States to make irrational choices: this is the concept of the territorial trap [4].

There is a contrast between the rapid and capillary circulation of the virus on a global scale and the principle of national territorial sovereignty as the locus of political responsibility [5].

The pandemic, the acceleration of information and online communication have changed practices in every sphere of life [6]. They have led to the concept of zero time that is revolutionizing decision-making processes because infinite speed is difficult to govern. They have altered the concept of space. They have changed the way we relate to each other and they have raised the question of a new form of proximity and coexistence. Tracking and chasing a virus, detecting a hacker or decrypting an automatic fake news generator are tasks of maneuver warfare, not positional warfare. It is a scenario that weakens the traditional frontiers of physical and political geography. The international health emergency seems to highlight the fact that ours is a disorderly, fluid and dynamic world that is undergoing a transition towards a glocalized system, i.e. one marked by a close relationship between local and global spheres.

We seem to be witnessing the transition from the old Westphalian order, based on the Eleatic principles of being (and the State) to the new glocal order, centered on the Heraclitean concept of all things flowing. For this reason, this paper will attempt to outline the potential scenarios of glocal development in Italy, making use of new tools of analysis linked to the concept of a time radically changed by innovation, the speed of which has altered the mechanisms of political, economic and social governance.

In the first part, we will try to define the new actors of glocal development with a special focus on the origins, the characteristics and the actors of the Italic civilization. In the second part, the potential role of the Italic community as an agent of the economic and cultural reconstruction of Italy will be analyzed, considering that the digital revolution accelerated by the pandemic could in fact transform the digital space into the ideal place for the recognition and strengthening of the global network of Italics around the world and its soft power.

2. Materials

2.1. The new actors of glocal development

In the new global landscape, it is difficult to identify who is in charge of sovereignty and governance. In addition to the dispersion of power linked to the new digital decision-making centers,

there is a fragmentation of the traditional system of power in the international geopolitical arena. A multipolar international order is looming. The world-system is characterized by chronic regional and global instability and a decline in its previous governance. [7].

Today, from a geopolitical point of view, the main question seems to be how to recognize the actual strategic interests of a country when they are the result of interdependence between States in the current world order [8]. A glocal perspective [9] may suggest continuing to look at States, but also at local political entities such as cities, macro-regions and super-national cultural identities, such as civilizations, e.g. the British Commonwealth [10]. We need a swift, permanent shift to a sustainable society based on a new version of glocalization with people deeply rooted in their communities and profoundly aware of global trends and necessities [11].

The rapid development of technology has made interaction with others a structural feature of society. One of the greatest challenges of our time will be the possibility for civilizations to agree on a set of meta-values on the basis of reciprocity [12].

In the current global context, the interaction between different and often incompatible value systems has the potential to create conflict. Agreement on a set of meta-values can open the field for a new dialogue between civilizations. Geography is destiny has held for centuries. And yet, today, in the age of fast connections, in the season of new multi-identities [13] and hybridity, along with geography, connectivity is also destiny [14].

Political geography is flanked by the functional geography of exchange processes in the most diverse fields. We find ourselves in a World Society, inhabited by a multitude of civilizations and global communities that exist and arise, thanks to advances in technology, regardless of the political boundaries of nation-States, and are nurtured through continuous flows of ideas, people, objects and money, and constantly expand and influence each other in an attempt to better solve the problems that living together raises every day. One thinks, for example, of the transnational community that arose during the pandemic to identify a vaccine against Covid-19 [15]. Scientists have come out of their national labs, put the progress made online in real time, allowing distant research institutes to assimilate and corroborate them. This shows that a part of the international scientific community has already chosen the path of global solidarity with a glocal approach (sharing on a global scale in the online space the results and the scientific research obtained locally) rather than nationalist isolation.

Of all global civilizations and communities, the Italic has the ideal characteristics to emerge in a glocal world [16]. The adjective itself is intended to emphasize this and semantically includes within it that of Italian, which refers more directly to the territory of the nation-State.

It is necessary, however, to go beyond the simple historical fact of Italian emigration, in order to understand the global Italic identity based on a mentality, a taste and a vision of life that are expressed not only in a way of speaking, eating and dressing, but also in a way of relating to others, of conducting business and of recognizing oneself in a certain type of art and culture. It is a form of soft power that is never aggressive and is nourished by encounters with different cultures. In other words, it is a true commonwealth, a civilization, a community of experiences and ideals, a search for commonality with all those people who have Italian roots or who appreciate Italian history and culture. Think, for example, of the many young people in the world who study Italian not for work reasons, but out of curiosity and interest.

Italicity is a characteristic of open to hybridization: a fluid negotiation process. Acknowledging oneself in this community does not imply renouncing one's own national identities and affiliations, but rather is an invitation to transcend and strengthen them, adding to their own citizenship, a second, broader and more enriching sense of belonging. Italics constitute a global community, called to the

challenge to act as a world community, to be developed and recognized following the example of the better-known Anglo-Saxon, Hispanic, French-speaking or Chinese [17].

2.2. The origins and definition of the Italic civilization and community

Italic civilization has its origins in ancient Rome and Roman expansion, especially in the Mediterranean Basin. With their political, administrative and military power, the Romans succeeded in imposing themselves on and unifying the coastal civilizations to the point of renaming the Mediterranean, *Mare Nostrum*. The Italic civilization withstood the collapse of the Roman Empire and was reborn culturally strengthened from the ashes of the Middle Ages. There was, in fact, a moment in history, the Renaissance, when Italy began to be universally considered a benchmark, for beauty, taste, style, and the ability to dictate the trends that would spread across the globe. For example, after the War of Independence of the 13 North American colonies against Great Britain, a strong passion for the Renaissance architecture of Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) developed in the USA. Buildings and villas with a clear Palladian design sprang up, the White House being one example. Today, the most authoritative scholars of ancient Rome are Italics, foreign lecturers and researchers, who never tire of discovering the details of that civilization.

Then came the Risorgimento, the Unification of Italy. 1861 was the final year of the expansionist policy of the Kingdom of Piedmont. However, the actual beginning of the Italian State came in 1870 with the conquest of Rome and Latium, especially because of the symbolic value of the city of Rome: the seat of the Papacy, the geographic barycenter of the Italian territory, a place of cultural mediation of the many local cultures.

Italy was unified thanks also to the will and agreement of the European States. A small State like Piedmont could not conquer the entire peninsula without the consent of the European powers. This was one of the intuitions nurtured and developed with diplomatic maneuvers and concrete acts by Camillo Benso, Count Cavour.

Europe, even in the pursuit of the status quo due to national egoisms, retained an authentic and vibrant idea of Italy, because in the previous centuries, the whole of Europe had been marked by Italic soft power that had created an intangible but strong and perceptible network of culture, arts, and relationships between scholars. A network with a European dimension lacking a single, codified guide and indeed kept alive by spontaneous impulses originating in the territories, religions and heresies, by exchanges of professors and alumni between universities, but still in a virtual relationship of continuity with the spirit of ancient Rome and Christian Rome, witnessed and perpetuated by consular roads and still functioning aqueducts, by libraries saved and preserved in convents and abbeys, by pilgrim routes along the Via Francigena and Via Romea, by the two-thousand-year stratification of monuments, human settlements, customs and traditions, languages and local cultures [18].

An italic is not simply a synonym for Italian. Italic is someone who loves, appreciates and recognizes the charm of Italy and its soft power. The Italic does not necessarily have a passport or an Italian bloodline; he can live in Italy or anywhere else in the world. The way of life and the commonality of values is the glue that unites Italics scattered around the globe and this can become a soft power of Italy. The reference is to that mix of culture, taste, style, quality craftsmanship, fashion, design, high-value manufacturing, electronics, robotics, avant-garde entrepreneurship and gastronomic excellence that produces a refined and unique art of living well. The President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, spoke about this in an official speech on 7 March 2016, during the *Italian Quality Day* and the presentation of the *Leonardo Awards* [19]. He referred to the appreciation of Italy in the world for its extraordinary blend of culture, experience, taste, nature, and knowledge by all those who

on a global scale are influenced and attracted by Italic soft power. It is estimated that there are around 250 million Italics in the world, well beyond the number of Italians abroad. It is no longer only Italians who transmit and develop the Italian way of life around the world. Italian style is imitated, recreated and hybridized according to local tastes and needs, enabling it to compete in a glocalized world. Italic power is not aggressive, far from claims of hegemony or colonization. This explains why Italy is at the top of the global ranking of countries with the greatest cultural influence on an international scale [20]. Italian is the 21st most spoken language in the world, but the fourth most studied. In some Mediterranean countries, Italian is the second language of study in schools. The Italic soft power is a heritage to be invested not in the territorial expansion of the Italian Republic, but in the attempt to recognize, develop and enhance a true Italic civilization on a par with the British Commonwealth or the Iberian Hispanidad. The thousands of centers, associations, and communities among people of Italian origin or among Italophiles, which already exist in various parts of the globe, testify today to the spread of this community of feeling [21].

3. Results and discussion

3.1. *Italic community mechanism of a new glocal development*

In the post-pandemic phase, Italy will be called upon to face its most complex test of resilience since the Second Post-War period. To rebuild the economic, social and political fabric, the Italian state could make use of Italian soft power and the Italic community. Below we will analyze three practical examples concerning the impact the Italic community could have in two key sectors of the Italian economy: exports and tourism.

A) The Foreign Italian Chambers of Commerce Abroad could enlarge their potential pool of users, incorporating Italics. This could be done by offering Italic entrepreneurs operating on a global scale, specific technological tools and services, to create a networked and non-centralized communication system to promote shared opportunities worldwide, such as workshops, meetings, fairs and markets. The Foreign Italian Chambers of Commerce Abroad would continue to play their traditional organizational role. And, at the same time, they could become the ideal place to develop, strengthen and express an innovative Italic entrepreneurial identity capable of benefiting from the multitude of interconnected actors and multi-directional and complex synergies.

We should support good practices such as the Making in Italy—Making in the USA: Artisanship, Technology and Design. Innovating with Beauty that was founded in 2013 thanks to the collaboration between the Giannino Bassetti Foundation, the Consulate General of Italy and the Italian Cultural Institute in San Francisco. The project was also sponsored by international private players such as Deutsche Bank, Poltrona Frau Group, FCA and Autogrill. The aim is to encourage the collaboration between the Californian avant-garde, which first developed the Web and today uses the Net to rethink manufacturing, and the Italian avant-garde of *savoir-faire* with beauty, which reinvents Leonardo's workshop through the combination of artisan skills and polytechnic innovations. The spread of new technologies, such as 3D printers and laser cutters, allows objects to be produced faster than the old craftsmen. In the past, in order to be able to produce an object, a craftsman needed years of study of the material: his knowledge stemmed from his ability to combine the design studied by others into physical objects, to transform ideas into the material. 3D printing and laser cutting do not replace the role and experience of the craftsman, they amplify his knowledge and production possibilities. First and foremost in terms of design, because the new technologies act as a multiplier, allowing prototypes

to be quickly created and ideas to be quickly made material [22]. It will always be the craftsman's know-how that dictates the details and style of the object.

The new technologies will also be useful in terms of production because they will allow local craftsmen to have designs that can be replicated in all parts of the world, thanks to continuously expanding databases. These standardized designs will amplify the potential of the craftsman, who will be able to customize objects, even producing them by hand or composing handmade pieces with printed components. The opportunities arising from this technology are well suited to Italy because it is internationally recognized as the home of beauty and know-how. Italian design has always been appreciated because it incorporates manual skills, design and technical knowledge, a mix that the new technologies enhance. Customization, limited series production, and the product that is constantly being renewed are the other elements that make this economic and technological phase crucial for Italy. Innovation that meets sustainability and, more generally, corporate social responsibility: machines that can be anywhere and make the same product will contribute to the reduction of shipping of inert products with an incalculable advantage for energy consumption and CO₂ emissions. These new technologies can be an extraordinary employment driver, making more traditional craft occupations attractive because they are now, finally again, at the cutting edge of technology.

The Italic community could also support the Italian State in relaunching the tourism sector in the post-pandemic phase by enhancing the role of Italians abroad and also that of new Italian citizens—the second generation of immigrants, born and raised in Italy to foreign parents.

B) The role of Italians abroad can be a driving force for the relaunch of tourism in Italy through Return or [23] Roots Tourism [24]. Tourism may serve to change power arrangements and values in destination areas and, in turn, tourism patterns and processes are a response to different values and interests [25].

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are between 60 and 80 million Italian descendants in the world who for their holidays could favor Italy, the place where they left their homes, affections and interests. It is a type of tourism that involves feelings, memory and human history and that can become a lever of support for Italy. The interest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Roots Tourism, which has been convening an annual conference on this topic since 2018, has been accelerated by the need to create initiatives to revitalize in the post-pandemic phase one of the sectors most affected by the international health emergency, and also a historical driver of the Italian economy. In 2018, the National Agency for Tourism in Italy, included ten million travelers in the roots tourism category, generating an economic inflow of around four billion euros.

Roots tourism is common in all Italian regions, including areas often excluded from traditional tourist flows: small villages, inland and rural areas. Roots tourism can be a tool—together with technological tools such as the so-called marketing ecosystem that considers the interrelated and dynamic megatrends [26]—for mobilizing resources for the preservation and enhancement of our country's historical and cultural heritage.

C) Second-generation immigrants in Italy, as members of the Italic Community, can also make a contribution to the post-pandemic Italian renaissance. Italy has become an important destination for migration flows in relatively recent times. It has the advantage of being able to learn from the policy mistakes made in the past regarding second-generation immigrants by European States with a long-standing experience of immigration.

It is the new generation of immigrants that Italy should invest in to transform immigration from an element of conflict into a cultural but also economic resource. The young people born in Italy to foreign parents are potential cultural and economic ambassadors of Italy, capable of establishing a bridge between the country of origin and the host country, including the Italics living there. They are

often more familiar than others with the customs, tastes and tendencies of both countries. They have the potential competence to monitor the development of new markets and new consumers. They can establish a dense transnational cultural and business network thanks to their personal relationships [27]. It is these new ambassadors that Italy could count on to relaunch tourism, but also exports. To promote in China, for example, Italian small villages, large cities of art or handicrafts and haute couture, Italy could invest in training the second generation of Chinese immigrants in Italy which could result in an economic benefit, but also one of social integration. According to a study conducted in Sweden on data collected from 7,000 domestic manufacturing companies, for every employee of foreign origin, a company can record an average annual increase in exports of more than USD 300,000 [28].

Italy, in order to promote a new economic recovery in the post-pandemic phase, could eventually bring together the entire Italic community in a sort of Digital Italian Square (with the same function that squares had in the Renaissance) that would allow Italian and non-Italian citizens, united by the values of Italicity, to meet, exchange information and keep in touch by sharing any kind of italic experiences, for example, economic objectives and also specific cultural initiatives. The perimeter of the Digital Italian Square goes beyond the territorial borders of the Italian State, it follows that of digital global interconnections. To live and to do business as Italics, it is not the place of residence that counts, but the will to adopt the Italian way of life. For this reason, the Italic digital square should be open to hybridization, multilingualism, and a crossroads of ideas and proposals that can represent an advantage for individuals and for the entire community.

4. Conclusions

Italy is about to face its most complex and formidable reconstruction in recent times in a geopolitical scenario changed by the pandemic. It is a change of epoch, not an epochal change. In addition to the dispersion of power linked to the new digital decision-making centers, there is a fragmentation of the traditional system of power in the geopolitical chessboard. In this scenario, in the new global landscape, it is difficult to identify who is in charge of sovereignty and governance. A glocal perspective may suggest continuing to look at States, but also at local political entities, such as cities, and super-national cultural identities, such as global civilizations. It is a solution that could allow our country, and others, to avoid what John Agnew called the territorial trap that would push the world system into giving national responses to the growing number of global challenges. We are called upon to choose between nationalist isolation and global solidarity. The latter option is not achieved on a level playing field, i.e. by merely intensifying relations between Nation-States as was the case in the pre-pandemic phase. The pandemic has accelerated entry into the new world; resorting to the power management tools of the old world may prove ineffective or counterproductive. For this reason, it is perhaps advisable to recognize, as supporting actors of the Nation-States displaced by the global effects of the virus, the role of new actors such as global civilizations, i.e. aggregations that are in many respects post-national that develop multiple identities and citizenships within themselves, based on the acceptance and the recognition of self in the other. They are transnational networks interconnecting continents, territories with increasingly porous borders, and sub-national and local actors, who will increasingly assume power, while national governments and traditional global multilateral organizations will find it difficult to cope with this rapid dispersion of power.

In the post-pandemic phase, the Italian State could count on the Italic community as a new agent of glocal development. This could be an opportunity to inaugurate a new phase of development, capable of combining local and global, tradition and innovation, real and digital, development and sustainability, under the banner of an economy of beauty centered on the principles of humanism, soft

power and resilience. Acknowledging and enhancing the Italian community in the post-pandemic phase could make it possible to rebuild and modernize Italy's economic as well as social fabric, reinforcing its internal cohesion and its capacity to act on an international scale. The achievement of this objective will be through the systemization of a sophisticated and complex mosaic of public and private interventions with a dual approach: top-down and bottom-up. Initiatives, therefore, from above and below, united by the same goal, which is to broaden and update the concept of the national community by creating the social, economic and political conditions necessary to act in the new world. It is a scenario that needs to be observed and studied taking into account the ever-changing geopolitical balances in the current international chessboard. Indeed, the current global disorder complicates the need to search for new parameters and scientific models useful for understanding the change of epoch we are going through.

Conflict of interests

I declare no conflict of interest on this manuscript.

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