

## **Culture e impresa: an inseparable link**

*by Giuliano Urbani*

From the birth of Europe, culture and business have been inseparably linked. Purchase of art and cultural works by ecclesiastical and monastic bodies and public authorities is well documented. However, from 12<sup>th</sup> century on, we ascertain that private resources from merchant guilds contributed greatly to the development of a cultural heritage, especially in Italy. This happened because the economic protagonists (the «*mercatores*» and the emerging bourgeoisie) of the urban revolution of that time wanted to leave a public legacy of their deeds or accomplishments. Over the centuries, **this desire for recognition in the collective memory** led to the funding of outstanding works, especially when a weaker power wished to gain legitimacy through generous donations and patronage of the arts, as occurred in the Medieval free cities and the *Signorie*. The artistic and monumental grandeur of Florence, Siena, Mantua and Urbino are cases in point.

In Italy, where such examples form a conspicuous part of our cultural heritage, the modern spirit of capitalism has always been inclined to demonstrate its social value as a benefactor to the arts. Contemporary Italy owes great part of its culture to business. One need only recall the contribution of Adriano Olivetti and his Community in the fields of literature, sociology and politics.

On the other hand, renowned institutions have also acknowledged the cultural significance of entrepreneurial work. The study of industrial archaeology has led to a cultural re-evaluation of several buildings in Italy. I would draw particular attention to the unique case of the Crespi d'Adda settlement in Capriate San Gervasio, included on UNESCO's world heritage list in 1995. This is an exceptional example of those «workers villages», built in Europe and in the USA, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, evidence of the enlightened philosophy of entrepreneurs who strove to fulfil the needs of their workers.

Companies are now increasingly interested in their past, often when celebrating some special anniversary of their industrial history. A growing number of Italian firms are devoting energy and funding to publications and events that demonstrate their historical and social value. Industrial museums are being founded to let public know about the technological and organizational progress of a business and its work conditions.

The publication of an online journal by the **Centro per la Cultura d'impresa and Fondazione Ansaldo – Archivio economico delle imprese liguri** is an important step in raising awareness about this subject. «**Culture e impresa**», in collecting and publishing the latest developments in this field of inquiry, serves to sensitize entrepreneurs to the fact that the recorded memory of their

work is worth preserving. The journal, being a forum for shared reflection and dialogue between entrepreneurs and scholars, becomes an invaluable tool for enhancing the social value of enterprise.