

“La storia nel futuro®”: from the shores of Lake Orta to the world through Genoa.

by Paolo Marengo

Why call a project “**La storia nel futuro®**” (In English:History in the future’)? The answer is quite simple. It grew out of the firm belief that that every future is necessarily based on history. This is equally true for a person, a community or a city. With this idea in mind, I founded the cultural association “**La storia nel futuro®**” (www.storianelfuturo.org) in June 1999 on Lake Orta in Omegna, that part of Piedmont that has a lot in common with two of its adjoining neighbors, Lombardy and Switzerland.

Along with other *knowledge workers*, I wanted to capitalize on twenty years of experience in industry, starting from Ansaldo. I also served as director of four different Innovation Centres in four different Italian regions: in **Liguria**, the Consorzio Genova Ricerche, first among all the *Consorzi Città* created by IRI (Institute for Industrial reconstruction) and CNR (Italian National Council for Researches) in 1986; in **Piemonte**, the Maggiore Lake Tecnoparco (www.tecnoparco.it), the first of the four Piedmontese technological parks in 1996; in **Tuscany**, Pont-Tech (www.pont-tech.it), the association for innovation created in Pondera (a small city east of Pisa) by Piaggio, the S.Anna Superior School in Pisa and the local administrations, in 1999; in **Lombardia**, Cestec (www.cestec.it), Innovation Centre of the Lombardia Region, in 2001.

But the idea that underlies “**La storia nel futuro®**” comes from my experience in Genoa, when this town was chosen in 1990 as a “sample city” along with Barcelona, Lille, Lyon and Milan for the **FAST** - Forecast and Assessment of Science and Technology – program promoted by the 12th General Management of the European Community headed at that time by Jacques Delors. The project gave me the opportunity to meet **Richard Knight**, a recognized authority on local systems valorisation.

Knight, an economist and geographer of the **London School of Economics** (www.lse.ac.uk), acquired thirty years of experience in the monitoring of urban transformations starting in Cleveland, Ohio, with that city’s transition from iron and steel heavy industry to high-tech industry in the 1970s. With the Association **Cleveland Tomorrow**, Cleveland’s community participated in the transformation of the town through forums and open debates among the scientists, academics and business people of the region, leading to the development of shared strategies. Richard – today back in Ohio but still a good friend – encouraged me, in my role as director of Genova Ricerche, to apply the same model in Genoa with our sample study for the European Commission. Our final report, submitted to the European Commission in 1991 in Vienna, indicated, fifteen years ago, urban strategies of continuing relevance for Genoa. That project gave me the

awareness of the importance, for every local system, of valorizing its distinctive atmosphere or, *Genius Loci* (www.academici.com, www.knowledgeboard.com); in other words, facing the future in coherence with its history.

A few years later, in 1996, as director of the Tecnoparco del Lago Maggiore in Verbania, I founded (together with a group of twenty researchers, managers, and entrepreneurs, especially Lino Cerruti, journalist and historian of North Italy) a cultural association that would develop communication projects for the valorisation of the local systems.

The Association, named “**La storia nel futuro®**”, was the first registered trademark in the Office for trademarks and patents of the new Verbania Chamber of Commerce and had, as its first objective, the enhancement of the splendid new province of “Verbano Cusio Ossola” located between Monte Rosa, Lago Maggiore and Lago d’ Orta – each location with its own distinct local atmosphere.

The value of this new province is unique, featuring natural parks, mountains and lakes, with a population totalling not more than 150,000 inhabitants—the same as many single districts of Milan. Indeed, Verbano Cusio Ossola was one of the first industrialized areas in Italy, being the site of the first electric line, the first paper-mills, textiles and steelworks. For example, the historical steelworks **Cobianchi** in Omegna is still recognized as an industrial and tourist area of great logistical value thanks to the Sempione railway tunnel, which will reach its hundredth year in 2006. This area has certainly faced transformations and crises in the textile, paper, iron and steel sectors, and has been able to transform its industrial network into metalwork manufacturing of consumer goods such as cookware, cutlery and faucets for kitchens and bathrooms. In these fields, Verbano Cusio Ossola has developed a flourishing worldwide trade that competes vigorously with the equivalent Chinese competitors. The well-respected brand names of **Bialetti** (www.bialetti.it) and **Alessi** (www.alessi.it) are found, not only in houses all over the world, but also exist as state-of-the-art exhibits in important modern museums like the MOMA in New York. Many problems linked to globalized markets remain, but Bialetti and Alessi show us how to face them.

“**La storia nel futuro®**” presented four cycles of lectures for the benefit of the public, especially students and teachers. These lectures described and illustrated the historical transformation of Verbano Cusio Ossola, beginning in 1998 with the Tecnoparco del Lago Maggiore, symbol of the new models of business creation; and continuing with three more cycles in the Forum Museum in Omegna (www.forumomegna.org), founded on the original site of Cobianchi steelworks. In particular, Alberto Alessi, the creative soul of Alessi, delivered a memorable lecture during the Omegna Forum. He admitted that he had told the history of his company from Russia to the United States but never in Omegna, only one kilometer from the manufacturing plant. Enhancing the value of a territory through the testimony of its key players in order to create a future that is as significant as that territory’s past in the global competition of towns is extremely difficult.

The “**model of communication**” of the project “La storia nel futuro®” is successful because it both involves and motivates different user networks: the **speakers**, who describe and illustrate present and past history; the **participants**, who acquire greater awareness of the values of their territory; the **sponsors**, who appreciate the model and sustain the costs with their monetary support; the **promoters** and corporations, who host the lectures. The

lecture series vary from city to city, but are always linked to culture, science and education (Technological Parks, Cultural Centres, Universities). For this reason, the project “La storia nel futuro ®”, first created with the aim of valorizing one particular area - Verbanò Cusio Ossola – has been applied to other Italian areas since 2000.

The lecture series “Giovanni Alberto Agnelli” was organised in the spring of 2000 with the **Piaggio Foundation** in the beautiful **Vespa Museum** (www.museopiaggio.it). Vespa, makers of the renowned Italian motorcycle, will celebrate its 60th anniversary this year. This series, extremely well-received by the public, spoke about Vespa, as well as some of the less known but equally important Italian “realities” of Valdera the area surrounding Pontedera, a small city east of Pisa. On these occasions, entrepreneurs and researchers depicted various industrial activities, including ceramics and the world of ceramic workers, hemp, pasta and wine, and captured the enthusiastic attention of the audience.

The re-launch of Piaggio, which is about to be listed on the stock exchange, is the result of the industrious nature of the Valdera territory. But it is only in 2003 that “La storia nel futuro®” arrived in Genoa, my home town, where I studied and had my first work experience with the historical GM Grandi Macchine of Ansaldo (www.ansaldoenergia.com). Genoa was about to be chosen as **European Capital of Culture** for 2004 and, at that time, the city was developing several projects that attracted worldwide attention. “La storia nel futuro®” was one of those projects. It started in October 2003 with the first lecture in Villa Cambiaso at the faculty of Engineering of Genoa University (www.unige.it), which organised this event in association with the Chamber of Commerce of Genoa (www.ge.camcom.it)

From October 2003 to March 2006, several lectures have followed, held by entrepreneurs and managers from Liguria who work worldwide. The talks highlight the well-known enterprising aptitude typical of Liguria. Genoa and its surrounding territories were the birthplace of legendary business innovations which have spread throughout the world; for example, bank cheques which were invented here; the cloth of Genoa which became blue jeans; the betting game that we now know as the lottery. **Francesco Profumo**, a professor from Savona and director of the Turin Polytechnic (www.polito.it), supported this project and in this way, in less than four months, “**La storia nel futuro®**” in **Turin: Wednesdays at the Polytechnic** was organized. Four lectures, each highlighting a different area of the Polytechnic’s scientific knowledge, welcomed over 800 participants between May and June 2005. The project was enormously successful and, as a result, we might hope that Professor Profumo will be elected as president of the Polytechnic in June of this year.

And the next step towards the United States is just around the corner. Through the net and the phone calls with VOIP, “La storia nel futuro®” has discovered **Jeff Capaccio** (www.carrferrell.com). He is a lawyer in California, born in San Francisco of Italian parents – his mother from Liguria and his father from Calabria. He is also the founder of the association **Ligurians around the World**. In 2004, Jeff spearheaded the initiative of monthly get-togethers around a table of excellent Italian food and wine. Numerous Italian managers and entrepreneurs, a prominent creative force in high-tech Silicon Valley, meet with the purpose of getting to know one another, sharing their different experiences and developing business between Italy and the United States. Thanks to Jeff, Paul Otellini, a top manager of Intel (www.intel.com), Silvano Gaj who works for Cisco (www.cisco.com),

Vittorio Viarengo, vice president of Oracle (www.oracle.com), Enzo Torresi (www.mycube.com) and Giacomo Marini (www.cypressventures.com), formerly of Olivetti, both top managers of companies of Venture capital, together with other two hundred people, meet in SVIEC, the **Silicon Valley Italian Executive Council**, under the direction of the Ligurian-American lawyer, Jeff Capaccio.

“La Storia nel Futuro®” and SVIEC are currently developing a joint project. Young people studying in scientific faculties such as Engineering must have, before their graduation, the opportunity to understand what it means for an Italian to live and to create companies in the home of high-tech, acquiring the necessary know-how to import new models to Italy.

Therefore, for the first time in Italy, the **Silicon Valley Study Tour**, which, under my direction and that of Franco Cornagliotto (www.aizoon.it), entrepreneur from Turin, and thanks to SVIEC, has sent eleven engineering students (participants in the conference “La storia nel futuro®” in Genoa and in Turin in 2005) to meet Italians or Italian-Americans in their companies in the U.S. This encounter, from 5 - 22 of September 2006, will give these students the possibility of gaining valuable work or thesis research experience in the United States. To sum up, from Verbano Cusio Ossola to the world, keeping our Italian origins in mind, we are able to sail, just like Columbus once did, in search of new experiences.

The Ansaldo Foundation (www.fondazioneansaldo.it), thanks to the support of Finmeccanica group (www.finmeccanica.it), is now part and parcel of “La storia nel futuro®”. Recording the lectures held in Genoa, the Foundation will preserve their memory and supporting the projects through the indication of some speakers and sponsor companies, it will help to enrich their contents and to increase their visibility. A good History, with a great Future in many other Italian cities.

“La storia nel futuro®” continues thanks to the wide appreciation that it has received: the High Patronage of the President of the Italian Republic, the Patronage of the Ministries for Education, University and Research; Productive Activities; Economics; Innovation and Technologies; and Foreign Affairs from 2003 to 2006. In addition, this project has enjoyed the support of the Regions of Liguria, Tuscany and Piedmont as well as all the cities and the provinces that have hosted this project. More than 70 sponsors have provided backing and can be found on the web site www.storianelfuturo.org. They include: the Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Cuneo, San Paolo IMI, Banca Carige, Banca Intesa, Banca Popolare in Intra, Finmeccanica, Fincantieri, Ansaldo Superconduttori, Centro Ricerche FIAT, AsiRobicon, Costa Crociere, Alessi, Bialetti.