

COMPENDIUM SHORT PROFILE: ITALY

(based on the detailed country profile of Carla Bodo with Simona Bodo: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/italy.php>)

1. Facts and figures

Political system:	Parliamentary republic
Year of membership to the Council of Europe:	5 May 1949
Year of membership to UNESCO:	27 January 1948
Population:	60 665 551 (2016)
Non-nationals of total population:	9.5 % (2015)
Official language(s):	Italian (Minority languages: Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian)
Share of population using the Internet	63.2% (2016)
Public cultural expenditures per capita:	90 EUR (2014)
GDP in Billion EUR:	1 642.4 (2015)
Accession to Key Cultural Conventions:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>European Cultural Convention</i> (1955): 16 May 1957 • <i>European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages</i> (1992): 27 June 2000 - not yet ratified • <i>UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions</i> (2005): 19 February 2007

2. Historical perspective

General context

Although “the promotion of cultural development” was far-sightedly indicated among the goals to be pursued by the Italian 1947 Constitution, support of cultural creativity and access to the arts remained in the background for decades, in a country where heritage safeguard has traditionally been at the forefront of cultural policies due to its enormous archaeological and artistic legacy.

A relevant turning point came in the 1970s, when significant institutional reforms took place. Cultural access and artistic creativity started to be actively pursued, first by some of the newly created 15 ordinary regions (1972) – immediately aware of the potential of culture and the arts for asserting their own identities – and subsequently by municipalities, the city of Rome taking the lead. So much so that the call for a wider participation in cultural life became a debated national issue. The reply, at the state level, has been the rationalisation of cultural competencies through the creation, in 1975, of a separate *Ministry for Heritage*, by regrouping responsibilities for museums and monuments, cultural institutions, archives, libraries, book publishing, previously scattered in several ministries (whereas performing arts and cinema followed in 1998, and tourism was added in 2014).



No wonder if all the indicators dealing with the dynamics of cultural expenditure – state, local and private – as well as, consequently, of cultural participation and cultural employment, have been on the rise in the last three decades of the XX century, which also enjoyed a quite positive economic development (although the same indicators show a persisting gap in cultural supply and demand between the developed northern and central regions and the underprivileged – if richly endowed in heritage and artistic talent – southern regions of Italy: a longstanding problem, yet to be addressed...).

Since the turn of the century, however, Italy's cultural development has been heavily hindered by a dramatic downsizing of public expenditure for culture, brought about, first, by changes in political majorities and therefore in political priorities, and, subsequently, by a growing economic downturn. Financial restrictions have caused a progressive downgrading of artistic and historic assets, affecting as well artistic creativity, cultural institutions, cultural industries, and, consequently, the rates of cultural participation and cultural employment.

The greatest achievement of the last years has probably been the birth of a new social, intellectual and cultural awareness of the role of the arts and culture on the part of civil society as a whole (associations, non profit organisations, corporations), and – last but not least – the press. The great potential of using Italy's unique heritage and wealth in artistic talents for strengthening competitiveness in a globalised world – increasingly acknowledged by the political class – has helped to partially reverse the downward trend in state cultural expenditure. Fundamental social and cultural changes, globalisation, new approaches to preserve and transmit artistic heritage in a digital environment and a new awareness of culture's vital role both in development and in social inclusion have contributed to new concepts of culture and related policies. This left its marks in more recent governmental declarations, including the belief in “culture as the most important economic ministry”, on one side, and in “culture as a common good” and “the promotion of cultural rights for all citizens”, on the other.

Today, the cultural rights of all those living in Italy, including the now over 5 million immigrants, have started to be considered at both State and (especially) local level. The need to fight the existing pockets of deep segregation in our cities through fostering better access to education and culture for everyone has been repeatedly summoned, including by the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella. Consequently, with the motto that “any additional fund spent in security needs to be counterbalanced by an additional euro spent in education and culture”, the current government provided additional funds for a requalification of run-down urban suburbs and for boosting the cultural consumption of 18-year olds in the 2016 state provisional budget.

3. Overall description of the system

General context

The Italian cultural policy model may be considered from an economic and an administrative point of view. The *economic model* is closely connected to a mixed economy system, with the public sector historically being the primary funding source for heritage, museums, archives and libraries, and, to a certain extent, for the performing arts, whereas the cultural industries – with the exception of RAI, the state owned radio-television corporation – are mainly supported by the marketplace, although supplemented by public subsidies in case of poor market performance (e.g. as regards cinema and the press). On the other hand, in recent times, heavy constraints on the state and local budgets induced public authorities to encourage a direct involvement both of the non-profit private sector and of the marketplace even in the support of heritage and the performing arts.

As far as government action is concerned, the *administrative model* has traditionally been one of direct intervention in the support of cultural activities, and, in many cases, in the management of cultural institutions (museums, sites, theatres, etc.), be it through national ministries or regional, provincial and municipal ad hoc departments. A progressive “désétatisation”, though, has started since the 1990s, when relevant public institutions, like the *Venice Biennale*, along with the 14 blockbuster opera theatres, like *La Scala* (although still predominantly funded by the state) have been given foundation status. A more autonomous status has been recently decided also for 30 state museums and sites.

New models of public-private partnership, have been tried out also by local authorities through the so called “gestioni autonome” (autonomous operated organisations): *Musica per Roma* – the foundation operating the three Rome Auditoriums by Renzo Piano – may be considered one of the most successful examples.

Division of tasks and main players in cultural policy

State legislative functions in the cultural field lie presently within the *Chamber of Deputies* and the *Senate*, and are notably exercised through their Cultural Commissions. Besides the specific legislation in cultural matters, the yearly adoption of the *Budget Law* presently allows both *Chambers* to play a relevant role in the funding system, as the Parliamentary debates on this law often produce heated discussions on the pros and cons of public financing of culture.

In Italy, four levels of government – state, regions, provinces and municipalities – share responsibilities in the cultural field. Although important changes in the governance structure of culture are under way, for the time being – with the notable exception of three autonomous regions – the most important administrative and legislative functions still lie with the state, which has also been responsible, until the 2000s, for half, or more, of the total public expenditure for culture.

At the **national level**, responsibilities for the cultural sector lie presently with 4 ministries, and notably with: The *Ministry of the Heritage, Cultural Activities and Tourism* (MiBACT) entrusted with the full range of core cultural functions: heritage, museums, libraries and archives, visual arts, performing arts and cinema, cultural institutions, copyright and tourism (the latter added in 2013), with the only exception being communications (radio television and the press). In exercising its functions via eleven General Directorates, MiBACT is assisted by four central, widely representative advisory bodies: the High Council for Heritage and Landscape, the “Consulta” for the Performing Arts, the Permanent Committee for Copyright, and the newly added Permanent Committee for the Promotion of Tourism. The DGs are technically supported by relatively autonomous scientific bodies such as the Istituti centrali for Heritage protection and restoration, for Books restoration and cataloguing, for Archives, for Demo-ethno-anthropological goods, for Graphic arts, for Audiovisual Goods...

The other Ministries with responsibility for cultural matters are the *Prime Minister's Office* (press, conventions related to RAI, the state agency for radio and television), the *Ministry of Economic Development* (ICT regulatory functions and financial support to local radios and television networks), the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation* (international cultural cooperation), the *Ministry of Education, University and Research* (higher arts, music and dance education).

The **twenty Italian Regions** – all endowed with legislative powers and ad hoc administrative structures in the cultural sector (regional departments for culture) – are split into two groups:

- *Five autonomous regions* were created in the post-war period and endowed with more extended competencies in the cultural field. Three of them – Valle d'Aosta, Sicily, and

Trentino Alto Adige – are directly responsible for the safeguard and management of their own heritage assets, including the previous "national", now "regional", museums and sites.

- The cultural competencies of the *fifteen ordinary regions*, established in 1972, were initially limited to the supervision and financial support of local museums and libraries. Following the devolution of responsibilities for "cultural promotion of local interest" (Law 616, 1977), the subsequent so-called "Devolution Laws" adopted in the late 1990s and the Constitutional Law 3/2001, while the State remains the only level of government responsible for heritage safeguard, ordinary regions have now "concurrent legislative powers" as far as the managing and promoting of heritage and cultural activities is concerned.

Official representation of regional interests is entrusted to the *State-Regions Conference*, where the heads of the regional departments for culture regularly meet to discuss issues of common interest, also acting as a lobbying organisation pursuing institutional reforms towards a more federal governance structure in the cultural field.

The **107 Italian Provinces** have always been the level of government least involved in cultural policy and expenditure (only 131 million EUR in 2013). They are on the verge of being abolished, with the exception of the two Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, which the Regione Trentino-Alto Adige has entrusted with its own heritage competencies.

Along with the state, the **8 101 municipalities** are undoubtedly the most prominent public actors and funding source in Italy's cultural scene: notwithstanding the cuts recently undergone, in 2013 the total amount of their expenditure for culture – 1 990 euro - was still substantially higher than the expenditure by MiBACT itself for the same year (1 609 million). Their **municipal departments for culture** play a paramount role in the direct and indirect management of municipal cultural institutions: museums and sites, archives, libraries, theatres, cultural centres, etc. and support a wide range of cultural activities, including art exhibitions, festivals, White Nights (Notti Bianche), cultural minorities' celebrations...

Financing of culture

- The total amount of public cultural expenditure in 2014 has been 5 464 million EUR (ISTAT/COFOG data). Compared with the 6 099 million spent in 2001, in the last fourteen years cuts in public cultural expenditure reached 11.5% in nominal terms, and are thus much more dramatic taking inflation into account.
- *Public culture expenditure* at all levels of government per capita in 2014 amounted to nearly 90 EUR or 0.35 % of GDP. The ratio on public expenditure – an indicator of the government's willingness to pay for culture – was at 0.66%.
- *Private donations* for culture declined by 50% between 2008 and 2013.

Public culture expenditure at all levels of government per capita, in EUR, 2000-2014

	2000	2005	2010	2011	2013	2014
Italy	101	112	117	108	100	90

Public cultural expenditure by level of government, in million EUR, 2001 and 2014

Level of government	2001		2014		% var. 2001-2014
	million EUR	% of total	million EUR	% of total	
State*	2 476	40.6	1 903	34.8	-23.2
Local**	3 623	59.4	3 561	65.2	-1.8

Total	6 099	100.0	5 464	100.0	-10.5
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Source: Elaborations by *Associazione per l'Economia della Cultura* on ISTAT / COFOG data.

Notes: For the level of government data, consolidation is made within each level but not between levels.

* State expenditure only includes the Ministry for Heritage and the Prime Minister's Office.

** Local expenditure includes Regional, Provincial and Municipal expenditure.

4. Main cultural policies and priorities

Different government coalitions followed one another in recent times, each bringing about changes in cultural policy priorities, although with a constant, dominant emphasis on heritage.

In May 2013, the programme outlined by Minister Massimo Bray, besides announcing new regulations for heritage and landscape safeguard (including the prevention of seismic risk) and for increased access to cultural creation/production, was the first to focus on the promotion of the "cultural rights" of all citizens, "including those with an immigrant background".

In April 2014, the new Minister Dario Franceschini presented his programme, including:

- to increase Italy's competitiveness in post-industrial societies by emphasising - through what he considers "the country's most relevant economic ministry" - the potential of its historical heritage, its beauty, its artistic talents;
- to achieve a modernisation and reorganisation of MiBACT, also by integrating the competencies on heritage and cultural activities with the competencies on tourism;
- to enhance contemporary art and architecture, also as a means for rejuvenating urban suburbs;
- to open more space for educational policies, through better coordination with the school and university systems; and
- to boost new forms of public-private partnership via individual and corporate donations.

Latest developments:

Latest developments in the field of cultural policy in Italy in the past two years have been characterized by a particularly intensive legislative and reorganizational activity, as well as by an attempt to partially reverse the negative trend towards downsizing the public and private financial support of culture and the arts.

Some examples:

- MiBACT's departments underwent two substantial administrative reorganisations in 2015 and 2016: most notably, autonomy was given to 30 relevant museums and sites – from the Uffizi in Florence to the Borghese Gallery in Rome, from Pompei to Ostia Antica... – whose management was opened up through competitions, thus causing some controversy among the Ministry's professionals.
- MiBACT will recruit 500 experts in heritage safeguard and valorisation: a welcomed partial remedy for a reduction in the ministry's staff of over 7 000 between 2005 and 2015.
- ARCUS, set up in 2001 to manage funds collected under the 3% of "capital expenditure for strategic infrastructure rule" allocated to MiBACT, was closed in 2016 and its role subsumed by ALES, the Ministry's agency for investments and services.
- A new programme for Italian Capitals of Culture has been launched for 6 years (2016-2021) in order to stimulate civic cultural planning capabilities.
- Two new Italian-UNESCO agreements were signed in 2015: *Unite for Heritage*, a task force of "blue helmets for culture" for the rescue of endangered cultural sites, and the establishment of a UNESCO training and research centre for cultural economics in Turin.

- MiBACT's financial allocation for 2016 is 27% higher than the previous year, but is still significantly lower than the figure for 2001, as the erosion of the budget started in advance of the economic downturn in recent years.
- An extra 1 billion is being allocated for the regeneration of run-down urban suburbs and for boosting the cultural consumption of 18-year olds in the 2016 state budget.
- As far as private support for culture is concerned, the temporary Art Bonus – a tax credit up to 65% for donations to support cultural assets – was made permanent in the Financial Stability Law 2016.
- A rationalisation of the present "jungle" of organisations in the performing arts system has led in 2015 to quite controversial admissions and exclusions: so much so that in 2016 the government was delegated to rationalise legislation in a *Codex for the Performing Arts*.
- According to a draft law for cinema, ad hoc state financial allocations will increase by 60%, also providing special incentives for young authors and support for new cinema halls.
- A more structured effort by MiBACT to address cultural diversity and integration issues was made in December 2015, through the launch of "MigraArti", a project financing the endeavours of Italy's "new citizens" in the field of music and the performing arts.
- A downsizing of -16% in the traditional cultural industries, with a negative fall out on related employment, occurred between 2010 and 2014, according to AGCOM, the Agency for Communications.
- To address the crisis in the publishing industry a new draft law will create a Fund for the pluralism and innovation of information
- A law reforming the public broadcasting company – enhancing the role of a government-appointed CEO – has been adopted in December 2016.
- The reduced VAT rate on cultural goods of 4% was extended to E-books by the Financial Stability Law for 2015.

5. International cooperation

General context and main actors

The main governmental body involved in international cultural affairs in Italy – although in cooperation with MiBACT, also by means of a "Memorandum Agreement" signed in 1981 – is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation/MAECI.

It comes to the Ministry – through its *Directorate Central for the Promotion of Italian Culture and Language* (also responsible for cooperation in educational and scientific matters) – to coordinate Italy's cultural activities abroad, in cooperation with international organizations (UNESCO, the COE, the EU Commission, ICCROM...) and through bilateral cultural agreements. The main instrument for the Ministry's cooperation with foreign countries, though, is its worldwide network of 83 *Italian Cultural Institutes Abroad*, whose purpose is to promote Italian culture by organizing all sorts of cultural events – lectures, exhibitions, theatre shows, concerts ... – along with courses in Italian language. Unlike similar institutions, as the *Goethe Institutes*, however, it should be noted that the Italian Cultural Institutes – on which reform is pending – are in no way autonomous from the Ministry, being subject to frequent changes in political majorities. With 300 branch offices worldwide, the *Società Dante Alighieri* also plays a relevant role in disseminating Italian culture and language abroad.

The latest MAE's bilateral endeavour is the joint organisation of full-scale yearly cultural events in given countries, selected according to foreign policy priority criteria. After Russia and China – among the favourite targets of international cultural exchanges and cooperation



in the past few years – 2013 has been the *Year of Italian Culture in the USA*: 50 events have been organised in 200 US cities around the theme “research, discovery, innovation”. More recently, 2015 and 2016 have been declared the *Years of Italian Culture in Latin America*.

It should also be underlined that close cooperation of both MAECI and MiBACT with developing countries in heritage conservation matters – as well as in the rescue of heritage artefacts dispersed by conflicts, lately in particular in the Middle East, also in cooperation with UNESCO – should be considered as a peculiar “Italian way” to intercultural dialogue, as well as to supporting sustainable development.

European cooperation

Italy has been involved in most of the European joint cultural programmes with the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Among the cultural programmes carried out by Italy with the Council of Europe – the European Audiovisual Observatory, the Eurimages fund for film production and distribution, the *HEREIN* project in the heritage field – the *Cultural Routes*, launched in 1987 and recently renewed with the support by the European Commission and the European Parliament, can be singled out.

As for the European Union, Italy has always been at the forefront in the commitment for enhancing its action in the cultural field. An example is The *Report on Cultural Cooperation in the European Union* (the so-called Ruffolo Report) adopted in 2001 by the European Parliament: an Italian initiative aimed at strengthening a European common policy in support of its diverse cultures. Italy has also been actively engaged in the merging of the two existing EU programmes, *Culture 2007-2013* and *MEDIA*, into the new programme *Creative Europe*, aimed at boosting European competitiveness through the support of its cultural and creative sectors. The Italian MP Silvia Costa – President of the Cultural Committee of the European Parliament – has actually been Rapporteur for the Creative Europe Programme 2014-2020, finally adopted in November 2013.