

Entrepreneur, woman, Sicilian. Emblematic example of a *protected species*? Not at all! Alice Petralito has an academic and professional background which echoes commitment, commitment and again commitment. Admittedly, our friend is a bit anti-conformist! Who would ever dare to leave a permanent job, let alone one in the Senate? And who would ever *descend* to her Sicilian parents to communicate her decision and the challenge she wants to take up? It's easy to be Alice's fan today (success inevitably leads to consensus), but to find supporters during the tough times of choices and changes is quite a different story. The lack of the entrepreneurial spirit might be the scapegoat to justify the difficulties that Italy is facing in recovering from the crisis. Yet, it seems like yesterday, coping with problems in the global environment, the Italian initiative managed to create long waves of economic growth.

Every statement of Alice raises unanswered questions, the most striking being the one on the strange relationship between the new generations and work. Is there any real will to work or do something useful among youngsters? Are they just looking for economic stability, or do they seek to exercise their Right to Happiness in its American meaning? They all seem to be waiting in line for the launch of a *State Staff selection exam*. After all, these selections are just tests on the candidates' knowledge of specific subjects, with no room for the evaluation of candidates' motivations. Are motivations still relevant today? Alice is the living proof that motivations still matter, but she as well had to go through many experiences to understand she was on the wrong way. Undoubtedly, everything helps, but was it really necessary to face the boring and contrived routine of Roman Palaces to find her way?

One year has passed since *we played* with the Anonymous we interviewed in August 2011, who hilariously envisaged he could get listed on the Stock Exchange, and here we are again to talk about the same topic, this time drawing our inspiration from a success story: to fall short of expectations is *"the price we pay for betraying our inclinations (...) what we lack is the grip on reality, starting from who we are. A quandary: shouldn't this be the task of education? And how come a generation with the highest rate of graduates ever is the less equipped for confronting reality?"* Those questions struck us then and those we ask again today: let us ponder on them, better while enjoying a perfect *Sicilian happy hour*. Take a gourmand's word for it.

Mariella Palazzolo

Telos is a member of the FIPRA network

PETRALITO

CLARIFYING THE RULES OF THE GAME.

THAT'S THE REAL BETTER REGULATION.

“A suggestion could be to draft a handbook for those willing to start a business, making them aware of any risks and difficulties, before they waste time and money.”

Telos: Any self-respecting newspaper has a column about *stories of young people*. The most recurring characters are the thirty year old *yuppie*, hungry for success *no matter the crisis*, who tells how much he loved the entrepreneurial risk right from the cradle and the *melancholic* Graduate with great expectations and lousy achievements. You undeniably have a successful story, is it possible to talk about it without falling into the classical stereotype?

Alice Petralito: Yes it is. Since I've never planned my life now I'm neither falling short of nor living up to any expectations. I have no regrets. By the way, I've always loved living and taking up challenges, feeling certain that doing well today would take me to a brighter future. But what this future actually is, I'd rather find it out day after day. I have an entrepreneurial attitude for sure, I've learnt to know it and to nurture it over the time but I can't tell if it belongs to me *from birth*. What I can tell is that I left home when I was eighteen, never to go back: thus, I developed my *problem solving* skills, which are fundamental for an entrepreneur. Finally I think we have to know ourselves better and to listen to ourselves, not being afraid of changing our life nor our work. This certainly helps to make those brave choices which an entrepreneur can't afford to escape from taking.

The economic crisis has been either denied or dramatised. From an entrepreneur's point of view, is Italy a country in decline? Do you expect anything from politics in terms of encouraging economic growth? And how much does recovery rely on the society?

Italy is in decline for sure, a country with an outdated internal structure fooling itself into believing it can be competitive in the global market without making any radical change. Strictly speaking I don't expect anything from politics. What may really help is to change the entire ruling class but that's a wishful thinking. I'm convinced that *the administration of the res publica* is one of the most difficult



Alice Petralito. Born in Catania, grown up in Modica, in one word Sicilian! Alice left her homeland to go to Milan for her University studies. There she graduated from *Bocconi* in Business Economics and Legislation. She went on with the usual series of traineeships, one abroad at the European Commission, the other in Italy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then she attended the Master in International Affairs at the Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) of Milan. After a year and a half working in financial communication for Sanpaolo Wealth Management, she seized the opportunity to work at the Senate in Rome where she was assigned to the international relations area, thus getting acquainted with the basics of Protocol. But the *Palace life – slow rhythms and Byzantine procedures* – is not for her. In 2007, she luckily came across a talented Sicilian pastry chef, and the idea of *Ciuri Ciuri*¹ bloomed: a Sicilian pastry and ice-cream shop, catering and banqueting, now with four stores in central Rome, and two recent openings in the heart of Milan. Alice is 360 degree responsible for the administration and management, marketing, corporate communication, events management as well as the development strategy of the company. Still, she keeps on defying herself with new challenges. Maybe because she fenced with brilliant results being regional champion and often among the best in Italy?

¹ *Ciuri Ciuri* means flowers in Sicilian and it is the title of a famous folk song.

jobs, entailing burdensome responsibilities, and therefore I can't explain why there's no provision requiring practical or theoretic training in that field. Putting these considerations apart, I hope for a better promotion and protection of the private initiative. Yet, there are too many hurdles today. What politics could and should urgently do is to *clarify the rules of the game*. The sector I work in, but it may well be the same for many other ones, is characterized by uncertainty of rules, you can never tell if you are complying with all the legal requirements because legislative provisions are often contradictory with one another, as well as different regulatory bodies. It's very hard to work well under such an uncertain framework. The Government is working to simplify the administrative burden on business. A suggestion could be to draft a *handbook* for those willing to start a business, making them aware of any risks and difficulties, before they waste time and money. Society, in turn, should be more critical but in a constructive way, not just showing angry dissent. People's attitude towards many things should change, for instance towards Power. Power means responsibilities, whereas for the majority of Italians it is just synonym of personal privilege. When you assume such a perspective, it is hard to have common good in mind while *playing politics*.

It's quite a task to modify Italians' reputation of being lazy. However, according to the data on the average annual hours worked per worker, Italy equals the US and it is far ahead France, Germany and the UK. Apparently the reason of our decline of competitiveness lies elsewhere. Probably in Italy we work intensively but not efficiently. Is this true in your experience in HR management?

It is certainly true! With few exceptions, we lack work culture and respect for work. And this is true today more than ever before. The mentality is always the same: I only work when I have a tight deadline to meet or my boss is watching me. The habit is to focus your efforts on getting a contract and, once obtained it, just exercise your rights without even asking yourself what your own duties are. And it's very disappointing to observe such a behaviour among the youngest. They are all complaining that they can't find a job, but at the end of long rounds of interviews, I have often found myself wondering whether they are really trying to get one!

It is a widespread belief that Italians food habits are being influenced by global trends. Yet, you gave your business a strong local identity: how does the *happy hour* get along with the rediscovery of traditional recipes?

Here we offer the Sicilian *happy hour*! It's true that nowadays eating rhythms and habits are changing and that there's a great interest in ethnic and exotic food among the public, but the typical cuisine of our tradition is always Italy's favourite. Traditional food in Italy is unique in its diversity, since it comes from many different regional and local realities. Moreover, in our business we play on the nostalgia of those Sicilians who, by choice or necessity, live far away from their homeland.