Made in Italy. Values, Identity, and Relationships

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Abstract

The interpretation of "Made in Italy" values and their relationship with consumer perception are deeply intertwined with cultural and social aspects. With its strong connection to places of origin, the Made in Italy brand carries a profound symbolic value that resonates with our shared cultural heritage.

Over the years, Made in Italy has evolved into a powerful collective brand, uniting numerous companies and embodying qualities, style, and historical culture. It stands as a beacon of design leadership, conjuring images of diverse productions, boundless creativity, and innovative prowess that we all contribute to.

Yet, the perception of the current Made in Italy is a nuanced interplay of current production transformations and more profound shifts in the global, sociological, and cultural context. Understanding this dynamic can give us a richer perspective on the brand's evolution.

Introduction

The following reflections are crucial to the PE11 Made in Italy circular and sustainable Spoke 2 PNRR Project. This project, titled: "Emotional. Experience Made in Italy: immersive storytelling design for contemporary values and sustenability" .

The research is based on the shared understanding that the values of 'Made in Italy' are intricately tied to national cultural and social aspects. This includes the unique link between companies and their original production areas, even in international productions. One of the key factors that sets 'Made in Italy' apart is its strong connection with specific places, which gives it a unique brand value. Over time, 'Made in Italy' has evolved from a brand of origin to a collective brand, uniting numerous companies and symbolizing quality, style, and historical culture. It is synonymous with leadership in design, fashion, quality of food, raw materials, technologies, and artistic and creative sectors, reflecting Italian productions' diverse and innovative nature (Terenzi and Furin, 2020).

However, not all Italian companies are able to share these values, even though they have compatible characteristics. This is because their history goes beyond the brand paradigm but is also deeply rooted in the territory's evolution.

The notion of "country of origin" has shifted from the generic "Made in Country" to a more extensive set of meanings: Country of Manufacture, the

Country in which the production phases take place; Country of Assembly, the Country in which the parts of the product are assembled; Country of Design, the Country in which the product is designed. "Country" represents one of the territories that welcomes production passages and transformations; being only a "stage" of the production landscape, to strengthen its identity, it tries to regenerate the relationship with the consumer by referring to values traditionally linked to Italian culture.

The current communication of 'Made in Italy' has not kept pace with the profound global transformations. It remains stereotypical and disconnected from contemporary variables, multiculturalism, changing territorial paradigms, and globalized productions. This detachment from today's production realities has led to the misuse of' Made in Italy' on counterfeit products, which are only superficially Italian (Temperini, Gregori, Palanga, 2016).

Among the most significant reasons lies the fragmentation of identity values associated with territories. The territory of Italian productions is dynamic, fluid, and constantly evolving; it is rooted in its history, indeed, but it evolves and changes. The perception of the current Made in Italy is not always attributable to production transformations and only partially relates to the more profound transformations in the sociological and cultural context. Made in Italy, it could recognize itself in an atmosphere more consistent with the complex landscape of the future. According to Böhme (2010), the atmosphere is "the primary perceptual reality": it does not end in a passive observation of the surrounding physical reality but implies an affective/emotional involvement. Within a territory, identities, cultures, and productions intertwine intricately. By aligning the communication of the Made in Italy brand with the contemporary values of Italy, there is an expectation for increased participation from companies and, to some extent, consumers in the production process.

Perceived values.
The culture of the production process
By Stefania Palmieri

"The Made in Italy expression embodies a culture and emblematically characterizes the industrial production of our Country.
Made in Italy is not just a production system but also a cultural system: family, art, creation, ingenuity, and innovation."
Adolfo Urso - Minister of Enterprise and Made in Italy (2024)

Is Made in Italy a family affair?

Every object with the Made in Italy label is a testament to a globally renowned brand. This label is not just a mark of origin but a symbol of superior quality, meticulous craftsmanship, unparalleled luxury, and a rich family heritage. It encompasses various products, from fashion and footwear to regional delicacies and fine wines. But it doesn't stop there. The Made in Italy brand extends to services, such as tourism and territorial marketing, showcasing our cultural heritage and local traditions.

A brand that represents its way of life, its history, and its cultural roots. The Italian manufacturing vocation is so highly esteemed worldwide that Made in Italy is considered one of the most important brands globally.

A critical lens through which to understand and delve deeper into this concept is undoubtedly the production culture that generates Made in Italy. Are there recognizable types of companies that, more than others, keep this

brand so "local" alive and well in such a global age? The answer is yes!

At the core of Italy's entrepreneurial landscape are family-run businesses. These enterprises, deeply rooted in their local communities and traditions, are also forward-thinking, embracing innovation and looking to the future. Many Made in Italy success stories share a common thread- the family. These businesses stand out globally, not just for their products but for the values they uphold. They are a testament to the enduring power of history and tradition, driving steady growth across generations.

It is within these family-run businesses that the true essence of Made in Italy thrives. Italy boasts one of the highest concentrations of family businesses in Europe and the world, accounting for approximately 65% of Italian companies. These are often long-established enterprises, outperforming other business types regarding growth and profitability. They are also highly focused on international expansion, a testament to their adaptability and resilience in complex and competitive markets. Many of these businesses operate in the Made in Italy sectors, where the values of authenticity, uniqueness, quality, craftsmanship, trust, and ethics are deeply ingrained. This is particularly evident in industries such as food, fashion, and furniture, where the creation of brand value and its positive perception are crucial, both domestically and internationally.

Among the secrets of the success of family businesses, which characterize them as ambassadors of Made in Italy in the world and make them more or less attractive to potential investors, are the so-called social capital and patient capital.

Social capital refers to the attachment to social values related to respect for tradition and employees. They operate in a reality perceived as their own property and always focus on quality. Furthermore, confrontation is marked by blood ties and is therefore felt as more genuine. Finally, guaranteeing customers, suppliers, and investors the same name, if not the same face, over the years is synonymous with stability.

On the other hand, patient capital refers to the foresight typical of these companies. Rather than immediate profit, family businesses aim for consolidation and security for their heirs. And indeed, the success of Italian family businesses lies precisely in generational transition (Amore et al., 2021). Experts agree that the great success of a family business comes when the new generations grasp the entrepreneurial DNA of the company and transform it into something new.

But is there a way to measure the perception of Made in Italy worldwide?

The Best Countries Report, compiled by the US News & World Report, the BAV Group, and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania using qualitative and quantitative parameters, seeks to assign a value to this intangible asset. A set of 73 national attributes, or terms that can be used to describe a country and are also relevant to the success of a modern nation, has been identified.

These attributes have been grouped into ten thematic subcategories that entered the ranking of the best countries: Adventure, Agility, Cultural Influence, Entrepreneurship, Heritage, Movers, Open for Business, Power, Quality of Life, and Social Purpose. This report measures Made in Italy by calculating the market value of the 30 most important Italian brands, trying to extrapolate their strengths.

In the Best Countries Report 2023, for the year 2022, Italy is ranked 14th out of 85 countries. Globally, the main Italian brands are perceived as a guarantee of quality, authenticity, and style. These brands refer to a group of large, agile companies interconnected with a dense network of other small to medium-sized enterprises. In particular, references are made to companies driven by a strong entrepreneurial spirit and characterized
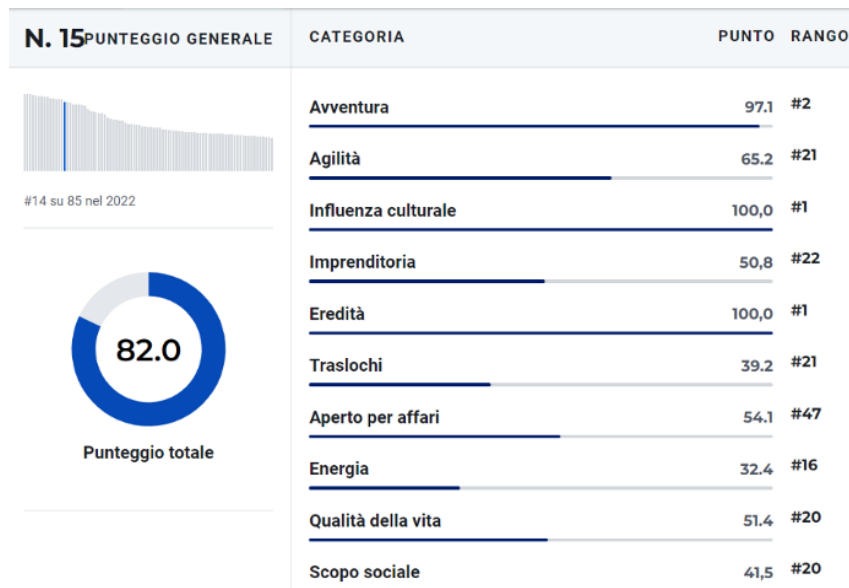
N. 15 PUNTEGGIO GENERALE	CATEGORIA	PUNTO	RANGO
	Avventura	97.1	#2
#14 su 85 nel 2022	Agilità	65.2	#21
	Influenza culturale	100,0	#1
	Imprenditoria	50,8	#22
82.0	Eredità	100,0	#1
	Traslochi	39.2	#21
	Aperto per affari	54.1	#47
	Energia	32.4	#16
Punteggio totale	Qualità della vita	51.4	#20
	Scopo sociale	41,5	#20

Figure 1. U.S. News Best Countries -2023 Rankings (https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings)

by innovation, internationalization, and a focus on customer experience. This entrepreneurial drive and innovative mindset are critical factors in the success and perception of Made in Italy.'

The analysis reveals that some Italian companies are very skilled at leveraging their image, while others are less strong. Except for specific sectors such as luxury, fashion, design, and food, Made in Italy seems to have a weaker image compared to Made in Germany, the USA, and France.

At a global level, the USA, China, Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom are the national brands with the highest added value. China continues to narrow the gap with the USA; the Chinese brand would be worth 18.8 trillion dollars compared to the 23.7 trillion dollars of the American brand. Despite the proliferation of Italian names worldwide, the true' Made in Italy' remains a beacon of strength and global recognition. This is due to the concept of brand rarity. Italian raw materials, often rare and found only in certain geographical areas (think of wines or olive oil), contribute to this unique perception. The same concept of rarity is found in the skills of human resources: workers in Italian companies are technically prepared, with unique and hardly imitable skills. This is perhaps why many Italian fashion brands have their own school where they train tailors and pattern makers.

'Made in Italy' is not just a label; it's a central element of Italian cultural identity. It represents a depth of professionalism, know-how, knowledge, work, innovation, research, quality, and extraordinary value. Italy must be much more aware of its economic, social, and cultural strength as a country of aesthetics, taste, design, image, identity, and history that have always accompanied it. This cultural significance of 'Made in Italy' sets it apart and demands respect and appreciation.

Symbolic Identities. The Culture of the Territory
By Daniela Anna Calabi

The country-of-origin effect (COO) represents an intriguing starting point for reflections on the culture of territories and its perception. Presented as a cognitive bias (from a detail, one forms a complete, and not necessarily correct, idea of content), the COO effect has the great potential to distort the consumer's perception who based on the "made in" label could deduce that the quality of a product is good simply because it is made in a given country (De Luca & Pegan, 2012).

The theme of the COO effect has been widely discussed in the international economic literature over the past forty years, which has highlighted its ability to influence consumer decision-making (Baker & Ballington, 2002; Usunier, 2010; De Nisco, 2007; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Vianelli & Marzano, 2012; De Luca & Marzano, 2012; Bursi et al., 2012). The process underlying the relationship between COO and consumer behavior is attributed by some authors (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1989; Verlegh, Steenkamp, 1999) to three main components that interact with each other: the cognitive sphere, the affective sphere, and the normative sphere.

In the cognitive component, the image of the country of origin indicates the product's quality and its individual attributes (e.g., reliability, durability, design, etc.). In the absence of more detailed information on the quality level of the product, the consumer subjectively evaluates it by "substituting" such information with what they know about the country of production as a whole or in the specific sector to which the product belongs.

The affective component manifests when the product's country of origin can evoke an emotional value (e.g., after a vacation spent in that country) or a symbolic value (e.g. when the country's image is associated with a specific national identity or social status). Finally, in the normative component, the purchase is linked to the willingness to support or not the economy of a particular country based on the level of agreement with its policies and conduct (such as boycotting products from some countries as a form of protest).

From an economic, political, and cultural perspective, the image of a country can influence the purchasing intentions of foreign consumers regardless of the judgment on the quality of the products themselves (Wang, Lamb, 1983). Some studies have found a kind of "hierarchy among countries" in the minds of consumers on which evaluations and judgments are expressed. At the base of this scale is essentially the level of economic development of the country (Manrai et al., 1998). However, these rankings inevitably vary over time (Bilkey, Nes, 1982). Furthermore, the COO effect is not significant to the same extent for all types of products, so a country may be appreciated for some types of goods and not others. The effect is also more pronounced when referring to products associated with a country holding a particular production tradition, such as Italian fashion, French perfumes, or Swiss chocolate (Roth, Romeo, 1992).

Moreover, scholars are shifting towards expanding the COO effect model, no longer limited to the country alone but more generally applicable to any geographical region, from cities to districts, provided they can convey distinctive characteristics in the minds of consumers (Andehn, Berg, 2011). According to another perspective, studies on the COO effect are repositioning toward concepts such as product-country image (PCI) (Papadopoulos et al., 1993; Liefeld, 2004) or, more recently, toward country image (Zeugner-Roth, Diamantopoulos). Several contributions highlight how the image of the country of origin (understood as representation, reputation, and stereotype) associated with its productions is the fundamental antecedent of the effect that the country of origin can have on consumer decision-making (Usunier, 2006; Bursi et al., 2012). In particular, this construct qualifies the productions of a specific country concerning the areas of innovativeness (superiority, technological advancement), design (elegance, balanced style), prestige (exclusivity and status of national brands), and workmanship (reliability, quality of national products, durability) (Roth, Romeo, 1992; Aiello, Donvito, 2011).

Recently, studies on the theme of the country of origin have focused more on deepening the interactions between the country of origin and the brand, namely the country of brand origin (COB) effect. From this perspective, the study focuses on the origin perceived by the consumer through the brand; the belief is that in different situations, the consumer does not possess nor seek information about the product's origin but relies on the "signals" that the brand can provide.

From this framework, the strategic relevance assumed by Made in Italy emerges, which, from a simple mark of origin indicating the international specializations of the Italian production system, has become a collective brand over time. Synonymous with leadership in design, quality, and globally recognized reliability, Made in Italy evokes the unique and distinctive image of productive quality, creativity, innovation capacity, and lifestyle (Fortis, 2005). Made in Italy, its evocative and connotative power is connected to typical and unique meanings and values (Vescovi & Gazzola, 2007), and it can be compared to a "megabrand" (Fan, 2006). A country brand becomes a megabrand when it enjoys an accumulation of trust and reputational resources that facilitate a rapid accreditation process among multiple international audiences in terms of notoriety, appeal, and credibility (Roth, 1995; Holt et al., 2004).

Made in Italy is thus a process of identity elaboration aimed at finding new balances between technical-economic components and cultural components. Adopting this perspective, the search for a competitive identity for Made in Italy can overcome two extreme modalities. The first, restrictive, according to which Made in Italy indicates only what is entirely Italian, with the risk of excessively emphasizing the value of the territory and underestimating the value of cultural exchange instead. The second, instrumental, where Made in Italy is everything perceived as such by the market (excluding counterfeiting or imitations), and which, compared to the first modality, nullifies the distinctive value of the territory, exacerbating the role of international marketing strategies (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2004).

The analysis of the different interpretations of the Made in Italy phenomenon highlights that the distinctiveness factor is the strong connection between the product and the territory (Marino & Mainolfi, 2011). Paradoxically, an effect of globalization is precisely that it has conferred a competitive advantage on the local identity of Made in Italy products, which has always stood out abroad for its high quality and originality, the result of traditions and historical skills rooted in specific territories (Golinelli, 2012). Some surveys aimed at investigating the distinctive features qualifying successful Italian productions abroad recognize Made in Italy products not only a high intrinsic value (use value) as instrumental "ingredients" for achieving a better quality of life but also a high symbolic value, thanks to their ability to evoke the so-called "Italian dolce vita".

From a conceptual point of view, it must be emphasized that the notion of "country of origin" is not unambiguous and elementary. If initially the concept of the COO effect was linked to that of the generic "Made in Country", gradually the spectrum of meanings has expanded; as is known, it is possible to distinguish between "country of manufacture" (COM), i.e., the country where the production phases take place, "country of assembly" (COA), where the assembly of the product parts takes place, and "country of design" (COD), the country where the product is conceived, designed, and drawn (Samiee, 1994; Nebenzahl et al., 2001).

Territories as networks of relations.
Trans-territorial cultures
By Mario Bisson

Every time the land becomes a place of exchange and cooperation, it becomes a territory, a means and object of work, production, cooperation, and communication (Magnaghi 1998). More precisely, it takes shape as a "landscape" of nature and culture and as a space of sharing where relationships and exchanges intertwine.

The concept of 'territory' encapsulates geographical, cultural, and spatial values , rendering it a dynamic and adaptive system (Bretagnolle et al.). Its properties are in a constant state of regeneration, presenting a 'surprise' for the observer (Batty & Torrens 2001: 3), thereby highlighting the dynamic nature of a 'territory' as a complex and adaptive system.

From an epistemological perspective, it is essential to differentiate between 'landscape' and 'territory.' The latter refers to a geographic area and its physical structure, delineated by boundaries and imbued with its historical and cultural dimensions. On the other hand, 'landscape' represents the aesthetic perception of the relationships between the environment and human beings, reflecting the human interaction with the territory, places, and spaces.

Over time, the territory evolves into cultural heritage, a product of continuous human actions that shape it into a common good in the present (Magnaghi, 2015, p. 140). This territory serves as a crucial reference point for formulating plans, policies, and strategies for economic development, encompassing relationship building, knowledge advancement, and organizational transformation (Rullani, 2010). It stands at a pivotal juncture, once again underscoring the importance of the term 'territory' in economic development.

In short, the territorial paradigm is changing again due to some fundamental data. Referring to territorial conceptions that date back to Fordism or the district capitalism of the last century risks overshadowing the transformations that are taking place in the present and, above all, the opportunities and threats of evolution that we will face shortly. The essential point is that today's generative and replicable knowledge tend to separate and distance themselves, connecting remotely within global networks and supply chains. Their synthesis is no longer in the individual territory but in the trans-territorial relationship that traverses each place, connecting local productive systems with increasingly relevant knowledge, goods, and capital flows. (Rullani, 2013, p. 148)

Nevertheless, geographic proximity remains highly important: it is a context of shared experience that shapes and evolves with those who inhabit it; it represents the result of the sedimentation of shared experiences.

Today, the territory is an "unfinished system" (ibid: 151) that continuously seeks to regenerate its identity through external events that deconstruct it to find a new balance. It is a transitional system that, thanks to the generative intelligence of the subjects who inhabit it and with whom it interacts, takes on new forms capable of responding to the opportunities and challenges of each season.

Strategic action on a territory involves promoting actions that enhance the resources of an area through virtuous mechanisms that generate further resources. Design, with its visual cultures that re-signify places and connect the idea of a particular place to the collective imagination, is a crucial tool for enhancing historical, cultural, and environmental resources. Each landscape contains a well-structured and complex system, both tangible and intangible,

of values, narratives, and opportunities, which should be the foundation of the design process.

Tomàs Maldonado defines design as the "strongest link that connects man to reality and history" (1970, p. 31); in the case of the design of place identities, that link operates within the French concept of milieu (Governa, 1997), referring to an endogenous, rooted, and appropriated design. Design, therefore, acts on the cognitive and material interaction of the local network with the environment and the ecosystem, a relationship that involves translating the potential of the context into communicable and exchangeable values through processes of symbolic and material transformation of the environment. If productive innovation processes evolve from the presence of a characteristic and recognizable cultural, social, and productive environment suitable for exchange, the process develops from the interaction among the actors. In this case, both the processes of constructing the design culture and the network of generative relationships and collective co-production processes of values can be made explicit (and potentially translated by communication design), as they are based on tacit processes of relationship and collaboration.

The cultural environment is, therefore, the fundamental "layer" of the territory necessary for the construction of recognizable identities.

The communication of Made in Italy products to date is 'fragmented.' Correct communication of the country's system, instead of the chaotic proliferation of promotional messages, initiatives, and events that end up diluting each other, could make a significant contribution. One of the vulnerabilities of Made in Italy is the confused management of communications, which leads to a significant weakness: the inability to evolve with the changing socio-cultural and economic context.

A statute for Made in Italy seems lacking, often used parasitically for "cloned" products; there is talk of Italian sounding, a chronic counterfeiting problem affecting various merchandise categories. In evaluating a product, consumers can easily be influenced by false considerations that leverage cultural, affective, and emotional characteristics.

The argument focuses on the importance of understanding the complex dynamics of urban networks and the possibility of classifying them based on their local integration and external functional openness. This approach allows for the analysis and comparison of different models of urban development, highlighting variations in the structure and organization of urban networks at both global and local levels. The operational definition of the critical components of urban networks provides a conceptual framework for studying the relationships among cities, organizations, and urban systems within a broader context of interconnected global networks. The communication problem affects the identity of territories starting from advertising atmospheres, where "Made in Italy" seems to be conveyed mainly through a stereotypical representation of tourist territory; it raises crucial issues concerning the perception and communication of authenticity and cultural diversity associated with the Made in Italy brand. The identity of a territory is often influenced by advertising representations that promote Italian products, with an excessive emphasis on tourist and stereotypical aspects. This approach reduces Made in Italy to a simple label of origin, different from global production, rather than enhancing the complexity and authenticity of Italian traditions, craftsmanship, and culture.

Even just considering advertising atmospheres, it is noted that they mainly focus on the tourist representation and stereotypical image of Italian values, neglecting the highly advanced technologies and scientific research that characterize contemporary productions, conveying a superficial and reductionist image of the cultural heritage. This phenomenon could lead to standardization of Italian products in the global market, losing sight of the

historical, artistic, and artisanal roots that characterize true' Made in Italy'. However, the problem requires a critical reflection on the communication and branding strategies used to promote' Made in Italy', and a strong call for more authentic, diversified, and respectful approaches to the Italian cultural richness.

Still far from being able to offer solutions, it is recognized that the cultural perspective determines the methodological indication and the choice of the design standpoint. The designer's perspective becomes the tool of investigation and communication that is thought to provide a synthesis of the complexity of the territorial relationships of the urban milieu. Remember that the urban milieu refers to the physical and social environment in which daily life occurs in a city, namely tangible elements such as architecture, urban structure, and productive places; intangible elements such as culture, habits, and social relations. The milieu plays a fundamental role in constructing the sense of place, the latter understood as the emotional and psychological bond that an individual develops with a specific place, an emotional or affective source of gratifications and memories.

Conclusions

The narrative that Made in Italy embodies is necessarily partial, but when it becomes a cliché, it fails to reflect the continuous and profound transformations of the country. It is argued, therefore, that a modern one could be introduced through a nuanced and truthful narrative in response to the perception of a Made in Italy that strongly evokes the past. This shift is a suggestion and a necessity to keep up with the evolving global market.

The country of origin brand results from a compromise between two representations of the country: real and "crystallized," acquired, and strongly stereotypical. It is a representation in which idiosyncratic beliefs weigh significantly. It is therefore necessary to identify the foundational values of the country brand, establish a positioning, and a desirable and adaptable vision across different productive sectors.

The identity communicated by Made in Italy does not reflect the current reality, which is characterized by diverse identities and sectoral productions organized in international networks. The Italy of De Sica, Fellini, Rossellini films evokes a memorable vision that portrays past social, cultural, historical, and political realities; it tells of a time sedimented in memory, realistically foundational, but not suitable for identifying realities born from the layering of other narratives, choices, and visions. Certainly recognizable and much loved, historical identity alone is unfortunately inadequate to transparently communicate the value of global productions. To construct a narrative today capable of considering the many Italian productive and cultural identities, a strategy of realism is necessary, with the aim of creating a unified communication that rests on fundamental values, such as cultural heritage, strong material, and immaterial memories, but capable of intercepting and communicating the value of international networks of relationships and contemporary social, trans-territorial trends. This unified strategy is crucial to ensure a clear and consistent message about Made in Italy (Rullani, 2013, p. 142).

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