

Italians in Braşov. The end of "Little Italies" abroad

*Italians are back to be immigrants. But something changed from the past.
The "community" is just a memory: "the other italians are annoying".*

By Andrea Lattanzi

The news is not that Italians are back to be immigrants – +19% in 2013, +71.5% only to Great Britain in the same year – but, considering the past, is that nowadays Italians prefer to migrate alone, without building locals communities in another country. We have been in Romania, where the Italian immigration has many facets, at least as many as the similarities and differences between these two peoples.

There is not, or better, no longer exists, an ideal type of Italian migrants in Romania. After the fall of the regime of Nicolae Ceausescu, the area was interested by a strong wave of entrepreneurs and large companies which had seen in low-cost labour and convenience of taxation a place to relocate their businesses or start new ones. Today, however, with the crisis and with the growing of troubles of the Italian economy, in Romania is possible to find many different profiles, from expert antiquarians to young workers, from the caterers to the dealers.

Braşov, beautiful town of about 300,000 inhabitants in Transylvania, for Italians is not Timisoara, where the Italian community has gradually expanded to reach heights of 10,000. In Braşov Italians are a few, fewer than 1,000, and there are none large companies run by managers from Italy. But it is not difficult to find people from "Belpaese" because, unpleasant exceptions aside, the Italians have become particularly beloved here.

The first foreigner accepted in the tradition is Italian – One of the most positive examples, in this sense, is the one of Massimiliano Domizi, who at the age of 19, in 1992, decided to follow his emigrated uncle in Romania. The regime had just crumbled and Max, after an initial period of difficulty, began to move in international cooperation, promoting trades between Italian and Romanian local institutions. Then, he worked in the public works sector, and finally opened a travel agency for the "widespread rental" of apartments in Romania. His «greatest success as an immigrant» was to be admitted to the party of Junii, annual event that mixes Christian and non-Christian traditions in the neighborhood of Şcheii, at the foot of the mountains which surround the city. A key moment of the festival is a parade on horseback through the streets of the suburb. Well, Max was not only the first foreigner, not only the first Romanian not from Braşov, but the first person born outside the district of Şcheii to be able to take part in the parade as a horseman. «I've established a great relationship with the members of Junii - he said - going to eat together, riding, sharing unforgettable moments. They welcomed me like a family». A Romanian touristic guide in Florence, explains that «this festival for the people of Şcheii has the same value of the Palio of Siena» the famous horse race which takes place in the central square of the Tuscan city. Friends and folklore aside, Max explains that a crucial factor to convince many Italians to go to Romania are the tax laws and bureaucracy.

The reason of migration in a figure: the fiscal system – The tax burden in Italy in 2014 came to 44% of tax revenue to GDP ratio, while in Romania stood at 29.5%, where there is a single rate of 16% of the income of natural persons and legal entities. For those who have requested and been granted residence in Romania, at the rate of 16% affects the income wherever it has been produced, but for non-residents 16% only affects the income produced in Romania. A great advantage for those who decide to open a business without taking up residence. Despite this, Flavio Tilesi, 53, born in Basel but raised in Milan, has taken up residence in Romania. "Taxes are good - he explains - life is good, pleasant and with very little you make many things. If you do not pay taxes is simple, the pick up the income from your bank account is compulsory".

There is no news: "The one man" in the well-being loves food and women – Flavio is not the only one to focus on the quality of life in Romania, «as long as you accept the great social inequality» still remain around here. Walter Mattuzzi, Venetian farmer who arrived here in the early eighties as a dealer in leather, now cultivates kitchen herbs for 40 restaurants and for the Italian Embassy in Bucharest. He says flatly: «the food is good and if you accept the rules you live better as well».

To live better, though, you also need affections and relationships. The clichés of the Italian person that goes beyond the Carpathians to take a beautiful Romanian wife is soon tested by the facts. In an eight-day stay we did not find an immigrant Italian lady, only men, often married with indigenous partners. Roberto Cesaroni from Grosseto, sixty-five and "historic" antique dealer in Braşov, came in Transylvania at the beginning of Nineties for the bachelor party of a friend. «I was here five years to spend the money I had earned with my beer house in Tuscany – he remembers – and I met my current wife.

I stayed for sentimental reasons - continues the merchant - but I would never go back in Italy again». Like him there are many and all of them are united by a deep feeling of respect for the land and for the people which received them.

"The other Italians are annoying" – But the Italians with each other, how do they behave? We said at the beginning, Braşov is not Timisoara and among them the sense of community is reduced to a minimum. Always Roberto tells us that «I have no relationship with the Italians. They are all annoying». The same opinion of Federico Caboni, Cagliari 36 years old, who lives halfway between Italy and Braşov. Arrived in July 2014 for a bachelor party (bachelor parties, but how many are made in Romania?), he explains that from he came here he hasn't tied up with Italians at all. Despite this, he says «to do not feel abroad» because «it is always a matter of rules». If you follow them «it is easy», otherwise «it's complicated», Federico, who was an executive of a US multinational, has bought a place a few days after he got here. The reason? «Romanians allow you to live in peace».

High level of security perceived – Security is one of the merits of Braşov. «I've never seen a cop out from a bank», says Roberto the antiquarian of Grosseto. The low rates of crime is favoured by a very strict criminal law, and, it is claimed not without reasons by the most malicious, from the fact that many of the "criminals", as the Romanian manager of a local bar calls people with in trouble with law, «have been taken by you Italians in your country». Nicola Brescia, 57, pizza maker of Caserta, has a strong passion for football. He trains four times a week and has a small team of soccer. «I've never had a problem with a Romanian - supports - although in my environment there is a human variety such that you could find everything and more».

Good bye Little Italy. No faith for you, no faith for Italians Friendliness (of Romanians), low taxes, bureaucracy leaner, food more than satisfactory, business opportunities and more generally a better life. Braşov is a place where Italians can escape to find peace and well-being. Dramatically, or fortunately, alone, without shutting themselves in a community-based system which can have always its advantages in terms of relationships but which brings necessarily a load of rules, mechanism and a potential isolation from the locals. The times in which Italians abroad were all together, protecting themselves collectively and looking for the solidarity of their compatriot are gone. The Little Italy of New York or of San Diego is just a memory. The faith of in Italy is over. But, maybe, also in the Italians.