



Global Junior Challenge

Projects to share the future

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Mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno
Political Authorities from other Cities,
Students, Teachers, Parents,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Global Junior Challenge once again gathers at the Campidoglio City Hall of Rome to celebrate excellence, generosity, solidarity, creativity, and the energy and determination to innovate society out of a deep concern and commitment to build a better world for all and, particularly, for the new generations who will inherit the world today's adults have helped create. I believe humanity will need a lot of the virtuosity we celebrate here this morning to face with success the great challenges already in front of it and for decades to come.

We live in a world in rapid evolution and complexity. Scientific and technological advances abound in many areas of direct relevance to human well-being in work and life in planet Earth. Genetics, biotechnology, neuroscienze, nanotechnology, robotics, artificial intelligence, bio-interfaces, cognitive technologies, web 2.0 and 3.0, immersive technologies, and many

others, can be applied transversally in many areas of life and work such as Health, Education, Environment, Safety, Entertainment, etc. The future is expected to bring massive sociotechnical systems that will gather huge amount of data (big data) from myriads of sensors distributed pervasively in cities and other places. This big data will be processed by massive computer power, giving us real time information that will help us change our behaviour and solve problems such as pollution, traffic, epidemics, and so on. In short, scientific and technological advances have the potential to enhance the development of human society towards a more harmonious relationship between the individual, the collective and the planet.

And there is more ... along with advances in hard science and technology, there are many developments in the “soft” areas of organization, governance, knowledge management, didactics for individual and social learning, environments for technological and social innovation, simulation environments for entertainment and many others. These interact, make use, enable and stimulate further the development of science and technology.

So far, so good, and indeed, some people envisage a world of abundance for all, not that far out in our lifetime. In a recent book, *Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think*, authors Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler argue that maybe in 25 years we may live in a world of nine billion people with clean water, nutritious food, affordable housing, personalized education, top-tier medical care and non-polluting, ubiquitous energy. In addition, this would give us the freedom to pursue our goals and aspirations unhindered by political repression. Would it not be beautiful?

Certainly, yes, it is a most attractive optimistic vision, and one I would wish to subscribe immediately were it not for some present day realities that gives us less room for optimism and much more of an invitation to work hard to improve the world we have now and get ever closer to the optimistic vision, maybe not in 2025 but at least in this century.

Let us see a few words that remind us where we are today in Italy: deep economic crisis, lack of growth, low productivity, tax evasion, corruption, unemployment, precarious work, NEET, Monti's lost generation, corporate and individual selfishness, institutional weakness, greying of the population, weak progress towards 21st century education, environmental problems, etc. Above all, these problems are interrelated, they are the expression of a societal structure that over the years gradually lost dynamism, becoming ever more rigid and paralyzed, something suicidal in the era of the Euro and globalization.

Today, there are efforts to change this reality and the majority of the population is paying a high cost. So far, the government has managed to stop the severe financial instability and loss of credit menacing the country and, perhaps, this is the less difficult part. It is yet to be seen whether and how the country solves the knot of its rigid societal structure and finds a renewed dynamism to advance with force towards a knowledge society based on trust, excellence, merit and a sense of community and country in the heart of Europe. Above all, it is essential that the benefits of this renewed dynamism be inclusive, that is, for all citizens: young, adults and seniors. In this respect, why not imagine an Italy that's not only able to break out of its own crisis; it is also able to become a real European and world leader in tackling some of the fundamental problems facing humanity today. The European Union speaks of “global challenges” that demand urgent attention and it has already re-oriented an important part of its Horizon 2020 budget towards projects aimed at technological and social innovations tackling these challenges. I think that Italy is in a position to provide some the most innovative and profound responses to these challenges, perhaps paradoxically, because the societal

crisis has reached so deep into the country's institutions and each one of us. The Monti government has already demonstrated that this is possible at the financial level in Europe. Now it is the time for all sectors to demonstrate the same leadership for the entire society: thus, the forprofit sector, the social sector, the government sector and the community sector are all called upon to work together with determination to wake up, reinforce and channel the enormous reservoir of energies represented by the people, organizations, and communities across the country.

No doubt a huge challenge for Italy. How to face it? Certainly, there is no formula and myriads of initiatives are required to create the better future, including the structural reforms that must unblock the country's dynamism, excellence, innovation and solidarity.

At the Fondazione Mondo Digitale, we believe that education is at the heart of the overall solution. This education, however, is not limited to the formal education imparted by schools, universities and other formal educational organizations; it is also the informal education that comes from families, communities and society at large. It is the codified knowledge of the formal subjects (always in evolution) and it is also the habits, attitudes and life competencies (or skills) widely accepted as fundamental components of the 21st century education. Above all, it is lifelong because it is an education not just for a better job, it is an education for a better life as a responsible citizen playing an active role in a better society.

Clearly, this type of "life education" is required if Italy is going to reinvent itself to regain the position among the world leading nations – a position that belongs to her because of the so many talents of its people; its cultural heritage without parallel in the planet; its history of greatness that goes back to the Roman Empire, gave rise to the Renaissance and witnessed the reconstruction of the post Second World War and the rise to one of the leading economic powers in the world.

To achieve this "life education," the scientific and technological advances I have referred to at the beginning will undoubtedly contribute greatly. In fact, they are already enabling the transformation of teaching, learning and the organization of schools, universities, and educational systems in general. They are enabling the rise of new educational curricula, new learning and innovation skills, new information, media and technology skills, new evaluation systems, new learning environments in the class and the institutions, and new needs for professional development. Scientific and technological advances are also facilitating the integrated formal and informal education of life competencies such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, commitment, team work, community-building, cross-cultural understanding, social responsibility, project management, innovation, entrepreneurship. These life competencies are slowly making their way into education but they are still far from a systematic integration into the system. Yet they are an essential element of the "life education" required for the re-invention, or, we can legitimately say: the new renaissance in Italy.

At the Fondazione Mondo Digitale, we work for the dream of an inclusive knowledge society and the fundamental core of this work is centred on "life education" and, particularly, on the nurturing of life competencies and the elimination of all those divides that exclude people from the benefits of the knowledge society. Thus, we have developed innovative programmes tackling the digital, gender, inter-generational, inter-cultural, and other divides that discriminate against the realization of the human potential of individuals and society. We have developed knowledge, instruments, platforms, events and many projects that have touched the lives of many people in collaboration with many organizations from all sectors, above all,

schools across the country and abroad. We have found wonderful committed people, young and old, like the innovators present here in this hall, who surely will play a key part in the new renaissance of the country. People who live their lives serving rather than self-serving, caring for the disadvantage, giving, sharing and cooperating with others, mentoring, supporting and from all this growing as responsible citizens in their communities and society as a whole. At the bottom of all this is the exercise, the practice, of fundamental virtues such as generosity, solidarity, compassion, fairness, integrity, humility, merit; in short the fundamental pillars of a free, just, equal and secure society.

Today, more than ever, this is what we need, because the re-invention of the country passes through the re-invention of its people from a predominantly selfish, materialist and socially indifferent behaviour to a predominantly generous, free and socially-and-planetary responsible behaviour. We must break with a culture and, hence, “life education” that almost invisibly reduces our rich, multi-dimensional humanity to the role of consumers and power-hungry individuals.

Nel suo libro *Consumo Dunque Sono* (2007), Zygmunt Bauman ci spiega bene la situazione di vita nella quale ci siamo intrappolati e per tanto la sfida davanti a noi per rinforzare ed incanalare le migliori energie della società verso la costruzione di un futuro degno per noi e le nuove generazioni. Bauman ci dice della società liquido-moderna di oggi:

“Il consumismo ... associa la felicità non tanto alla soddisfazione dei bisogni ... ma piuttosto alla costante crescita della quantità e dell'intensità dei desideri, il che implica a sua volta il rapido utilizzo e la rapida sostituzione degli oggetti con cui si pensa e si spera di soddisfare quei desideri; ... Nuovi bisogni richiedono nuove merci, nuove merci richiedono nuovi bisogni e desideri; l'avvento del consumismo inaugura l'era dell' "obsolescenza programmata" dei beni offerti sul mercato.” Questa società ci impone un contesto “inadatto alla pianificazione, all'investimento, e all'accumulazione di lungo periodo ...” (p.40)

But to come out from its profound crisis and fulfil the dream of a new renaissance, the country needs to look at the long term and give rise to systemic processes of social innovation that engage all sectors of society; above all, it needs to question and gradually change the dynamics of “programmed obsolescence” fed by a superficial happiness based on the vicious circle of “merci-desideri-bisogni,” that exclude all those who cannot join the ranks of “consumism.” We need to rediscover and live our full humanity, individually and collectively, the richness and beauty of who we are, and the greatness of what we can achieve. We need to feel deeply that we belong to a marvellous species and that, together, we can think and realize the unthinkable, only if we have the will to be the best of what we can be.

I wish to conclude by sharing with you a dream that intends to be a contribution to a society where “life education” nurtures an individual and social behaviour predominantly generous, free and socially-and-planetary responsible. This dream is inspired by people like you; by your wonderfully imaginative and generous projects. It is a dream based on solidarity, innovation, and excellence, for people who wish to enrich their communities, society and themselves by giving their time and talents as volunteers and activists do today. We use the name of 21st Century Volunteers and see it as a fundamental path towards a “life education” rich in both the systematic learning of “life competences” and the systematic practice of the virtues in our humanity. This “life education” must develop and utilize the best of today's learning and educational science and technology; it must be active, experiential, project-oriented and capable of collaborative personalization to unleash the potential of each and everybody; it must be rooted in communities and territories since the experiential learning and practice of

life skills and virtues must happen in concrete processes of community improvements, where problem-solving, innovation and entrepreneurship skills can be best developed and applied; it must utilize and operate in an integrated fashion in the physical (territorial) and virtual (online) dimensions crucial to success in this century. These territorial/virtual processes must become spaces for a “life education” that integrates gradually with the formal educational system in open educational environments where families, educational organizations and communities interact to contrast the reductionism of the “modern-liquid society” and realize the full potential of what we can be as people, communities and, indeed, humanity.

Thanks to all the innovators who are here today because your presence is motive of joy and celebration; thanks to all the people who have worked hard to make this celebration a reality, including the Municipality of Rome that has always supported us, and I know that together we will multiply the power of our respective dreams.

Many thanks,
Alfonso Molina, 19 October 2012

Professor Alfonso Molina's speech is also available as a [PDF](#) ^[1].

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