

Testimonies from elsewhere:

Questions for some young school and university graduates who left Molise during the last few years

edited by Norberto Lombardi

I asked the interviewees to discuss the following themes:

- 1) *Their study curriculum, university education, post-graduate training (where, and a judgment on its quality), previous experience studying abroad or elsewhere in Italy, and apprenticing experiences, if any.*
- 2) *How and when they came to the decision of leaving Molise, their impact with the world of work in the host area, a comparison with Molise and, if abroad, with Italy.*
- 3) *Ties of affection and social relations (family plans, personal contacts with Molisan and Italian individuals or communities, how they spend their free time, etc.). If and how frequently they use web-based communication systems (e-mail, Skype, or social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.); how frequently they go back to Molise.*
- 4) *The image of Italy abroad in their work and life milieus; perceptions of the South and of Molise in other Italian cities; regional and local news from Molise).*
- 5) *Whether theirs is an irreversible decision or they would be ready to seize an opportunity to go back and, if so, at what conditions. What collaboration projects with Molisan institutions, entrepreneurs or professionals they would consider.*

These were their answers:

The watershed of meritocracy

Marco De Martino, engineer, Düsseldorf

I was born in Isernia 26 years ago. After graduating from high school at the E. Majorana Scientific Lyceum of Isernia in 2004, I enrolled in the faculty of Engineering of Telecommunications of the University of Pisa. Here I obtained my bachelor's degree in 2008 and my master's degree *cum laude* in 2011. In 2010, I won a European scholarship, which allowed me to prepare my master's thesis at the research laboratories of the Japanese

company NEC Europe LTD in Heidelberg, Germany. During this period, I had the opportunity to meet colleagues from all over the world and further my knowledge in my research sector. I do not deny that I initially had trouble with the language. I had just begun to study German and only had what little English I had picked up in school and in study periods abroad. I felt completely at loss. During these first six months abroad, the need to make myself understood led me to improve my English and thus become acquainted with different lifestyle and begin to appreciate the fact that the managers and employees of the company treated us interns on equal terms.

Overall, this was a key experience that shaped my subsequent decisions. Having obtained my master's degree in May 2011, I went for my first job interviews in Italy and abroad. Here I began to notice the first substantial differences. In Italy (Milan, Florence, Genoa, Lucca and in Molise) travel expenses were on me, whereas in Germany (Munich and Düsseldorf) the companies that were interviewing me paid for all my expenses (even breakfast!) and the managers were very nice to me.

I began to entertain the idea of leaving Molise years ago, when I moved to Pisa to attend the faculty of Engineering, which Molise did not have. I later decided to have a work experience outside of Molise to grow professionally and culturally, and make more money. Beginning in July 2011, I started to work at the research and development laboratories of Nokia Siemens Networks in Düsseldorf, Germany. Here I appreciated the company's work method. The work environment was much more relaxed, and informed by a care for the working space and mutual trust. It is not easy to compare different work environments, since every company has its own customs and norms. However, as far as I can tell there are major differences, also as regards the use of space. Working with 45 people in an open-space office is different from working in rooms with 2 to 4 people, each with at least 12 square meters per person, as in my company.

Of course, going abroad is difficult, since one loses all the ties of affection and the relationships one built over the years. Besides, you have to learn to cope with your problems on your own. Of course, it also brings a positive growth. We Molisans, in particular, are not the pampered Mama's boys former minister Padoa Schioppa made young Italians out to be. The vicissitudes of life have often forced us to emigrate. Fortunately, modern Internet-based communication systems (Skype, e-mail and Facebook) allow us to keep in touch with family and friends and begin new relationships with other Italians who, like me, emigrated from Molise.

Of course, there are also opportunities to go back to our beloved Molise, usually on the main holidays, like Easter, Christmas and the summer break. Certainly at those times we appreciate the beauty of our land and the company of our loved ones even more. Returns home, however, are usually also the time when we compare the order, cleanliness and efficient services of the towns we live in abroad and our green Molise, where

ruthless politicians allow concrete buildings to be erected in towns at the expense of our practically vanished green lungs. My beautiful Isernia is an emblematic example of this.

A major difference between foreign countries and Italy, and especially Italy, is meritocracy. An excess of favoritism and the indifference of our fellow Molisans have often led to extreme neglect of the land and its resources. The consequences are under everyone's eyes, first and foremost the lack of jobs for young people and a consequent increase of the social gap in our land. By my experience, even Germany is not the Land of Cockaigne. You often need to work very hard, but there is more equality between wages—although super managers exist there, too—and social differences are less perceivable. As a consequence, there is a better quality of everyday life. And then, when I think that during the twelve years I was registered with the local employment office I never received a single job offer, and the only messages that appeared on my mobile were those of politicians at election time, well, I wonder whether this system is ever going to bring some benefits to the collectivity, or the only alternative for us young people is to flee the area.

In my case, having been away from Molise for almost eight years, the decision not to return appears inevitable. I do not deny, however, that, like many other emigrant Molisans, I would like to have an opportunity to do something for my region, and possibly even go back to lead a serene life in the place where I was born.

Surely what drives us all, young and not-so-young, to go abroad is the lack of job opportunities, but allow me to say that the situation of Molise does not encourage people to stay either. Towns lack services, there is a near absence of public transportation—especially buses and trains—compared to other towns abroad, and the lack of civic sense and respect of one's fellow citizens results in a deterioration of the quality of life.

From study to work

Alessandro Di Stasi, civil engineer, Parma

I was born in Campobasso. I am 36 years old. I graduated in Civil Engineering, with Structures as my main study focus. I hold a doctorate in Mechanics of Antiseismic Structures. Since 2001, I have worked as a freelance professional in my own private studio. My field is building design, renovation, architecture, and all that concerns the building sector.

I left Molise in 1994 to study engineering after graduating from high school at the Campobasso Scientific Lyceum. At the time there was no faculty of engineering in Molise. The closest ones were in Rome and Naples, but I was a bit frightened of moving to a large city. I therefore

decided, with other friends from Campobasso, to go to university in a small and dynamic provincial city. I chose Parma.

The impact with the world of work after finishing university was excellent, as the Parma area has a flourishing building sector. I also had the opportunity to continue to interface with the university milieu and work for a local prefabrication company that had opened a plant abroad. Furthermore, I soon obtained some direct appointments by the town and Provincial governments of Parma for the conservative restoration and seismic improvement of several school buildings placed under the protection of the Superintendency of Cultural Heritage. I have hence always felt very well-rewarded, especially because I have had the opportunity of forging a relationship of trust with some much larger companies than those existing in Molise.

In the year after graduation, 2002, I married a girl from Parma and had a little boy with her, who is still one of my main occupations during my free time.

I have kept up my contacts with my milieu of origin, including both family and friends. To keep in touch with them, I use web-based media almost daily. I use Skype to “see” my parents and brothers, and talk to them. I use Facebook and Twitter to stay in touch with my friends, as my returns home are rather sporadic. I usually go back during the Christmas holidays, at Easter time, and for ten days or so in August. Nevertheless, I do keep up my relationships with my childhood friends. Every now and then I go to see them in the several Italian cities where they have been living for years (Rome, Florence, Milan, Bologna, etc.).

Italy is much appreciated abroad in the structural and architectural planning sector, among other things because some Italian universities still offer top notch training in this field. However, there has been a general decline of university education after the introduction of the “3+2 years” system. This has had a direct negative reflection on the image of our country in the eyes of professionals from other countries, whose level education, on the contrary, has been steadily increasing.

Contrarily to what one may think, in my sector there is a very good opinion of many professional milieus in the Italian South, as they work closely with very high-level university systems whose research is appreciated all over the world, such as “La Sapienza” in Rome, “Federico II” in Naples, the Politecnico in Bari, and the Sicilian schools of Palermo and Catania, to mention only some. Molise, instead, is still lagging behind in this field, as the Civil Engineering sector is very small in university, being limited to the Termoli and Adriatic coast area) and still too recently established to have a strong research curriculum. Among other things, there is no faculty of architecture.

For the moment a return to Molise is out of the question for me. I would be unable to have a professional activity comparable to the one I have so

laboriously worked my way up to during these years in Parma. I do not rule out, however, that one day I could place the professional competence I have gained during these years in the service of Molisan private subjects and public institutions, even wholly for free. We could create a discussion group on a social network (for example, Facebook), or a computer magazine to keep subscribers up to date on mobility trends in Molise.

Sacrifice is acceptable, not the lack of prospects

Giovanni Faonte, PhD student, Yale University

I was born in Campobasso on August 5, 1984. I began my university studies in 2003 at the LUISS, Libera Università degli Studi Sociali, in Rome, with a focus in Economy. From there I moved to the Università degli Studi di Roma, La Sapienza, where I obtained my Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics, with full marks, in 2007. My thesis was entitled *Un'applicazione delle Algebre di Banach alla Teoria delle Serie di Fourier* (An Application of Banach's Algebras to Fourier Series Theory), and my thesis advisor was Prof. Alessandro Figà Talamanca.

I later won a scholarship for a Master's Degree in Mathematics granted by the SISSA/ISAS, International School for Advanced Studies, in collaboration with the Università degli Studi di Trieste. In 2009 I obtained my Master's Degree in Mathematics, with full marks. My thesis was entitled *Picard Stacks*, and my advisor was Prof. Barbara Fantechi.

Since 2009, I have been a Mathematics PhD student at Yale University, with Prof. Mikhail Kapranov as my advisor. As part of the same program, I have been teaching math courses and tutoring in the same university.

My education is purely academic and scientific, in the field of pure mathematics, with career prospects in the university research sector. My research interests lie in the fields of Geometric Algebra and Category Theory, and more specifically the Theory of Homotopia, the Theory of n -Categories, and Derived Algebraic Geometry.

I left Molise when I was very young, at the age of 18, after graduating from high school at the "L. Pilla" I. T.C. technical institute. Like many others, I decided to attend a university outside of my region. Usually such decisions are prompted by the fact that universities outside of Molise offer a better education and more job opportunities. Besides, since there are no Mathematics faculties in my region, I had no choice.

After finishing my university studies in Italy, since 2009 I have moved to the United States, where I am currently a PhD student of Mathematics at Yale University, Connecticut. I am on a five-year scholarship, susceptible of being extended, and the money is more than the Italian standard.

The United States of America are different from Italy. This inevitably involves adaptation problems. These difficulties are offset, however, by the experience of getting to know a system different from one's own, a very stimulating and formative experience, which opens vistas on the understanding of socioeconomic phenomena, especially from a reverse perspective, as when we try to interpret the sociological, economic and political dynamics of our country of origin.

The largest difficulties are likely to be encountered in personal relationships, in relations with American structures and institutions, and on the job. Difficulties in personal relationships are due to cultural and linguistic differences, which one feels especially acutely at the beginning of one's stay abroad. These difficulties are easily overcome with time, giving way to the discovery of diversity and a certain sense of solidarity, especially among the non-American members of a community. The American social fabric, although sometimes rough, is fundamentally very flexible, as America is historically a country of immigrants. Tolerance for cultural diversity is thus high. The only form of discrimination is probably socioeconomic in character, and sometimes coincides with racism.

As regards institutions and structures, the sensation is that government bureaus function well. The Police, in spite of their notorious strong scenic and physical presence, seem to perform their job adequately. Health care, instead, is inadequate. The impression is that its inner dynamics and its relationship with the ill are guided by a managerial philosophy rather than a medical one. It is thus not surprising that this has been a recurrent theme in American political debates over the last year, along with the high cost of education and training.

Finally, as regards working environments, the impression is that there is very high pressure and competitiveness. While this, on the one hand, generates dynamicity and opportunities, on the other it sometimes undermines the quality of the work milieu and relations among colleagues. On the other hand, and this is something I really want to stress, there is a general impression of a serious and professional attitude, which minimizes the possibility of alternatives to work in the strict sense. The quality of research and the intellectual movement around Universities are decidedly above any standards we are used to in Italy today. The reasons for this are the larger availability of financial resources and their efficient and disciplined management to reach scheduled objectives.

Currently, I regard my interpersonal relations as very good. This is strictly dependent on the gradual improvement of my ability to communicate in English, and my adoption of American social models and structures. I am a member of the Italian Society of Yale Students and Affiliates, an association whose main purpose is to provide opportunities for socialization for Italians at Yale, and promote the richness of Italian culture through various initiatives. Through this society I have managed to

get in touch with many Italians, including some Molisans, although actually only few. The geographical origin of the members of this society matches the distribution of Italian population.

I use web-based communication and information systems on a daily basis. This has considerably helped me to remain in touch with my town of origin. I go back to Italy every six months.

I often reflect on what it means to be an emigrated Italian, what the personal implications are, and how the people around me perceive my presence as an Italian. Actually, Italians have a very positive image in America. The fascination with Italian good taste, *bella vita*, and culture probably still has a strong hold on the American collective imagination. Furthermore, the strong flows of Italian immigration to America in the last century has allowed the Italian community to become clearly recognizable and well integrated into the American socioeconomic fabric. Since most of these flows came from the South, the image of the Italian in America is sometimes specifically that of a southern Italian.

However, there are limits to this cultural interface, a trend to reduce various aspects of our society to icons or stereotypes, as in the case of the theme of the Mafia. Here there is a very negative image of Italian politics. The last years of the Berlusconi government and the various scandals that have come to light have caused Italian politics to lose credibility. Today our country is regarded as incapable of maintaining an adequate level of institutional reliability and address the challenges of the future. This obviously has an impact on the trust of foreign investors and the credibility of the Italian people, and seriously damages Italian citizens, whether they reside in Italy or not.

In principle, I would be willing to go back. I would be honored to do research in Italy and bring to fruition the experience and education I have acquired so far in my own country. I am still in touch with my reality of origin, that is, Molise, through a collaboration with the *Rivista della Scienza e degli Scienziati Molisani*, edited by Prof. Carlo De Lisio, whose purpose is to collect historical information about Molise and promote scientific work in the region.

I feel an Italian citizen under every respect. Indeed, my feeling of belonging to my country has been reinforced and has matured since I started my experience in America. The catalyst of this effect is probably the very fact of being outside the Italian system.

I personally believe that the moment has come for our State and the Italian people to start a period of reflection on the real state of things. We should examine and put into context, with real data at hand, a series of inner and outer dynamics to be able to adequately position our country in the European and international context.

The current economic conditions call for a change in mentality. The cycle of wealth generated in Italy in the postwar period has probably come to an

end. Accordingly, we must give up the mentality and way of seeing politics that has developed over the last fifty years. We need a new season, a ruling class capable of facing the challenges posed by the global context, a ruling class playing with seriousness and respectability the role the country—that is, its citizens—has assigned to them as its representatives, a ruling class capable of pursuing policies with middle and long-term objectives.

We need a new class of citizens, aware of what is going on around them and capable of imposing respect for the common good. The efficiency of a democracy, and even more of a social state, depends on the civic awareness of its citizens. We should recover a sense of national identity and develop a European identity as well to support this change. The moment has come to sow, so we may reap in the future. The cultural, economic and social destiny of our country will depend on this. It is not a simple challenge, but there are not many alternatives. This is the challenge that Italy, as part of the European system, is called upon to meet to propose an alternative development model to the American and Chinese ones in the global context.

The current economic situation of the country severely restrict opportunities for a university career in Italy. Funding for research, already scarce in the previous years, has now become close to nonexistent. Furthermore, we should develop criteria to assess research and education in public universities, under the control of academic and government institutions. We should provide incentives to universities to develop a higher degree of intellectual mobility, both at the national and the international level. We should establish effective routines to control how public money is spent, to avoid speculation, on the one hand, and create a more meritocratic system, on the other. These are responsibilities that politicians need to assume, especially at a time of crisis like the one we are going through. The current sacrifices may be acceptable, but not a lack of solutions.

Working Scout-style

Michela Izzo, Natural resource management projects - PPS, Santo Domingo

My departure from Molise was more the result of circumstances than an actual decision. After graduating in environmental science at the Università degli Studi del Molise in 2003, I had retained ties with the university milieu. I was carrying on some minor research and thinking of starting a doctorate. At the same time, however, I started to look for other opportunities. I was mainly looking for alternative ways of furthering my education.

Having sounded several possibilities, I happened to apply for a second-level Master in wind engineering at the Polytechnic of Milan, in collaboration with the Università degli Studi di Genova. The course was to begin in October of the same year. The funny thing is that I sent my application two days before the deadline. Well, after about a month (this happened in August), I was informed that I had been admitted to the selection interview. Thus, although I was not in the least attracted by Milan, I moved there to give it at least a try. I told myself that if I passed I could always say no. As is often the case, things take turns that leave us out of our depth, mainly because changes always call us into question, and this generates apprehension. I passed the interview and had to decide whether to leave or stay in Molise, in my family milieu.

In October I applied for a competition for admission to a doctorate, but that was not the right year for me. I was unable to obtain a scholarship to continue my research. Not having any other opportunities, I decided to leave for Milan, where I stayed until January 2006, when I left for a new reality, that of the Dominican Republic.

I am not going to dwell in detail on the events and tortuous paths that, during more than two years in Milan, eventually brought me to the Dominican Republic. I will only say that what guided me, sometimes unconsciously, was a wish to feel contented and satisfied with my role in life. Coming from a Boy Scout background, I had long ago chosen to serve, and could not realize this aspiration in my daily work. I never could accept the idea of working simply for an income. In Milan, I had all that one could wish for in the eye of society. At twenty-four, I had a steady job in a company conducting studies on the environmental impact of large building projects in Italy and abroad. At the same time, however, I was dissatisfied, mainly because I was losing my ideals one by one to reasons of economic interest. Thus, after slightly more than a year and a half, I began a “frenzied and desperate” quest for an alternative that would help me to find my vital niche. I was guided by a message that I found by chance during that period, which went: “Find the job you like and you will not have to work a single day of your life.” It was a prophetic invitation, since we spend about 40% of our lives working!

As part of the many tests, courses, interviews and competitions I took in 2005, I received a communication from the United Nations informing me that I had been selected for an interview for a grant for a one-year experience in the Dominican Republic as a United Nations Volunteer. You can imagine my surprise. For one thing, I did not even remember sending this application, one of a thousand sent during that period. For another, at the time I did not even know exactly where the Dominican Republic was. I only knew that it must have been a country with tropical beaches, and this was already enough to put off a lover of mountain tops like me. In the end,

however, I told myself that it would have been worthwhile to go for the interview, “and then,” well, “we’ll see.”

I went to Rome for the interview, which was in English and Spanish, with my *itañol*, pieced together after a month of superhuman efforts to acquire a minimum vocabulary that would allow me not to fail on the day of the interview. Chance had it that in Milan I lived in a place managed by Spanish people. There I was in continuous contact with Spanish and Latin American people, with whom I could practice.

To make a long story short, I did not make first place, precisely because of my linguistic difficulties. Nevertheless, they decided to interview me over the phone from the Dominican Republic, because apparently my curriculum was the only one that actually fulfilled the requirements of the job that had been put up for competition. Thus, after many vicissitudes, I ended up in Santo Domingo.

The decision to leave was not easy. Taking a leap is always a problem. What is worse is the fear of the free fall after you let go of all holds. My decision was made easier by the fact that the company I was working for granted me a year of unpaid leave, since I had achieved significant results in their most recent projects. I thus left with the certainty that, if something went wrong, I could return to Italy and get my earlier steady job back.

However, as is usually the case, once you have made the leap the second principle of thermodynamics makes it difficult, if not impossible, to turn back. When I arrived I never would have imagined that this country, about which I knew next to nothing before my application, would root itself in the depths of my being.

Since I arrived in 2006, I have been collaborating with the *Programa de Pequeños Subsidios* (the Small Grants Program) (PPS-SGP), a local development program of the World Environment Fund with a special concern for environmental protection. This program is based on the full participation of the beneficiating population, which is the true protagonist of the whole process. The final objective is not so much to bring the project to completion, as to progressively empower the target group, enabling it to autonomously manage its development.

My work experience in the PPS was an important stage in my professional and, above all, personal development. It is here that I found what people had told me did not exist, that is, Scout-style work. I think only those who have experienced the Scout life, the emotion of serving, of working together, can fully understand what I mean. This is precisely what I did throughout 2006. So, at the end of that year, I realized I could no longer go back to my earlier life. I therefore went back to Italy and Milan, but to resign. While I was hoping for a consultant contract allowing me to return to the Dominican Republic, I was contacted to work as a substitute teacher in a technical school. I taught there for a couple of months, until April 2007, when I had to resign again, because I was called from the

Dominican Republic to conduct a study on changes in soil use in one of the country's national parks.

This was the beginning of what I have kept doing to this day. My collaboration with the PPS is ongoing. It is volunteer work in the true sense of the world, and the catalyst of all my other activities. In 2011, I finally managed to complete my doctoral research, which I had been unable to start in 2006, at the University of Molise, with a dissertation entitled *Analisi del clima e delle sue dinamiche in Repubblica Dominicana e sue influenze sul territorio*, whose quality was greatly enhanced by my work experience for the PPS. My work mainly consists of assisting local groups, both in the Dominican Republic and in Haiti, in pursuing micro-hydroelectric production projects. I do feasibility studies, monitoring, and ongoing training.

At the same time, my scientific studies have enabled me to collaborate and get into touch with many institutions, both national and local, which I have continued to work with to this day. With them, I have conducted technical and scientific studies on natural resource and, in general, land management. In income terms, I probably did far worse than I would have done in Italy, but in real terms I have everything I need to lead a worthwhile life.

My experience during these years has led me to the conclusion that you are sure you have taken the right decisions whenever these decisions have allowed you to grow as a person. Furthermore, compared to the Italian and especially the Molisan milieu, I am happy of the fact that my case proves that a person can construct his or her own future without having to accept a reality based on patronage and ties which, far from promoting personal and social growth, create pathological situations of dependence.

My new life, so different from my life in Italy, has not involved any difficulties in communicating. The Dominican Republic, in spite of being an economically disadvantaged country—I cannot stand the expression “developing country,” as its inspiration is neocolonial—has always been at the forefront in terms of telecommunications. From day one I always had an Internet connection and a phone line. I was thus able to keep constantly in touch with my parents, my brother, and my friends in Italy.

Until last year, to fulfill the requirements of my doctoral course I had to go back at least once every eight or nine months, especially in autumn, when I had to present my end-of-the-year reports. Now I have not gone back to Italy in more than a year. I intend to go back this year in July and August, finally in the summer..

Here in the Dominican Republic I have forged some very strong bonds, especially with some people who have practically become my new family. Some very strong friendships have been born. What binds me so strongly to this country is that here people still have a lot of trust in one another, and there are social networks that make up for so many deficiencies. I think the

strongest driver is the people's warmth. It allows them to cope with so many illnesses, both physical and psychic.

As to how you are perceived in this new context, like everywhere else, every country is associated with a stereotype, which people will echo, at least in the beginning, when they learn where you are from. In the case of Italy, here, too, everyone will mention pizza and pasta to you, and tease you for your characteristic Italian pronunciation of Spanish, especially when you are newly arrived.

In the Dominican Republic, I must say that the Italian community, although it is quite numerous, is not very visible. It gives the impression of wanting to go unnoticed. I think this largely depends on the type of Italian immigration the country has known so far. The people who came here frequently did not want their past or identity to be known.

Things have begun to change over the last year. Many professionals have arrived and some commercial agreements have been struck, especially in the coffee export sector.

Lately people have become aware of the crisis many European countries, including Italy, have been going through. Besides, many people have followed stories about the Berlusconi government with interest and curiosity, especially because a Dominican woman was involved in one of them. I met quite a few people who asked me how it could be that the Italians had chosen a Prime Minister like that.

As far as I am concerned, here I found my professional and life niche. I am very happy with my role and feel appreciated both for my competences and as a person. I very much identify with the Dominican people. I have even started a procedure to obtain Dominican citizenship.

This does not mean I have broken my ties with Italy and Molise. From here I have tried to promote collaborations and exchanges. I succeeded in getting the University of Molise, the Dominican Ministry of the Environment, the Dominican National Meteorological Office, and the local office of the United Nations Development Program to sign a collaborative research agreement. The University of Molise and the Technological Institute of Santo Domingo (INTEC) have signed another academic collaboration agreement.

Last year, a Dominican delegation visited Molise, establishing a collaboration with the regional government and several town administrations. This year, the Dominican PPS received a second invitation from the town administrations of Jelsi and Riccia to participate in a series of exchange events to be held in July and August on themes connected to Rio+20.

I have kept up my training collaborations with Molisan Scout groups.

To conclude, in a world where usually morbidity gets the spotlight, it is very important to let people know about the experiences of so many people who decide to live a meaningful life day by day. So I think it is very

important to investigate, as you are doing, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions that drive the mobility of that human capital that makes a difference in the world.

Milan speaks my language

Tiziana Lombardi, architect, Milan

I am 41 years old. I left Molise about twenty years ago, initially to study, later for work-related and personal reasons. After graduating from classical lyceum, I studied architecture in Rome. During college I stayed for nine months in Valencia on an Erasmus scholarship.

My Spanish period was crucial for my professional and personal growth. During those months I experienced a dynamic and constantly expanding city. Even university there seemed more educational and better organized than the University of Rome where I had first studied.

At the Polytechnic of Valencia, I finished my exams and took Spanish language courses, as well as courses to improve my knowledge of computer tools and some computer drawing software that I still use in my profession.

After returning to Italy, I chose a Molisan theme—the restoration of the amphitheater of Venafrò—as the subject of my thesis. I therefore often went back to Molise, where I confronted and clashed with the local reality. Having completed my university career, I started to attend training courses and look for a job. At the time I was dating someone from Milan. So, although I was mainly applying to architecture studios in Rome, I sent a few curricula to studios in Milan as well. Milan called, and this, well, poor girl answered.

In a few days, with my immigrant's cardboard suitcase, I found myself catapulted onto the Milan scene. I felt so fully integrated from the very beginning that I disregarded job offers from Rome—which were few and not very interesting—and ruled out that I could ever return to Molise.

I had a keen desire to live in a large northern city, become economically self-sufficient as soon as possible, and, above all, to start my working life. I thus ignored invitations from the University of Rome to publish my thesis, which would have allowed me to continue my studies and research and maintain frequent contacts with Molise.

In Milan I apprenticed in some architecture studios for several years. I currently work free-lance. I feel I have reached a satisfying income level. The job itself is not always as satisfying. Especially in recent times, I have adapted to doing work that has little to do with my specialization, and sometimes have to accept fees fixed by the client himself.

Today, at 41, to keep up with my continually evolving field, I still attend refresher courses and have earned further specialization degrees allowing me to “invent new work.” Today’s hypercompetitive reality calls for sensitiveness to change, adaptability, keeping constantly up-to-date, and effective organization. All this complicates my life, which would have been easier in Campobasso, but makes me feel alive, and that is what I need. Milan is a town that offers many opportunities and rewards those who manage to keep up with its frenzied whirlwind and adapt to its rhythm. I have never worked either in Molise or in other regions. The above considerations are based on comparisons with the life and professional situations of my university mates and my friends who have remained in Rome or Molise and have preferred to apply for public jobs, or work in their family company or on fixed-term contracts.

Part of my family lives in Molise. I always go back for the holidays, the summer vacation, and some special occasions. The distance and the poor transportation network do not favor frequent returns. My closest friends have moved away, but, like myself, remain bound to their origins and go back “home” for the holidays. On those occasions we all get together. I am in frequent touch over the web with them and with other friends who have stayed behind in Campobasso.

The use of social networks has allowed me to get back into touch with people and be informed about what goes on in Campobasso from day to day. Here I have no other sources of information. Molise is little known in Milan. Those who have friends in the region are familiar with Campobasso, Isernia and Termoli, for the rest Molise is “*down there*.” The expression “are you going down *south* for the holidays?” has become the leitmotiv of the days before my departure. Proud of my origins, I mark out the syllables and double consonants as I reply: “Yes, I’m going back to Cam-bom-basso!”

Molise is my land, the place I feel I have to go back to during the holidays. I always have a good time in my region, probably because I know that in the end I will be going back to Milan.

Molise is my land, but Milan speaks my language.

“Maria, he doesn’t like the food”

Ilaria Massa, engineer, Munich

Today Germany is not only an economic world power, but also a political power. This situation, considering Italy's current difficulties, has led these two countries to become somewhat estranged. "Germans love Italians, but do not respect them. "Italians respect Germans, but do not love them." However, Italian has become the second language in Munich, and more and more university graduates are moving from Italy to Germany. That is what I did, too. An only child, I left the "belly button of the world," my beloved Campobasso, to study engineering in Pisa, and I never again had the opportunity to work in Molise, and never will.

After a frenzied and very theoretical study, the only work opportunities I found were up north. When I took up work in Milan in the telecommunications sector, I began to frequent foreign countries. At the same time, my nocturnal weekend trips on the Milano-Bari express—on average every four to six weeks—to go back to see my parents familiarized me with an increasingly qualified Molisan immigrant reality, made up of university students, as well as teachers and professional people living far away from their wives or husbands and children, who had stayed behind in Molise to benefit from its peace and the support of their families.

In 2005, having left Milan, I began a new work experience in the "northernmost Italian city," as the Germans say, keeping in touch by e-mail with my friends and my only girl-friend still in Molise. Strangely enough, Germans are familiar with Campobasso, through a book, *Maria, ihm schmeckt's nicht* (*Maria, he doesn't like the food*), which pokes fun at typical Molisan—or possibly more generally southern Italian—behavior, which clashes so much with the German attitude. This because the author's in-laws are Molisan.

Although I go back to Molise from Germany as frequently as I did from Milan—the Milano-Bari express having been replaced by the Munich-Naples airplane—these returns, now that I am pushing forty, leave me with a sad feeling. Campobasso is clearly suffering the economic crisis more than other towns in Italy, as the multiplication of gold pawnshops bears out. Filth and deterioration are irremediably undermining the idyllic image of what was once known as the "garden city." Recent TV investigations and an interview with the current President of the Molise regional government about the wasteful spending of the regional administration that I looked up on the Internet at once irritate me and depress me. Beggars in the town streets are increasing exponentially, and young people are forced to quit the region to look for job opportunities.

Culture, traditions, nature: the qualities of Molise

Luigi Scaroina, archaeologist, Campania

I am 40 years old. I graduated from the M. Pagano Classical Lyceum high school in Campobasso. I later moved to Rome for my university studies, where I graduated in Letters and earned my specialization in Classical Archaeology, both at the Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza.” I furthered my education with a doctorate in Antiquity Sciences at the University of Udine.

The good training I had received in these institutions allowed me to land some professional collaboration contracts with public institutions in Rome, Latium, Lombardy, and Abruzzo, and notably with the Superintendency of Archaeological Heritage of Molise. This gave me the opportunity to work on some of the most beautiful sites in the region, from Sepino to Campochiaro, from Colli to Volturno and Venafro, and especially Pietrabbondante. Here, in one of the most captivating archaeological contexts in Italy, an important excavation and restoration of the main Samnite sanctuary is presently under way. We have investigated a very large area, which will be soon opened to the public. The site, which documents better than any monument the splendor of the former inhabitants of Molise, is managed by the Istituto Nazionale d’Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte in collaboration with the Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza.” The growing success of the project has drawn students from several Italian and foreign universities to upper Molise. Indeed, in July and August a significant part of the population of Pietrabbondante is constituted by students who have become familiar with the beauties of our region and learned to appreciate them.

Currently, thanks to a public competition, I am an official working at the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities, based in Campania. In spite of difficulties in adapting to this environment—which is very different both from Rome, where I live, and Molise, where my loved ones are and where I have maintained my official residence—my impact with the public sector charged with the protection of the Italian cultural heritage was good. Although due to misguided national policies my wages are low, I find my job highly rewarding. I am sure it is one of the most exciting and wonderful jobs in the world.

As regards my relationship with Molise, part of my family still lives in the region, as do some dear childhood friends. I daily use web-based communication systems to keep in touch with friends in Molise and consult web sites where I retrieve information about my town and my Region. Unfortunately, I rarely travel to Molise during the winter. In the summer, instead, I spend a few months working at the site of Pietrabbondante.

In my field, Italy has an excellent reputation abroad, which is partly ruined by the incomprehensible Italian bureaucracy. Molise, instead, is still not very well known, although it boasts some archaeological sites that are renowned among specialists. Its cultural milieu is regarded as still very close-minded under certain respects. On the other hand, its people have a reputation for openness and hospitality.

I do not know if I would seize an opportunity to go back to living permanently in the region. I probably would, but in the awareness that I would be slowing down my professional growth. At any rate, I still cooperate with public and private institutions in Molise on projects aimed at promoting the region's culture, tradition and nature, its most important qualities.

Does Molise really exist?

Laura Spina, reporter, Milan

On a sultry August day about twelve years ago, my mother called me and said: "I am in Rome. I am queuing at the general registry office of La Sapienza university to enroll you in the Communication Sciences program." It was 1999, and I had made my mind up that all in all studying law in Campobasso was going to be OK after all, that I sooner or later would have loved that faculty, that sooner or later I would have become used to the banality of my home town. Fortunately, my mother had realized before I did that I was only trying to convince myself. She had realized that Campobasso would not have been enough for me and that I needed to have an experience away from home. And so, in September of the same year I found myself living in what was to become my adoptive town: Rome. Vast and beautiful, sprawling and welcoming, chaotic and pacifying. The cradle of my restless but thirsty-for-life soul.

There I learned not to rest on my laurels, to give nothing for granted, and to fight with tooth and nail not to be just a number, confused in the crowd. I inhaled the freedom of no longer being a "daughter" of Molise Scuola (as if I could be the offspring of a library!) and no longer being asked the most typical and dreary question in small towns like ours: "Who do you 'belong' to?" There, however, I also discovered the discomfort of abyssal distances between home and university, work, the theater, restaurant, or whatever, the dangers of going around late at night, the loneliness of walking through the streets and not recognizing a single face. There, again, I found myself cooking pizza and soup to feel at home, but ethnical restaurants were a joy of the senses that I had never felt before. I found that I missed the Holy Friday procession, but also that a town can have more than two movie theaters. I found that you cannot smell the fresh mountain air at 400 meters of altitude, but also that schools do not close in April due to the snow.

For my five college years, I went back home every two or three weeks, but the more the months went by and the more I only did it for the love of a boy who had gone back to live in Campobasso, and never because I missed life there. And I always went by bus, because it was a little cheaper, there were more runs a day, and, above all, I did not feel like traveling on a cattle

wagon, which is how one felt practically every weekend on the incredibly slow and very short interregional train that connects the capital of Italy with the regional capital of Molise.

By 2005, I had a university degree in my pocket—which at the time seemed somewhat useless—and no intention of going back home. I thus decided to go even further up north, once more driven by love of my boyfriend, who in the meantime had moved to Lombardy to work. So I left Rome and ended up in Milan. It was a freezing January of 2006, and everyone teased me because I talked like [Italian party leader] Di Pietro and greeted me with an ironic, “Oh, so Molise really exists then?” No, here, up north, Molise does not exist. We Molisans are everywhere, and not just driving half of the taxis in Italy. But nobody seems to notice. Few can place Matese on the map. Few know that the blue ribbon Adriatic beaches of Termoli are not the same as those of Rimini. Few are aware that, while Molise is indeed down south, Campobasso is not a warm place like Sicily, where you can go to the beach at Easter time. For the first time, I wondered why people have such a distorted perception of our region, our traditions, and our culture?

It is our fault, that is true. I hear people saying it ever since I was a teen: we do not know how to be sponsors of ourselves. We are incapable of promoting our heritage. We fend off “foreigners’ ” natural curiosity for our beauties. And then, for fear of remaining caught in a lethal quagmire, we escape. We young people flee to faraway places, where one does not inhale the most backward of provincialisms, where people try to do something real and become someone special. I do not know if I am special. I know that here in Milan I have become a professional reporter, I am paid for what I am worth, and I no longer have any reason to go back to Molise. I know that that land, my land, today has nothing for me.

Even though this year on the night of Holy Friday I again wished I was in the streets of the historical center filling my eyes and ears with a unique emotion that is only known to the citizens of Campobasso.