The Milan World Expo 2015 on human feeding

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1.- Milan will be the location of the next World Expo in 2015, an event that we consider the most important from now to 2015. In fact, next year in London there will be the Olympics Games, it’s a great event too, but compared to the 2 million visitors “sport passionated”, the Expo in Milan will have different numbers, about 20 million visitors. This is not the first time that there is an Expo in Milan. In 1906 the International Exhibition was held in Milan and the theme chosen was about transportation, celebrating the opening of the Sempione Tunnel, just completed in 1906, which made possible the first direct train line between Milan and Paris. That means this is the second time for us to have an Expo event. These are the facts and the figures of the event. During the six months period, from May to October 2015, we expect to have 20 million visitors, with 30% of international visitors; 130 countries will participate to the Expo and we forecast to invest something like 12 billion Euro in structures and infrastructures and 1.7 billion just in the site. The exhibition site area will be 1.1 million sq.m and there will be 70.000 new jobs, 7.000 events, 36.000 volunteers are expected for the event.

2.- Just a few story about the Expo. The origin of the idea of World’s Fair is rooted in the French tradition of national exhibitions, which culminated with the French Industrial Exposition of 1844 held in Paris. It was soon followed by other national exhibitions in continental Europe, and finally came to London, where the first real international exhibition was held. The World Expo’s history followed three main evolutionary steps. The first era was the era of industrialization, starting in 1851 and finishing in 1938. That was a World exposition displayed “State of the Art in Science and Technology” from around the world. The second era was the era of “Cultural exchange”; the main focus that characterized this period was the cross-cultural dialogue and exchange of solutions as defining elements of the Expos and future orientation. In the New York exposition in 1939 the theme was the “Tomorrow’s World”, and in Stockholm in 1949 the theme was “Sport”. The third era is the era of “Nation Branding”, starting from 1991 to present times. From the Expo ’92 in Seville countries started to use the World Expo more widely and more
strongly as a platform to improve their national images through their pavilions. Finland, Japan, Canada, France and Spain are cases in point. The last one was Shanghai in 2010, on the theme “Better city, better life”, having as main issues: economic prosperity in the city; blending of different cultures in the city; innovation of science and technology in the city; remodeling of communities in the city and interaction between urban and rural areas. This Shanghai event was basically an event for the Chinese population: 96% of the people that attended this event were Chinese.

3.- The World Expo today must incorporate all the three mentioned areas: innovation and technology; cultural exchange based on a theme; city, region and nation branding. The aim is to promote industrial and technological progress world-wide through sharing of scientific and technological innovation that could improve economic and social conditions globally.

The theme of the Expo 2015 is “Feeding the planet, energy for life” and it clearly explains that energy is the energy from food.

Before entering into the contents of the Expo, I would like to remember some important issues that we call “brutal facts” that are expected to be discussed every day. We are 7 billion people in the planet, we produce an increase of foodstuff of only 2% per year, while the world population increases at a rate of 3%: that means that we have a significant gap. The experts have estimated that in 2025, when we will be 8 billion, we will need to increase the cereal production of 41% and the meat production of 63%.

Another brutal fact is that we have only 1.5 billion ha of arable land, so that means that we don’t have any more land available for agriculture, and we have to produce more in the land where we are producing now. This is a big challenge, for sure!

Another brutal fact is that each year cardiovascular diseases causes over 2.0 million deaths in the EU, nearly half of all deaths, 42%. In addition, we have other problems like glycaemia control diabetes problems: over 48 million adults are involved in these, aged between 20 to 79 years. Weight is another issue: in Italy 9% of adults are obese, 27% of boys and 25% of girls between 5 and 17 are overweight or obese.

We therefore have to face major health issues, that can be improved through nutrition, which can give a strong contribution, in order to improve lifestyle.

Another sensitive theme is that of “Feeding the planet. Energy for life”. I divided the theme in two blocks: the first three subthemes: technology for agriculture and biodiversity; science for food safety, security and quality; innovation in the food supply chain. We call this part “Scientific and Technological subthemes”. The other block is “Socio-cultural subtheme” relating to food for better lifestyle, dietary education, food in the world’s cultures and ethnic groups. In the center, the solidarity and cooperation on
4.- What about the legacy?
Expo legacy will be the realization of important infrastructure for the city and province: the Expo Park; the Center for Sustainable Development and the Technological City are the most important.
The target of Expo is a quite large one. Farmers, food companies and processors, logistics and distribution chains, restaurant and catering industry, research centers and companies who want to learn about innovation and production technologies, do business in food preparation, improve communication with consumer and guarantee the quality of their food by using appropriate protection and monitoring systems to combat counterfeiting and adulteration.
We have special work groups in Confindustria that follow specific subthemes (I am involved in the blue box, Nutrition subtheme), that started more than one year ago: Innovation and Eco-sustainable development; Mobility and Networks; Expo Generations and new professions; Development Cooperation; International Promotion; Cultural Tourism, Attractiveness. These are the most important areas where we are involved and three teams (Nutrition, Expo Generations and new professions, Cultural Tourism, Attractiveness) are working closely together now.
Nutrition Group’s mission is to promote Italian excellence, including at the regional level, in terms of quality and food safety, innovation in industry and research in the agri-food and biodiversity. The territory is one of the key words, and its excellence. These are the criteria for us to define excellences: food chain; research and innovation; corporate social responsibility/ethical approach; talent development/permanent professional training; food safety; environmental impacts reduction; well informed consumer. These are, in my opinion, the areas where our groups are focused on, because these are the best way to characterize Italian food but also Italy’s food system.
We started two years ago, in 2009. Our team worked and generated many events along the years, with projects lasting until 2015. Basically every semester, twice a year, we organize an event. Until now, we had a meeting on “Functional Food” in Milan in June 2009; a second event in Rome, “La tavola italiana nel mondo”, where we celebrated our traditional food, but we also tried to illustrate that we have space for innovation also in the traditional food; and a third event in Parma and Piacenza area, what we call “The Food Valley”. This event was characterized by two different moments: one was spent to visit the territory, discovering the excellences that we have in this territory; in the second part of the day in Teatro Regio in Parma we discussed and focused on “Social Responsibility and Biodiversity and Sustainability”.

food. These are the themes and the subthemes on which my group, involved in nutrition, is in the process to create contents for the exhibition.
In addition, we have organized another event last March in Milano, in the Bocconi University, with the aim to analyze internet innovation in the food chain, analyzing where we are, what we have done in the past, which kind of mistakes we have done in the past and mainly what we can do in the future. These are the most important events. We also participated to other initiatives, with Federalimentare and with other organizations, and to meetings like this, where we try to create the consciousness that World Expo is the best opportunity we are having in the next 5 years to demonstrate that in this country our food system is unique.