

Protagonists. The case of **Fabio Zoffi**, the entrepreneur who invests in Made in Italy and Big Data

A Tech and Food Valley is possible

Italy is a country full of talent, which only needs the skills and economic drive needed to get out of the local dimension, focusing on the highest quality products and technologies.

It was 2011, the youth unemployment rate rose to almost 30%, bank stocks plummeted in July, the spread between the ten-year Italians and German Bunds would have reached a record of 575 basis points in October, and Italy was shaking under the threat of a speculative attack by the hedge funds. Only between October and December, the companies with open bankruptcy procedures were 3,500 gifts, while the "Rubygate" held the bench on the front pages. The Berlusconi government then fell and Mario Monti announced a € 30 billion package of austerity measures with an increase in taxes and retirement age. While all this was happening, Fabio Zoffi, entrepreneur and venture capitalist residing for twenty years in the civilized and peaceful Munich, decided to return to do business in Italy. Pure madness, or new Erasmus of Rotterdam?

Why bet on Italy?

"It is customary to say that the flapping of a butterfly's wings - underlines Zoffi - is capable of causing a hurricane on the other side of the world. Although this description of a fundamental aspect of chaos theory is useful in understanding natural phenomena, it is counterintuitive compared to the complexity of interdependencies in the globalized economic system. The world, especially the western one, is surprisingly stable, despite the perennial fluttering of many butterflies. The euro has not disintegrated, the civil war has not broken out in Greece, the United States has not defaulted on the dollar and public debt, China continues to buy American treasuries and the nearly twenty million unemployed in Europe have not attacked national Parliaments. The interdependencies in economic and financial relationships created by globalization are in fact a source of stability in the face of stress events, which otherwise would cause a probable chaotic reaction by individual sovereign states and institutions. This is because, trivially, suppliers have no interest in killing or making their customers go bankrupt, just as creditors are often better advised to help debtors in difficulty. That being allowed, I knew that the Bel Paese would hardly go belly-up and that many small excellences - Italy is a Talent Valley

in this sense - would need the skills and economic drive needed to get out of the local dimension. Hence my professional return to Italy in the chaotic 2011."

Serial investor in high tech

But let's take a step back. Who is Fabio Zoffi? Born in 1968, Zoffi was born in that city of merchants and pirates that gave birth to Marco Polo, he graduated with honors from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice in Business Administration and, in 1992, following his own desire for an experience abroad, he moved to Munich to fill various top management roles for companies in the Edizione Holding group of the Benetton family. Seven years later, at the motto of "turning ideas into venture business", he decided to start his own business and in the 2000s, in the full boom of the internet, together with other partners he created one of the first Italian venture capital funds, with 100 millions of euros provided and the focus on European high tech. Three years later, while the big American hedge funds buy non-performing loans (bad loans) from the big banks in Europe, they create the first electronic trading platform in Germany that buys small portfolios of stranded and non-performing loans from popular banks and German savings banks, to then aggregate and resell them to institutional investors after standardizing their rating through innovative software. The company will be acquired a few months later by a large Anglo-Saxon business bank. Also in 2003, convinced of the rapid spread of wireless communication, he created out of nowhere, the largest European player, also based in Germany, in providing wireless broadband through Wimax technology, consolidated in the largest number of radio frequencies in the 3.5GHz band and raising over 100 million euros of equity. A majority of the major American hi-tech and investment banking groups take over the majority. In 2009, together with some friends, he financed the innovative idea of an Italian team from CERN in Geneva: a thermal solar panel with performances that are highly superior to all the best existing panels, thanks to a proprietary technology that has found a way to reconcile glass and metal, thus avoiding any heat pantry.

In Italy to focus on quality and technologies

Zoffi, who defines himself an entrepreneur, or an entrepreneur-investor with another risk appetite, decides at this point to look again at the Bel Paese. Two key concepts guide him in choosing the entrepreneurial activities to bet on: the highest quality and niche products and technologies related to the world of Big data. "Let's take food Made in Italy as an example. It is a brand capable of evoking a cultural mood, which combines knowing how to live, knowing how to be and knowing how to do, a combination of culture, art, manual ability, territory, history , which together generate excellence in eating and drinking. Yet there Italians, who have always been great masters in production, have not succeeded - if not, for now, with Eatalay to seize the opportunity to spread an "Italian Way of life" abroad so sought after and appreciated. My first two investments in this sense if they are focused precisely on two historical brands of good food:

Bertolini, Friulian excellence with thirty years of artisan experience in the production and marketing of hams and quickie meats, and Noceto Michelotti, winery of the soft hills in Monferrato.

Big data in the valleys of Piedmont

Zoffi has also decided to focus on another big trend that is emerging in the world, after companies have digitized their processes in the last 20 years, thus generating trillion gigabytes of data. The so-called Big Data, or what to do with all this amount of information? Still in the valleys of Piedmont, a Venetian entrepreneur found the answer in a small Italian jewel, the Ors Group, specialized in software for the analysis of Big data and the optimization of business processes. "It was my first hi-tech investment in Italy. Not even Silicon Valley can boast an expertise comparable to that of Ors. Thanks to the algorithms of statistics, mathematics, econometrics, this Alba company is in fact capable, for example, to predict for banks what the demand for banknotes will be at each branch ATM, in order to optimize the stock of money per dispensing point and save on distribution costs; or it is able to support utilities in the energy sector, in predicting what the demand for electricity and gas will be for over a million customers in the next three days, thus significantly reducing the penalties for network imbalances. Again, Ors software optimizes global supply chains and robotic factories of large groups Italians and now also foreigners. Even the government could make use of them: we have in fact developed a first model for making the intelligent Spending Review say what cuts to do and where, so that they have the least employment and deflationary impact possible."

The last Paw

The entrepreneur Zoffi has recently entered, together with other investors, the capital of Satispay, an innovative Italian start-up with a smartphone payment system and helps develop it as an Advisory Board Member. Zoffi believes in the entrepreneurial skills of young Italian talents in the world of technology and food and believes it is his mission to help them grow and demonstrate to the world that you can, step by step, start-up after start-up, create a new Italy, Tech and Food Valley system like the most famous American Silicon. Without a little leaf, on the other hand, as the quoted Erasmus wrote, one cannot truly enjoy life.

Software at the service of wine

What does Big Data have to do with Made in Italy? A lot, if the processing of a lot of information in a few seconds can help make the quality of the products even better. It could be the next discovery of winemakers, thanks to the AlgoWine software developed by the Ors Group. Until

now, it has been up to the winegrower and / or the winemaker to taste the grapes day after day, to probe the consistency, the heat, the thickness of the peel and the flavor, in addition to doing frequent and expensive laboratory analyzes, to understand when sugars, acids and tannins reach their equilibrium point and decide when to harvest. Now, thanks to the AlgoWine software, which processes in real time thousands of information concerning not only the type of grape or wine that you want to produce, but also the type of soil is its exposure to light to heat, the amount of rainfall and the trend of temperatures ect., the experts in the field have an ally in the science of algorithms that helps them to obtain, well in advance, the forecast of the ripening curve of the grapes. The winegrower will thus be able to determine in advance the optimal time of harvest for each row thus avoiding, for example, that the delay in the harvest deteriorates in advance the optimal time of harvest for each row thus avoiding that the delay in the harvest deteriorate the chemical parameters necessary to maintain the required structure and aromas. The AlgoWine software also allows the optimization of the harvesting activities, reducing their total cost.