



# EXPO 2015

The reasons for a great result



Expo 2015's Communication Strategies | 28th October 2015

## Seven themes to talk about:

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1. What were the ingredients of this success?
2. The nature of the event
3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)
4. The link with Milan and its brand
5. Expo as new Italian Pop
6. Expo as discontinuity
7. The importance of communication



1. What were the ingredients of this success?
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# Entertainment is no longer negotiable

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Come 2015, the entertainment element is no longer negotiable.

Whatever kind of event is to be staged, there must be a significant portion of this ingredient.

Contents that are sophisticated and complex can be included, but they must feature layers that are easy to understand and pick up.

## 1. What were the ingredients of this success?

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# An event staged by the young for the young

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This is one of the most innovative elements of the whole *Expo 2015* machine.

The average age of the *Expo S.p.A* employees was fairly low, with many, many important positions filled by thirty- and forty-year-olds.

In Italy, this is no small exception.



## 1. What were the ingredients of this success?

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### Those who are against Expo

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The constant, substantial and highly active presence of a front opposed to *Expo* generated an extraordinary (and totally unexpected) positive effect. A front on many levels (from *No Expo*, to the *Black Block*, and including the most diverse national publications and media).

The message against *Expo* never really fired public interest (unlike the *No-TAV* protests in Val di Susa). Hence, once the site was open, visitors could choose whose side to take (with *Expo* or against *Expo*?).

*Expo* encourages the taking of sides, with identification phenomena and consequent changes in behavior

## 2. The nature of the event

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# The “limited” nature of the event

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*Expo* is on for six months, then finishes for ever.

This one of the restrictions of the *BIE* format.

A *Universal Exposition* begins, goes on for six months, then closes definitely.

*Expo* is a temporary event.

## 2. The nature of the event

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# To take part means coming in person

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*Expo* is not a TV event.

The Olympics, the *FIFA World Cup*, are large public events that are primarily enjoyed through the medium of TV.

A *Universal Exposition* has no TV appeal, and grants no rights.

To see it, a personal visit is required.

## 2. The nature of the event

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# A physical place never seen before, with innovative features

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This is another element that comes out of the restrictions set by the *BIE* format.

A *Universal Exposition* must take place on a well-defined site, where a series of pavilions are built to represent different nations (as well as the institutions and partners taking part).

## 2. The nature of the event

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# Attendance of the “world”

(Countries, NGOs, celebrities, heads of state)

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Expo exists thanks to the presence of an external “certifying” body (the *BIE*), but we then have an improbable number of “worlds” of the most diverse shapes and forms.



## 2. The nature of the events

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# A declared pop(ular) spirit

Every part of the mechanism is pop.

A new boundary-breaking approach.

We might also say: *the exotic made accessible*



## 2. The nature of the event

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# There are no privileged visitors

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At Expo, the experience is the same for everyone.  
Here are no Royal or VIP Boxes, or the like.

Regardless of social status and position, the experience is always the same.

This “democratic” element comes across loud and clear.



## 2. The nature of the event

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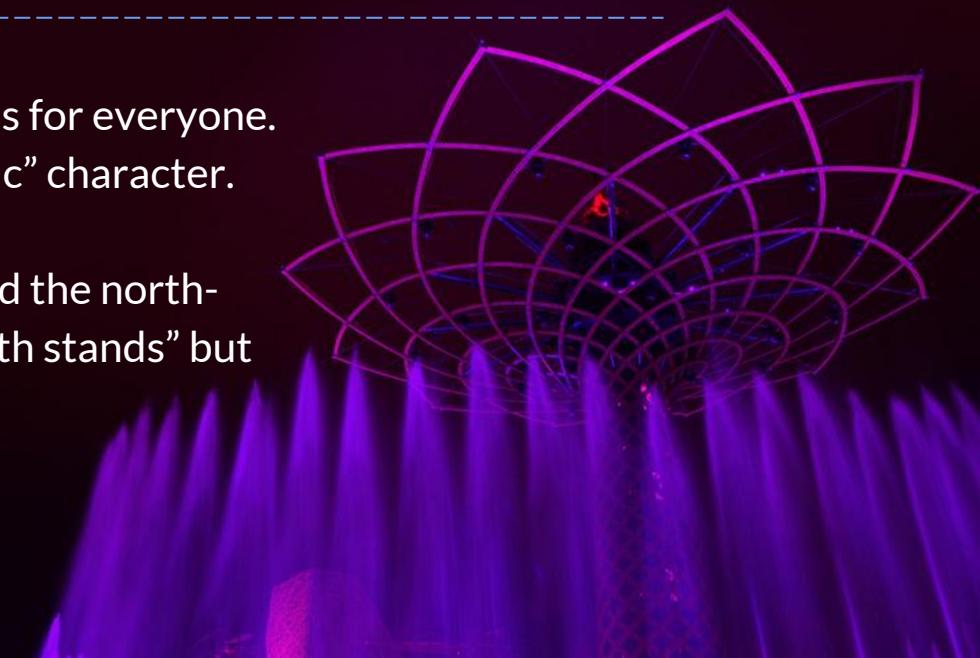
# There are no barriers of social status

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The 5 Euro evening ticket confirms that *Expo* is for everyone. This choice strengthens its overall “democratic” character.

At a stadium we have the east-west stands and the north-south stands. At *Expo* there are no “north-south stands” but there is a Happy Hour Admission at 7.00 pm.

This is fundamental for its overall success.



## 2. The nature of the event

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# “Party” element

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Expo 2015 can be seen as a huge patron saint's celebration on a national scale. In Italy, every city and every village has its feast day. What was missing was a national festival open to all Italian citizens.

Someone said: “...it is like a secular pilgrimage...”



## 2. The nature of the event

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# There is no more distinction between high and low culture

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The concept of high and low culture has been swept away. Anyone can understand, appreciate and share in an event revolving around food.

Fifty years ago, Umberto Eco proposed a distinction between *Apocalyptic* and *Integrated*. Come 2015, we can say that the *Integrated* have won.

Moreover, the theme chosen (food, feeding the planet), works on a theme of material culture that exists (and functions) regardless of distinctions of class, social status, or culture.

## 2. The nature of the event

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# Unforeseen short circuits

A series of phenomena and happenings were the cause of some serious doubts among us.

The *Tree of Life*, the longest pizza in the world, the *Ice Cream Festival*, etc. The Expo event itself was to demonstrate these as extraordinarily successful steps.

We learned that you should never be afraid of the pop element. When pop is really powerful, it sweeps aside any criticism and negativity.



## 2. The nature of the event

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# Intersections and contaminations

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Expo 2015 was interwoven with well-established pop elements and phenomena.

Sport, music, television.

From Italian singer Al Bano to TV's *Striscia la Notizia*, taking in Raffaella Carrà, Bono Vox, and a crowd of sporting celebrities.

This mixture was to become one of the main communication assets.

### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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## By its very nature, the theme of food is cross-cutting

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Food is a theme that can be developed through scholarly essays (material culture, anthropology, sociology, etc.), but also through simpler interpretations understandable by the general public.

Historians explain to us that in terms of material culture, pizza is cultural expression at the highest level. At the same time, eating pizza is an operation available to everyone.

When this mechanism is repeated an infinite number of times to take in all the world's styles of cuisine, the effect is dramatic.

The event's access threshold (cultural, social, economic) is extremely low. Anyone can take part.

### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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## A *mille-feuille* cake

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Speaking of food, we could see *Expo 2015* as a *Mille-feuille*.

Multiple layers, interconnected, that only acquire meaning when they are all eaten together.

The single parts are not *Expo*. The relationships between the single parts are *Expo*.

It is not mere rhetoric to say that we have set up the most incredible restaurant in the world.

Where what is exceptional about the situation is not the single cook, chef, or venue.

The whole thing is extraordinary because of the possible choices and the overall “short-circuit”.

### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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## A question of *DNA*

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The association between the theme (food) and the specifically Italian situation is clear to everyone. Whether foreigners or Italians. Italy's food and wine tradition is something that makes all Italians proud of their country.

The choice of this theme made it possible to transfer this original pride (a cultural *DNA* that all Italians receive at birth) to the event itself.



### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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## Italian food is simple

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Around the world there are many strong, celebrated food traditions.

None of these traditions can present this set of adjectives that describe our food: economical, simple to eat, simple to prepare, and simple to understand. Healthy and delicious at the same time.

It's a genuine brand.

Powerful, able to attract the attention of the media and visitors on a global scale.

### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

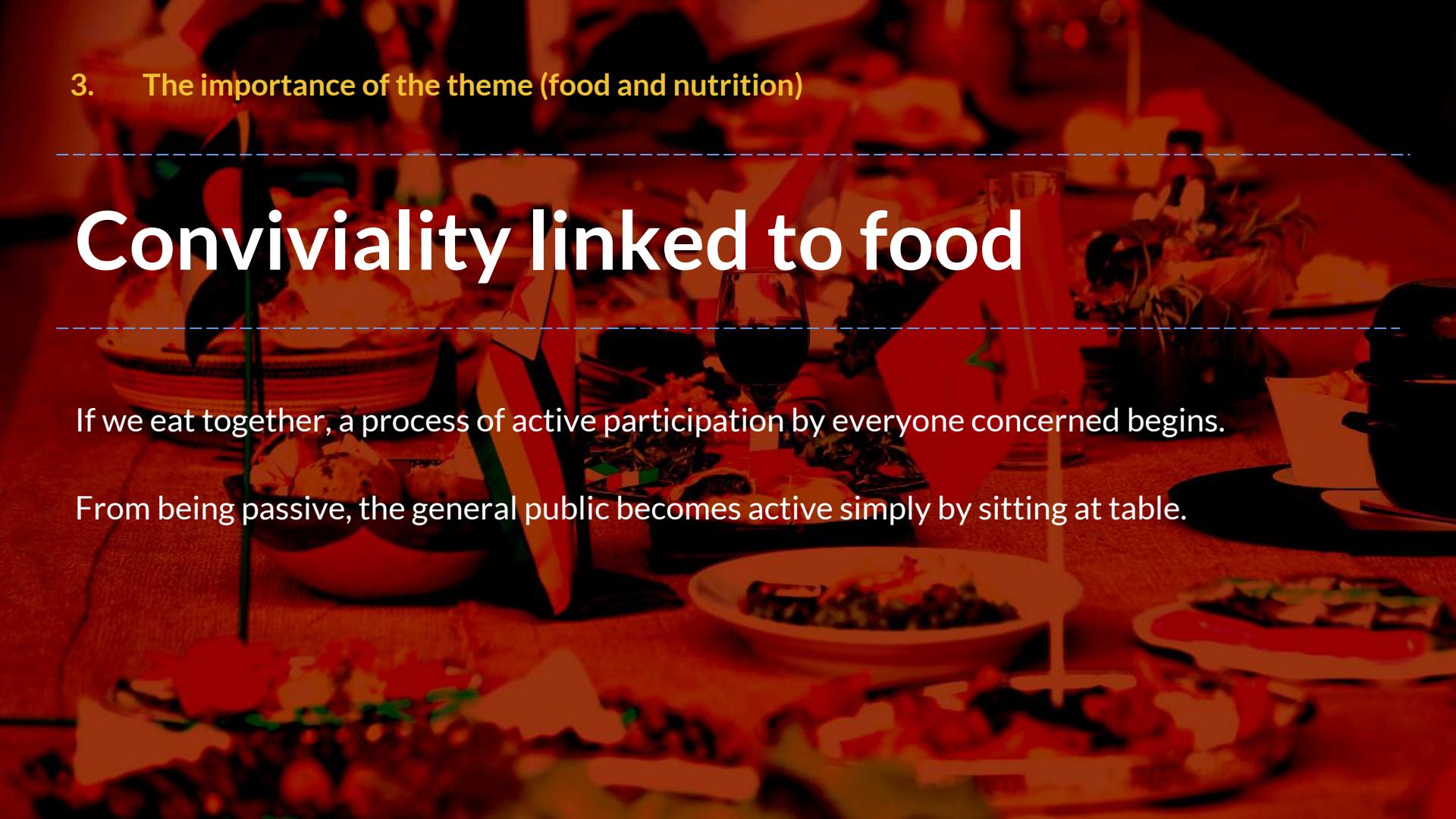
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## Healthy food / delicious food: and beyond...

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In contemporary debate there is this dichotomy between healthy food and delicious food.

Italian food and cooking are famous worldwide because of this characteristic of being healthy and delicious at the same time.



3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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## Conviviality linked to food

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If we eat together, a process of active participation by everyone concerned begins.

From being passive, the general public becomes active simply by sitting at table.

### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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## Wine as a founding element

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Wine is an important part of Italy's food culture and turns meals into a highly convivial occasion. Eating while drinking light alcoholic beverages is something that exists in few cultures outside Italy.

In the eyes of foreigners, this characteristic is really special, and generates a series of phenomena that can only happen here (the culture of the aperitif, etc.)



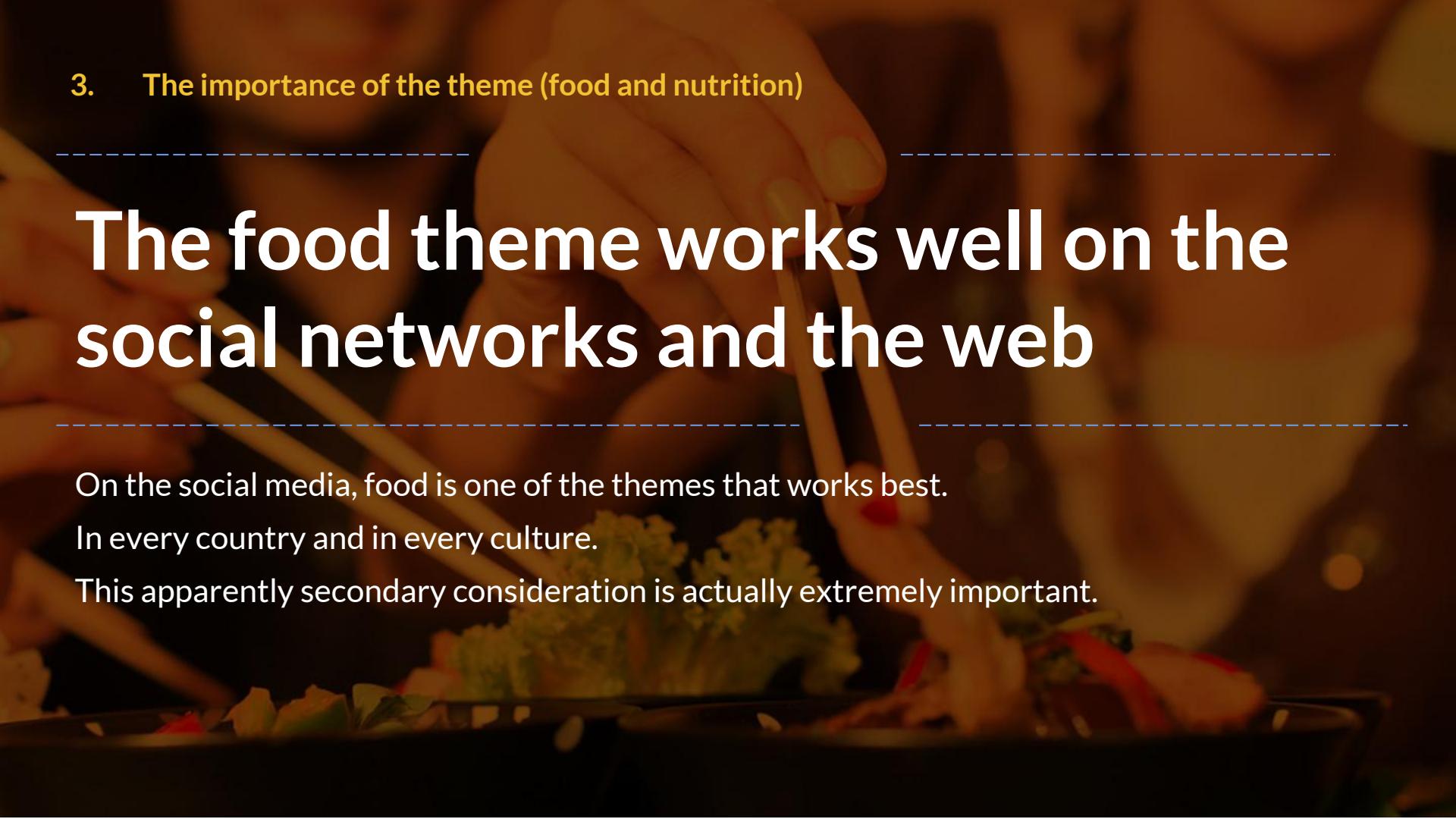
The background image shows a large, modern stadium or arena with a high ceiling and tiered seating. Many people are visible in the stands, some wearing white shirts. The lighting is bright, coming from overhead fixtures.

### 3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

## Involvement and collective participation

If the theme of the event is expounded in eating, everyone takes part as a group. If I go to a football match, there is a clear distinction between those playing and those watching.

If the event is a large social meal (like a village festival), everyone plays an active part.



3. The importance of the theme (food and nutrition)

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# The food theme works well on the social networks and the web

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On the social media, food is one of the themes that works best.

In every country and in every culture.

This apparently secondary consideration is actually extremely important.

#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

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# The city has coped well with the impact of the tourists

Twenty million visitors have had a powerful impact on the city.

As a whole, the metropolis has stood up well to the shock wave, transforming a potential problem into diffuse (and shared) energy.

#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

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## Great synergy between the various stakeholders involved

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The synergy between *Expo 2015* and various public and municipal bodies, and the countless action plans has been excellent.

Such a result was not automatic.

#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

# The infrastructure system has worked well

The underground, the overground, public and private transport systems (*car-sharing, BikeMi, etc.*).

The “city of services” took on the challenge and the response has been satisfying in the various spheres of operation.

#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

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## Also the private sector reacted well to the Expo challenge

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Private firms reacted positively to the challenge launched by *Expo 2015*.

This is testified by a series of initiatives scheduled to coincide with the opening of *Expo* (*The Prada Foundation, Silos Armani, Trussardi, Alfa Romeo museum, IKEA, etc.*).



#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

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# Events that work on the collective imagination

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Additional verve came from a series of other happenings and events that work on the overall collective imagination (*Salone del Mobile*, *Settimana della Moda*, *Monza Grand Prix*, the programming of *La Scala*).

Expo has worked on images that were already consolidated, magnifying their value. Over the months the *Expo* brand grew in value alongside the *Milan* brand.





#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

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# A Pop system in action on a metropolitan scale

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During the summer of 2015 we saw a series of other initiatives that worked with the same ingredients as Expo (*Pop*, admission for all, an absence of barriers of social status and culture, etc.), generating a machine that operated on a metropolitan scale (*Nuova Darsena, Mercato Metropolitano, Piazza Gae Aulenti...*).

This worked well.

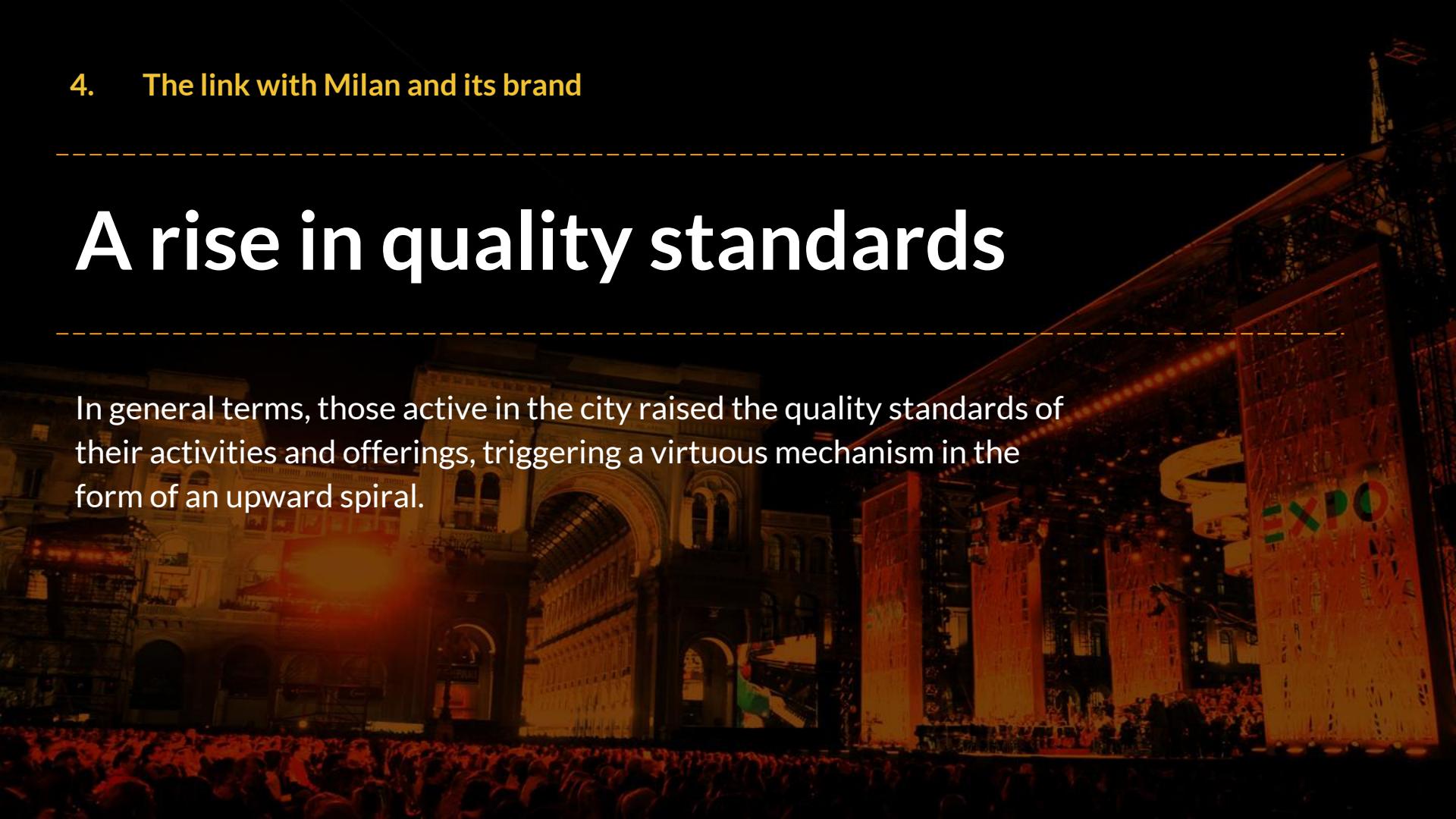
#### 4. The link with Milan and its brand

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# A rise in quality standards

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In general terms, those active in the city raised the quality standards of their activities and offerings, triggering a virtuous mechanism in the form of an upward spiral.



## 5. Expo as a new Italian Pop

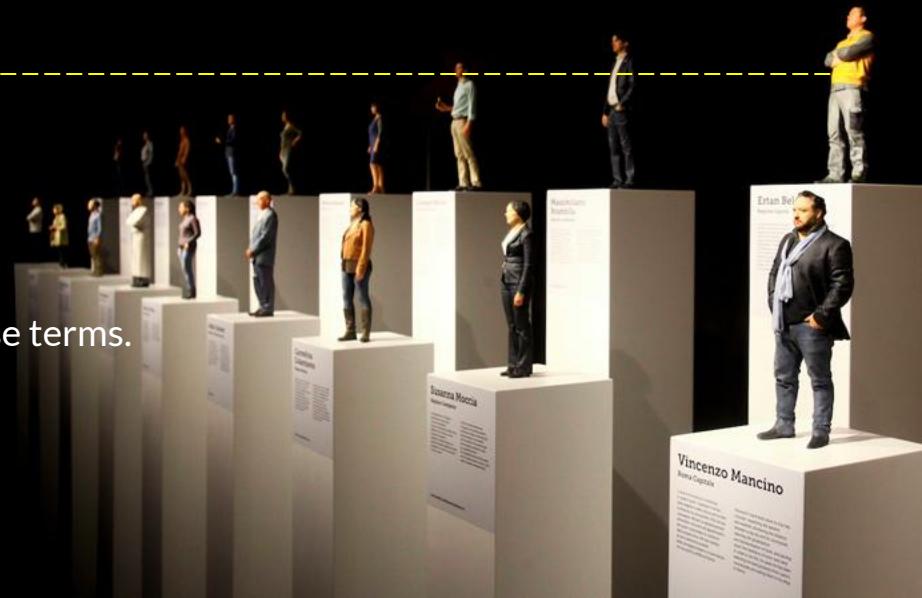
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# Earlier categories have been superseded

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Previously, work was done on “popular”, “pop”, “national-popular”, etc.

Here we have something new, never before seen in these terms.  
It's interesting to understand the new characteristics of contemporary *Italian Pop*.



## 5. Expo as a new Italian Pop

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# Italian style

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*Expo* has established a new definition and characterization of the term.

The traditional sense of “*Italian Style*”; of “*Made in Italy*” (in its current usage) lives off “high” and “precious” values. Fashion houses, sports cars, high end design.

At *Expo 2015* Italian Style is high quality but is popular with it.

*OVS* is Italian Style, *Eataly* is Italian Style, *Illy* is Italian Style.

*Nutella*, the *Fiat 500*...

This is new.

## 5. Expo as a new Italian Pop

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# Contemporary pop lives off participation

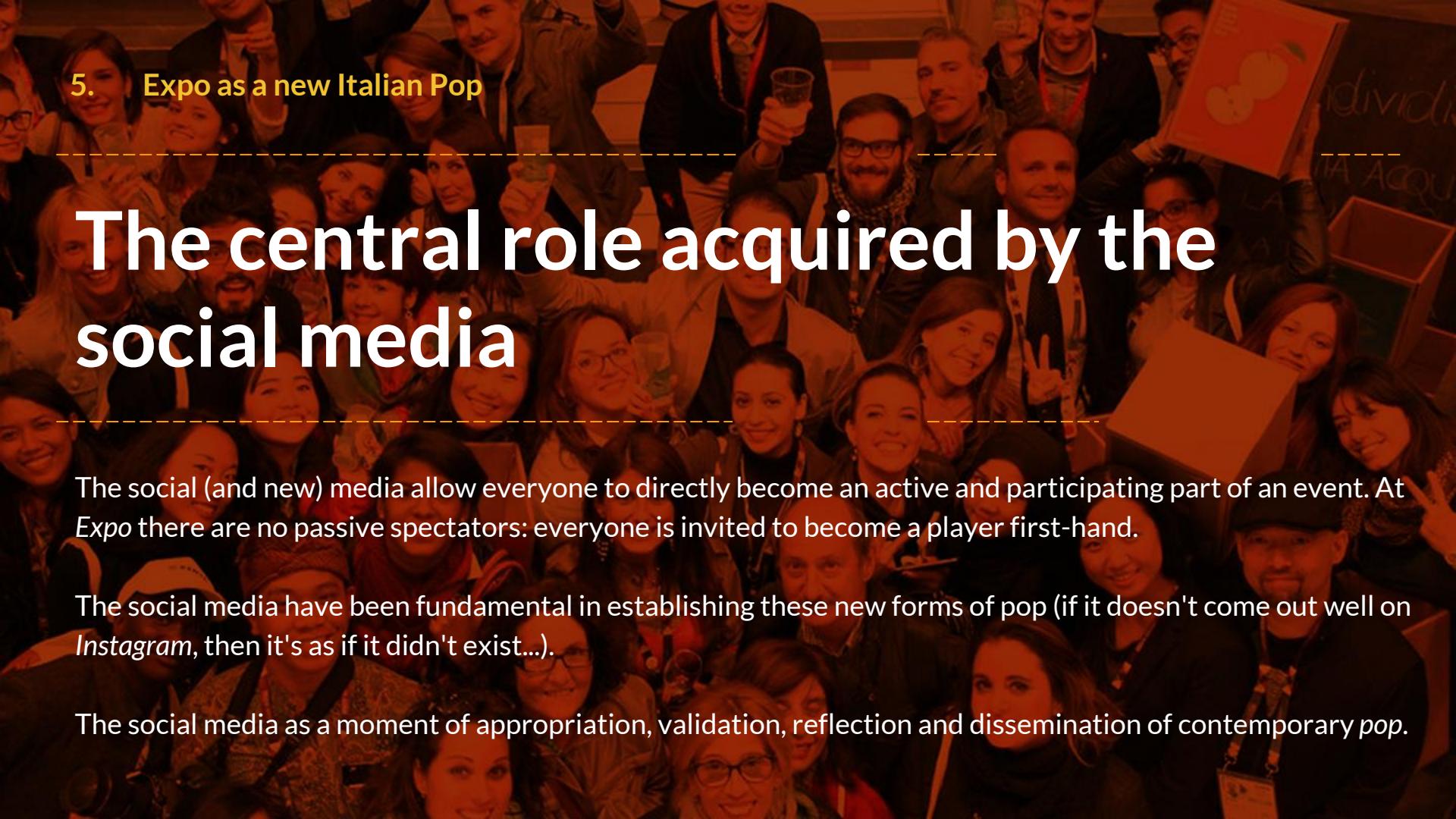
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Contemporary pop does not exist without active, regular participation by its fans.

Contemporary pop demands collective participation (on the scale and wavelength of the masses).

Contemporary pop lives off social media. Social media define the characteristics of new pop.





## 5. Expo as a new Italian Pop

# The central role acquired by the social media

The social (and new) media allow everyone to directly become an active and participating part of an event. At *Expo* there are no passive spectators: everyone is invited to become a player first-hand.

The social media have been fundamental in establishing these new forms of pop (if it doesn't come out well on *Instagram*, then it's as if it didn't exist...).

The social media as a moment of appropriation, validation, reflection and dissemination of contemporary pop.

## 6. Expo as discontinuity

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# “Yes, we can!” in an Italian version

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This grand event is a demonstration that the *Italy System* can organize one of the largest events on a global scale while respecting international standards.

All the various parts of the System work (as do their relationships). There is no (negative) Italian specificity. If we compare *Expo 2015* to the London Olympic Games or the *FIFA World Cup* in Rio, the (satisfying) results are analogous.

Angela Merkel's comments were a huge dose of self-esteem for the whole country.

“Yes we can!”, but also: “Nothing is impossible!”.

This sentiment is perceived and shared by all visitors, redefining the behavior set of anyone on site.



## 6. Expo as discontinuity

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# The strong points of Italian DNA are worked on

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Competition is on an international scale, working on the traditional strong points of Italian DNA: food, lifestyle, design, architecture, and elegance.

After years spent complaining about the unachievable models of Silicon Valley, this is a significant change of gear. The rhetoric of “start-ups”, of “co-working” and “3D printers” leaves 99% of Italians in the dark. The ingredients cited earlier are crystal clear to everyone.

Working around a theme that everyone feels a part of, helps redefine behavior: visitors are no longer spectators, they become part of the show (with significant consequences in terms of behavior).



## 6. Expo as discontinuity

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# The design of the services at the heart of the offer

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At Expo the services work well. Information, the shuttle buses, facilities for the disabled and disadvantaged. Cleanliness, on-site safety and security, the quality of the public toilets.

If visitors find themselves in a clean place, they will think twice about dirtying it.

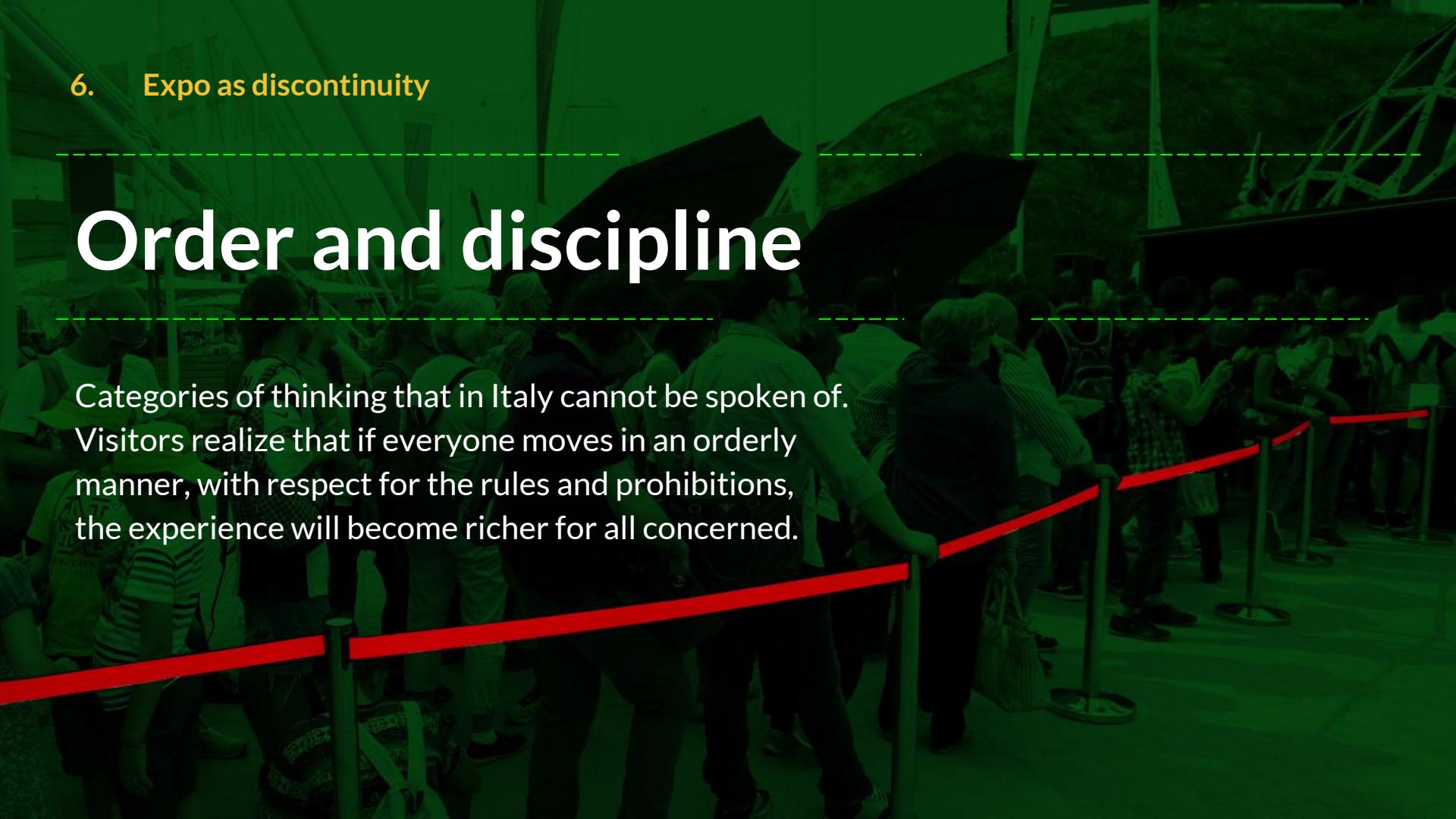
If those providing information are courteous, there is a greater possibility that everyone will be courteous.

Put another way, it's the banal (but powerful) strength of a smile.

## 6. Expo as discontinuity

# Order and discipline

Categories of thinking that in Italy cannot be spoken of.  
Visitors realize that if everyone moves in an orderly manner, with respect for the rules and prohibitions, the experience will become richer for all concerned.



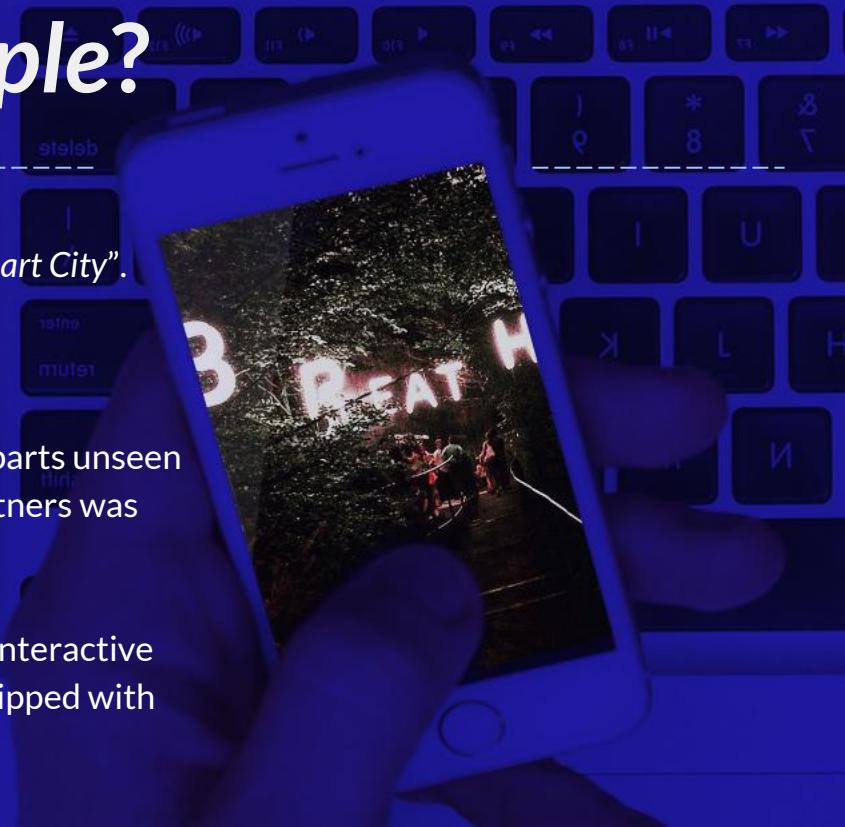
## 6. Expo as discontinuity

# Smart City or Smart People?

Expo 2015 was supposed to mean the coming of the so-called “Smart City”. This triumph did occur, but the “Smart City” took a different form from what we'd imagined.

Expo is a *Smart City*, especially with regard to the infrastructural parts unseen by visitors. From this point of view, the work carried out with partners was fundamental.

Meanwhile, more than a *smart city* (digital signage, maxi screens, interactive systems, etc.) we could speak of *smart people*. Normal people, equipped with smartphones and Internet access everywhere.



## 6. Expo as discontinuity

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# The digital totems

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One significant example is the digital totem. Designed to give visitors to the site all the information they need, these “exploded” when a feature was added: “*Take a Selfie with Foody*”.

At that point, (where the feature was no longer a necessity, but had symbolic value), people besieged it. Technology that firstly offers a series of symbolic and communicative features (the photo could then be sent to friends via email).

When the totem is *smart*, interest in it is low.

When the totem gets us to play and communicate with friends (opening up horizontal, self-managed communication), then it becomes a central part of the experience.

## 6. Expo as discontinuity

# Citizenship, belonging, appropriation

In the long months before the official opening, the mass-media continually underlined this aspect of Expo as a “*public thing*” (in general using the concept in a negative sense: waste, robbery, bad management of public resources).

Without going into the ins and outs of the accusations, it was clear to all Italians that this was a public event, hence, for all and sundry.

This sentiment of being in a public place (and therefore the property of all citizens) was important in generating a powerful sense of belonging and appropriation.

## 6. Expo as discontinuity

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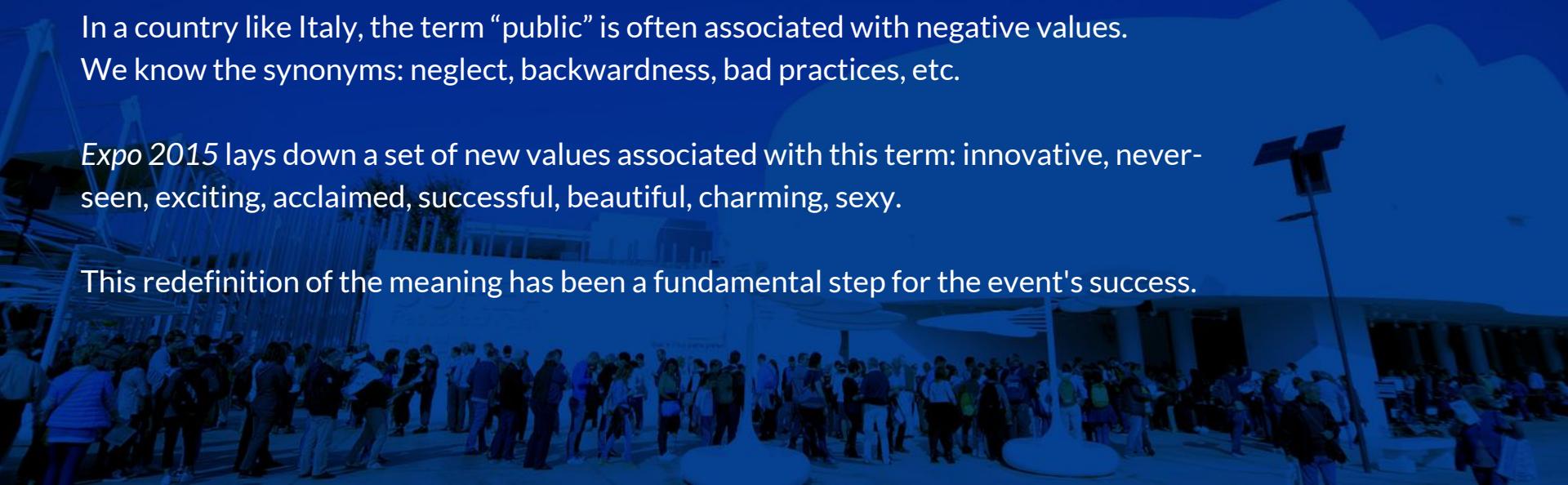
# A new idea of “public”

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In a country like Italy, the term “public” is often associated with negative values. We know the synonyms: neglect, backwardness, bad practices, etc.

Expo 2015 lays down a set of new values associated with this term: innovative, never-seen, exciting, acclaimed, successful, beautiful, charming, sexy.

This redefinition of the meaning has been a fundamental step for the event's success.



## 7. The role of communication

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# Communication as collective multipolar labor

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For *Expo 2015* communication means collective labor, in which *Expo* plays an important part, but also other stakeholders (countries, NGOs and partners).

There is not one single communication center.

The system is an interweaving of multiple voices (many times discordant).

This makes it easier for visitors to acquire communication tools.

That then become an active part of the global communication.

## 7. The role of communication

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# Disarticulated media

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The disarticulated media concept: *Expo 2015* communicates directly with its visitors, avoiding traditional channels.

Traditionally, such an event would be communicated thanks to marketing operations, and campaigns on TV and in the national press.

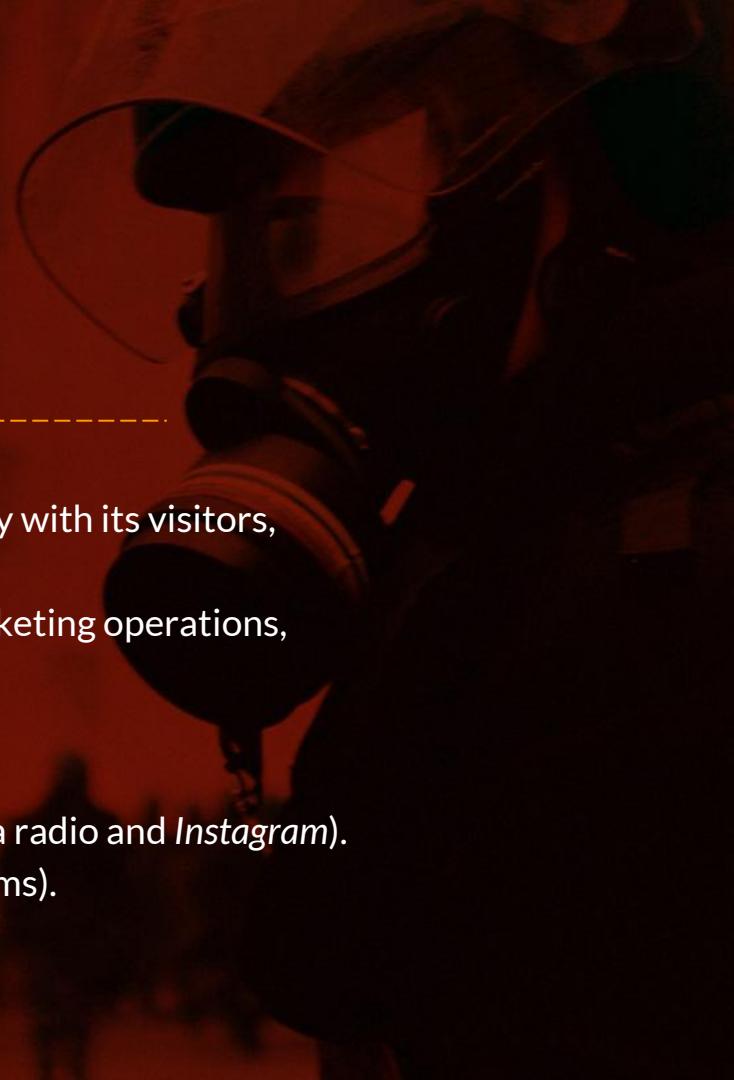
In our case the work was selective.

Direct communication by the *Single Commissioner Giuseppe Sala* (via radio and *Instagram*).

Intense use of the TV medium (a series of ultrapop and local programs).

A lot of local press.

An equal amount of intensity in using the social media.



## 7. The role of communication

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# Spontaneous communities

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This was one of the phenomena that characterized the event.

Dozens and dozens of spontaneous communities that allowed the active and direct participation of hundreds of thousands of people.

The group (on Facebook) called “*Consigli per gli utenti*” (advice for users) - an extraordinary example of *customer care* managed bottom-up.

More than 25.000 passionate and self-organized volunteers.

This had never been seen before, on this scale (and with this strength).

## 7. The role of communication

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# Top-down and bottom-up, as one

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Physical organization, logistics, architecture and infrastructure (i.e. all the “hard” material elements) need to be designed top-down. On the contrary, communication can be imagined either top-down or bottom-up. By some banal rule of complementarity, if you can work the communication bottom-up, everything functions that much better.

The more communication can generate *bottom-up* practices, the more successful the whole affair will be.  
Bottom-up communication does not annul the *top-down* kind.  
It simply completes it and makes active involvement of the masses possible.

At Expo 2015, communication defined the crossover and hybridization between *top-down* and *bottom-up*.

## 7. The role of communication

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# The young become the leading players

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Expo 2015 offered a range of frameworks, programs and activities specifically for the young (*School Project, Volunteer Project, FOP, etc.*).

In addition, the possibility for the young (singly or organized) to take part in the six months' worth of programs were numerous and divided among the most diverse fields (music, events, business, start-ups, innovation, associations, universities, etc.).

First and foremost, Expo is a place where the young take leading roles. At all levels.

## 7. The role of communication

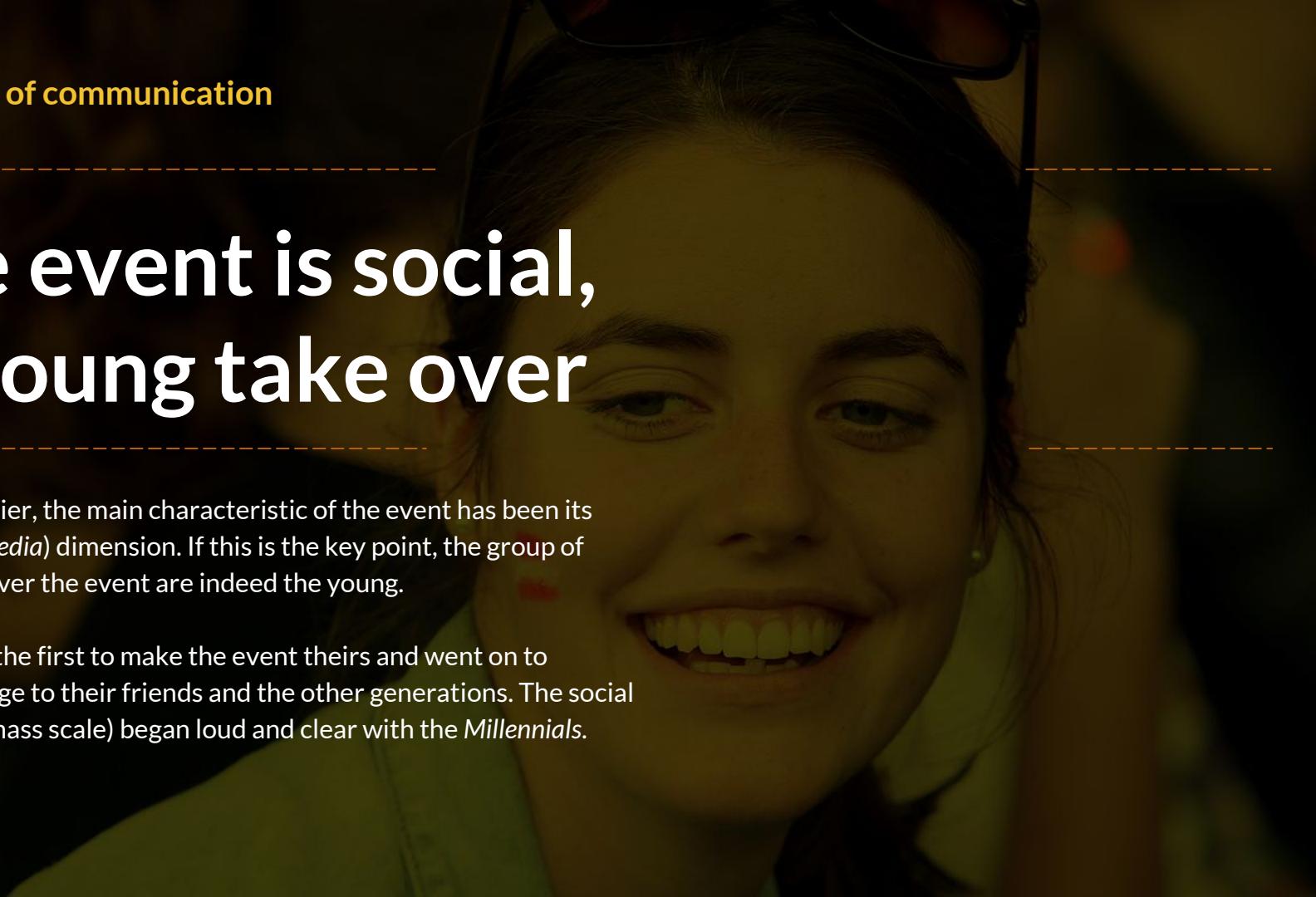
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# If the event is social, the young take over

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As explained earlier, the main characteristic of the event has been its *social* (and *new media*) dimension. If this is the key point, the group of users that took over the event are indeed the young.

The young were the first to make the event theirs and went on to transmit a message to their friends and the other generations. The social grapevine (on a mass scale) began loud and clear with the *Millennials*.



## 7. The role of communication

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# The Single Commissioner as Mascot

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The event's icon has been the *Tree of Life*.

The Mascot was supposed to be *Foody*, but its symbolic place was taken by the figure of the Single Commissioner Giuseppe Sala, who became the real testimonial of the whole event.

This was another fundamental step that magnified the power of the communication levers.

## 7. The role of communication

# @beppesala

In this universe where a smartphone and a social account allow active participation by all, it is fascinating to observe the communication dynamics linked to the *Instagram* account @beppesala.

A curious mechanism that works due to the event's senior figure (a *top-down* concept), to make horizontal dialogue possible with anyone (the *bottom up* dynamic).



## 7. The role of communication

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# Traditional media, new media

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The coming of new digital media has not made earlier ones obsolete.  
It has simply defined new relations and hierarchies.

*Expo 2015 has made heavy use of traditional media: the radio, the local dailies, specialist magazines, TV programs for the general public.*

The new (and social) media have rounded off the bulk of the work carried out using established media. This crossover has resulted in great results.



## 7. The role of communication

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# Summing up

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TV (fixed coverage on the most widely-watched programs) and intense use of the radio.

The press, radio and local TV stations.

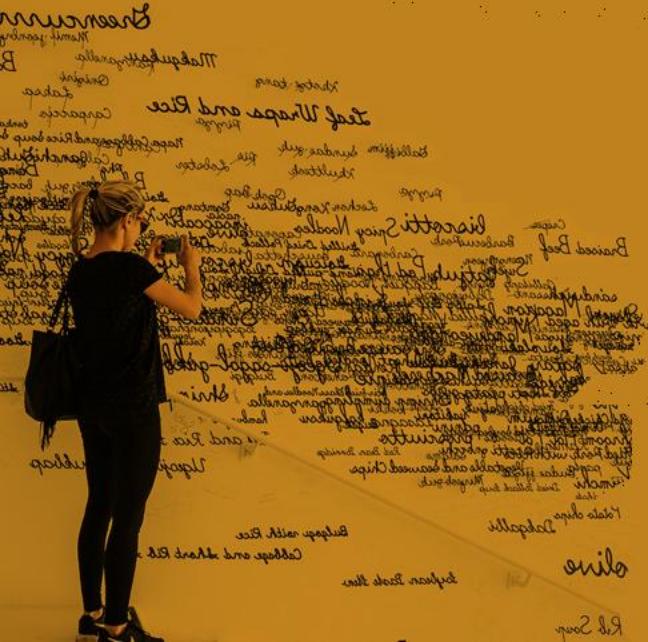
Hundreds of physical ambassadors to promote the event among different ranges of users.

Hundreds of spontaneous communities operating on the social channels.

Thousands of bloggers actively involved first-hand.

Partners and their many (diversified) communication activities.

The combined action of these communication levers has been the distinctive characteristic of Expo 2015.



Milan, 28th October 2015  
Expo 2015's Communication Strategies

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