

An Italian Plague: the Fraud Phenomenon

Natasha Lardera (August 18, 2011)



As solutions to the Italian economic crisis surface by the minute, the country is afflicted by a serious disease that, if cured, could help it save millions. In only 7 months the Guardia di Finanza has reported 3000 people who declared being invalid and poor and has reported 4400 for frauds to INPS (National Institute for Social Security) that amount to more than 48 million euros.

In 1991, years before his Oscar, Roberto Benigni came out with a very successful movie: Johnny Stecchino. The story is simple, Dante (Roberto Benigni) is an unfortunate man who drives a school bus for a school of kids affected by Down syndrome. One night, he accidentally meets Maria (Nicoletta Braschi), an attractive and wealthy woman from Palermo with whom he immediately falls in love. Soon Dante is lured by Maria into unwittingly impersonating famous mobster Johnny Stecchino, Maria's husband, with whom he shares an uncanny resemblance.



The movie was funny and it also addressed some serious issues and a couple of scenes that really caught the audience's attention were the ones where Dante receives the visit of a man from the social security office who is there to check on his condition of invalid. Suddenly Dante's hand starts shaking incessantly, the situation is so bad he cannot even write and for this he will get a check as he is not able to work (let alone being a bus driver) this work thus survive.

Reality often is harsher than fiction, and although these scenes are funny the truth behind them is not fun at all as every day we read of all these scams taking place in Italy. Fake bums who own dozens apartments, fake blind men who drive cars, ride bicycles or go grocery shopping. The incidents appear to be small scenes of a commedia all'italiana but Carabinieri have videos of blind men parking their cars or reading the newspaper, while in 2010 in Siracusa a councilman promised social security checks in return of votes. The same year, in certain Sicilian neighborhoods each building housed an invalid, so there would be up to 15 invalids on a single street

There are so many cases that defy imagination, so many movies can get inspiration from these stories. In the first 7 months of the current year, the [Guardia di Finanza](#) [2] (Italian law enforcement agency under the authority of the Minister of Economy and Finance specialized in financial crimes and smuggling) has reported 3000 people who declared being invalid and poor and has reported 4400 for frauds to [INPS](#) [3] (National Institute for Social Security) that amount to more than 48 million euros.

In seven months the guards have preformed 11000 checks on people who have benefited from "facilitated social services (Prestazioni sociali agevolate, Psa)" and have found people declaring to be poor in order to get full scholarships, maternity checks, food stamps, housing or contributions for rent and more grants who could be really used by those we really are in need."

The latest one happened just a few days ago in the Lecce area: in about 10 years a fake invalid has received by INPS 112.000 euros. Among the 4400 subjects who have cheated INPS for an amount of 48 million euros, there are 270 foreigners who, after have reunited with their older parents, asked for the social security check to support them, while, after having received it they actually sent it back to their own country, thus "stealing" a total of 6,2 millions of euros, about 23.500 euros a person.

Among the investigations one got particular attention because it involves a couple of 70 year olds from Reggio Calabria: they were receiving a regular check for years but they actually lived in Argentina. There have been about 612 people who were receiving checks for their parents who actually had died years before. The numbers on this are 3,7 millions of euros and 556 were unmasked in the Lecce and Palermo areas only in the month of July.

Another chapter involves fake farmers, people who officially are registered to work in the countryside during the summer, gathering fruit or whatnot, in order to collect unemployment in the winter months, but they actually have never worked. The investigation performed by the guards resulted in 3222 reports for an amount larger than 19 million euros. But this doesn't end here, in Foggia the guards uncovered a serious scam, where attorneys (14 to be exact) would appeal for the farmers presenting fake documents and getting money, oftentimes of people who were already dead.

With all the talk about the economic crisis in Italy and ways to solve it lately, this is definitely an area that should be looked into as so much money can be saved and people who really need support can have it and those who don't can stop being human leeches.

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