

The World at EXPO 2015 in Milan

Judith Harris (March 24, 2015)



After six years of work and planning, EXPO 2015 opens in Milan in less than five weeks, and you can almost hear the organizers' sighs of relief as work on the pavilions is being completed, and the goal of selling 10 million tickets before its official opening May 1 looms within sight. Organizers of this ambitious world's fair on the theme "Nourish the Planet, Energy for Life" report that distributors, travel agencies worldwide and on-line booking agencies have already acquired 8.5 million tickets.

ROME - After six years of work and planning, [EXPO 2015](#) [2] opens in Milan in little more than one month's time, and you can almost hear the organizers' sighs of relief as work on the pavilions is being completed, and the goal of selling 10 million tickets before its official opening May 1 looms within sight.

Organizers of this ambitious world's fair on the theme "Nourish the Planet, Energy for Life" report with obvious delight that 8.5 million tickets have already been sold to distributors, travel agencies worldwide and on-line agencies such as TicketOne. Of these sales, 5 million were outside Italy. EXPO commissioner Giuseppe Sala predicts that before the event ends Oct. 31 some 20 million tickets will have been sold.

Most visitors are expected to be Europeans, with at least one million from France and another million from Germany. Not least, Italian school children are expected to utilize at least 500,000 tickets. Chinese are expected in abundance: already a half million tickets have been sold in China, and twice that number are expected during the coming six months.



Officially known as the Esposizione Universale (Universal Exposition), the goals and achievements of the Milan EXPO have been overshadowed by graft scandals that surfaced a year ago. That seems to be in the past, and the good news is that the 145 countries participating represent 94% of the world population. Fifty-three countries have built their own pavilions, some by famous architects. And displays by the United Nations, the European Union and the European nuclear research organization CERN will be on view.

The world's fairs are now in their 163rd year. The most recent, which took place in Shanghai in 2010, attracted a stunningly large number of visitors, 73 million; all but 4 million were Chinese. In a novelty, this year, for the first time, a Chinese firm, Vanke, has its own pavilion, whose avantgarde design by the world-famous Daniel Libeskind is made of self-cleaning, air-purifying metalized tiles. Founded in 1984, Vanke is described as China's leading multinational real estate company with a turnover of \$2.3 billion last year.

Given the fascinating and universal theme of nourishing mankind, one of the pavilions, [Padiglione Zero](#) [3], has an archaeological theme, and will illustrate the earliest foods and how they were procured. A cluster of pavilions will introduce the world of rice by displaying and explaining various types of rice. Centerpiece of the cluster is a simulated rice paddy, while a related photo exhibition in the pavilion is by the noted [Gianni Berengo Gardin](#) [4], whose works are in the [Museum of Modern Art](#) [5] in New York and the [National Library in Paris](#) [6]; in 1994 his photos of Italy were exhibited at the [Guggenheim Museum](#) [7] in New York.

Another of the various food clusters is devoted to coffee. The architecture of the cluster is intended to refer to the branches of trees under which coffee plants grow. In the pavilion, sponsored by Italian coffee maker [illy](#) [8], "The idea is to relate the product, the art and the culture linked to coffee and future innovations in the sector," EXPO organizers explain. A related exhibition shows photographs by the celebrated [Sebastiao Salgado](#) [9], recently the subject of a documentary film directed by [Wim Wenders](#) [10].

The huge EXPO site is in the northeast of Milan. Although this is the capital city of the region which produces one-fifth of Italy's GNP, two events rocked the city this past week. One was the pending sale for \$7.7 billion of the Italian rubber-tire manufacturer Pirelli, based in Milan, to the state-owned China National Chemical. The 143-year-old [Pirelli](#) [11] is the world's fifth largest manufacturer of tires, and the takeover is described as one of the biggest Chinese acquisitions ever made in Europe. The loss of this important manufacturer, if the sale goes through, inevitably weakens the Milanese economy. (Read more at [<<<](#) [12])

Like the Pirelli sale, the second event behind the Milanese scenes has no bearing on the EXPO, but is distressing many progressive Italians. [Giuliano Pisapia](#) [13], mayor of Milan since 2011, announced this week that he will resign at the end of this year. The guessing game for his successor is on, but he will be a hard act to follow. Pisapia, widely admired for his honesty in public administration, has an interesting background as a courageous attorney who entered Parliament running as an independent backed by the far-left Rifondazione Comunista. There he served as president of the Justice Commission of the Chamber of Deputies. "He knew how to speak to the young people on the left as well as to the Milanese managerial class," said the financial daily *Il Sole 24 Ore*. (See [<<<](#) [14]).

Both will be missed, but in the meantime, there is EXPO to be enjoyed.

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