



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

PALERMO RENAISSANCE PART 1: REBUILDING CIVIC IDENTITY AND RECLAIMING A CITY FROM THE MAFIA IN ITALY, 1993 – 2000

SYNOPSIS

In 1993, Palermo residents elected Leoluca Orlando mayor with 75% of the vote. At the time of Orlando's election, a series of assassinations of high-level anti-Mafia leaders had left the city reeling. For decades, the Sicilian Mafia had held a strong political, cultural and physical grip on the city. Orlando's election affirmed that voters wanted him to continue what he had begun but couldn't complete during his first mayoral term (1985–1990): to purge the government of Mafia influence and help restore Palermo's cultural and economic vibrancy. Prior mayors had tolerated or assisted Mafia activity while the city center deteriorated, cultural life and business activities dwindled, and the education system weakened. Backed by a national crackdown on organized crime, the mayor used his second and third terms in office (1993–1997 and 1997–2000) to engage civic groups and businesses in revitalizing Palermo. By the time Orlando left office in 2000, his administration had renovated or reacquired hundreds of public buildings and monuments, built a cultural center and founded a downtown concert series, kick-started entrepreneurial activity and tourism, built dozens of schools and integrated civic consciousness into classrooms. Those actions helped reawaken civic pride. Although subsequent city administrations abandoned or rolled back many of the reforms, Orlando's administration helped define and lead a "Palermo Renaissance."

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Two companion case studies address simultaneous reform efforts in Palermo: "[Palermo Renaissance Part 2](#)" focuses on the city's budget, taxes, one-stop shop for licenses and documents, and citizen outreach. "[Palermo Renaissance Part 3](#)" details efforts to improve service delivery, management, hiring, and bidding processes in Palermo's water, gas, transportation, and waste management services.

INTRODUCTION

On 12 May 1997, the Teatro Massimo, Palermo's stately opera house, opened its doors to

the public for the first time in 23 years. Citizens poured into the newly restored hall to hear an orchestra conducted by Claudio Abbado, a world-

renowned musician with family roots in the city. The performance streamed on television and large screens outside the theater. Thousands of people assembled in nearby squares to catch a glimpse of the event and to visit cafés, restaurants and shops in nearby streets that were safe and lively for the first time in many years.

From his seat in the theater, Mayor Leoluca Orlando listened proudly. The theater's opening was another realization of a dream he shared with his cabinet members and Palermo's civil society organizations: to weaken the Mafia's grip on the city and reclaim Palermo's identity.

In the run-up to Orlando's election in 1993, Palermo, the capital of Sicily, had witnessed a rise in Mafia-related violence. Notorious for its murder rate, the city had 700,000 residents and approximately 100 Mafia-related assassinations per year, not counting disappearances.¹ Sicily's killing peak was in 1991, when there were 718 Mafia-related murders, accounting for 37.5% of the total number of murders committed in Italy that year.² Assassinations of civic leaders and an outbreak of violence between competing criminal networks had led many outsiders to equate Sicily with the Mafia. "Whenever you go abroad and say you're from Sicily, people say: 'Ah, Mafia!'" said Giovanna Fiume, a history professor at the University of Palermo and an anti-Mafia activist. Outsiders knew the Teatro Massimo—closed for "urgent repairs" since 1974—not as a historic concert hall but as the backdrop for the final scenes of the Mafia-inspired film *The Godfather III*.

The Mafia had long influenced Palermo's culture and government. Scholars traced the secretive, loosely knit group of "families" to the 1800s. During the 20th century, the organization built a global reputation for ruthlessness in a wide range of criminal activities ranging from kidnapping and robbery to racketeering and drug trafficking. Internal disputes sparked two so-called Mafia wars in the early 1960s and the late

1970s and early 1980s. By the 1980s, the Sicilian Mafia had shifted tactics from backroom deals and furtive murders to high-profile bursts of violence, leaving dead approximately 1,000 Mafiosi and innocent bystanders.³ Mafia members assassinated top political, judicial and security-sector leaders, including General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, an anti-terrorism expert sent from Rome to try to end the Palermo bloodbath.

The campaign of intimidation sparked a backlash among citizens. Anti-Mafia activism dated back to the 19th century, but as the body count of prominent politicians, prosecutors, police officers and religious leaders grew, a more vocal anti-Mafia movement emerged and strengthened. Church groups, women's organizations, professors and other civil society activists began to speak out openly and defiantly.

Orlando's personal experience drew him toward the anti-Mafia movement. After teaching on the law faculty at the University of Palermo, he served from 1977 to 1980 as legal adviser to Piersanti Mattarella, president of the Sicilian region (a position similar to that of governor in certain other countries). In 1980, the Mafia killed Mattarella in retaliation for pushing through a regional law that made it illegal to contract with Mafia-related firms in construction projects. Orlando, who had drafted the law with Mattarella, was inspired to pursue a life of politics.

In 1980, Orlando won election to the city council as a member of the Christian Democracy Party, which had dominated Italian politics since its establishment in 1943. In 1985, the council selected him to serve as mayor. (Under Italian law at the time, mayors were elected indirectly.) The party chose Orlando—who had a clean reputation—in order to distance itself from party supporters and previous party leaders who were becoming increasingly implicated in Mafia-related arrests, investigations and trials.⁴

During his first term as mayor, from 1985 to 1990, Orlando took initial steps to cut ties

between the city government and the Mafia. He appointed as commissioners (heads of city departments) several anti-Mafia activists from outside his party. His team began to build schools in Mafia-controlled neighborhoods, plant trees and gardens throughout the city, and reform procurement systems so that Mafia-affiliated contractors could not continue to control construction projects, long a source of illicit revenue.

At the same time, Italy's federal judiciary deepened its campaign against the criminal network and began to erode the Mafia's base and reduce violence. From 1986 to 1987—in a landmark case known as the Maxi Trial—the federal court in Palermo investigated and tried 476 individuals, of whom 360 were convicted.

Although Orlando's first term helped broadcast his anti-Mafia message and plant the seeds of reform, he was unable to accomplish all his goals because of party politics, entrenched corruption and resistance among members of the city council. In the 1990 election, Orlando ran on a Christian Democracy Party ticket under open-list proportional representation rules, in which people voted for both a political party and individual candidates on that party's list. The councillors who were seated then chose a mayor and the mayor's cabinet from among their own ranks. Under that system, Orlando received more than three times as many votes as any other council candidate, giving the Christian Democrats a first-time majority on the council. However, Orlando's party said Orlando could not appoint commissioners from outside parties, with whom he had forged alliances in the past. Orlando refused his party's appointment as mayor and the Christian Democrats selected another candidate. Orlando left the Christian Democracy Party and created his own anti-Mafia political coalition, *La Rete* ("The Network"). As a candidate of *La Rete*, Orlando won positions on the Sicilian regional

parliament in 1991 and Italy's national parliament in 1992.

In 1993, Orlando seized a unique opportunity for reform in Palermo. Anti-Mafia sentiment had escalated after a new round of violence against government officials, businesspeople and politicians, including the murder of Maxi Trial magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1992. In the meantime, Orlando's *La Rete* had gained credibility and momentum as a national anti-Mafia movement. Finally, Italy changed its electoral rules in 1993: citizens could cast votes for individual mayoral candidates as well as political parties, and the mayor could appoint commissioners from outside the council.⁵ In that favorable context, Orlando was elected with 75% of the vote, and his coalition won a majority on the city council.

THE CHALLENGE

Reviving Palermo was a formidable task. The Mafia was the most obvious challenge. Orlando said Mafia criminals had substantial influence in the city government under past administrations. "Before me, mayors in Palermo were friends of the Mafia boss. ... There was one who was not a *friend* of the Mafia boss; he was the Mafia boss," he said, referring to a former mayor who had been convicted of Mafia ties. In 1993, violence began to dwindle after Italian authorities arrested another Mafia chief, Salvatore Riina, orchestrator of many of the high-level killings. However, the crime networks were still embedded in the city government, and Orlando's task was to reduce or eliminate their influence. For a reformer, the danger level was still high, and the Italian government continued Orlando's 24-hour police escort and multiple bodyguards—a protective measure put in place a decade earlier in response to death threats against Orlando for his anti-Mafia stance.

Palermo had to address a host of other challenges. First, city spaces that should have been public such as parks, historic buildings and squares, theaters, monuments and schools were either dilapidated or owned by Mafia-affiliated groups or both. During the heyday of the Mafia, Palermitans witnessed a period of intentional decline. Written in 1963 by politicians aligned with Mafia interests, the 30-year-old urban master plan deferred maintenance as part of a deliberate decision to let buildings decay. New building projects—large, lucrative projects for construction firms with organized-crime ties—would then be the only option. Emilio Arcuri, Orlando's commissioner for the historic city center, said, "They were looking at razing to the ground the historic city center. ... Destroying these buildings would have destroyed the fabric of the city."

In his 2001 biography, Orlando analyzed this "Sack of Palermo" and the tragic chain of events that prior Mafia-connected mayors had unleashed: "The result was the destruction of a city and its spirit. In addition to the concrete warrens on the outskirts of the town, there were surreal projects like roads leading to dead ends and factories that never produced anything, while the center of the city was left to implode from neglect. Magnificent Moorish buildings and Norman churches deteriorated. ... The population of the city center decreased from over a hundred thousand to less than forty thousand almost overnight, with those left living in Third World squalor. And while all of this happened—the remaking of Palermo into a Mafiapolis—nobody said a word. The Mafia code of *omertà* (silence) had long since become a national affliction."⁶

The city's physical space was important for a host of reasons, not least public pride and civic engagement. Italian legislation dating back to 1968 entitled every citizen to 18 square meters of space devoted to public spaces such as schools and parks and facilities for religious, cultural and social

activity, but Palermo had only two square meters per person.⁷ Letizia Battaglia—an award-winning Palermitan photographer who served in a unique role as "commissioner of livability" during Orlando's first term—connected the city's dilapidation and lack of public spaces with diminished morale: "Palermo was a city that didn't love itself. People loved their own family, their own house. But people didn't have an appreciation for the city."

Rebuilding civic pride required rehabilitation of the city's public spaces and visible efforts to reverse the city's physical deterioration. Arcuri recalled the challenge of restoring Palermo's center. "We had 240 major buildings, 60 to 70% of which were in decay," he said. "We had to stimulate private citizens, and the private sector had to play a role. Back then, you could die in the city center because buildings would collapse due to lack of maintenance."

A second, and related, challenge was the decline of Palermo's arts and cultural life. The once-elegant Teatro Massimo, shuttered for 23 years, symbolized the Mafia/government collusion that had transformed Palermo into a city where bitterness had replaced optimism. There were no thriving cafés, common spaces, pizzerias, bars or shopping centers, the presence of which could have attracted passersby and helped cut down on crime. Orlando reflected, "I was born in Palermo. I had never been alone at night in the historic city center. It wasn't possible. It was dark and dangerous."

Giuseppe Ferrante, commissioner for productive activities, said, "Before Orlando, the city was a dead city. The concept of public goods was almost unknown."

A third challenge was to improve the economy, which would require creating entrepreneurial activity and jobs, reducing the Mafia's hold on employment opportunities, and increasing tourism. A local unemployment rate of 35%⁸ had created an incentive for young people to

join Mafia-linked construction and public works projects. Legitimate businesses, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, were wary of investing or expanding in a city where the rule of law was uncertain and government workings were opaque. The job market was stagnant as entrepreneurial activities floundered. Many professionals, skilled workers and businesses moved to northern Italy to find better opportunities. And because of the lack of cultural and entrepreneurial activity as well as because of Palermo's violence levels, tourism weakened. In 1993, the year after the Mafia assassinated the two Maxi Trial magistrates, tourism hit a low of fewer than 100,000 visitors.⁹

A fourth challenge was to improve schools. Deteriorating school buildings interfered with teaching, and the city's schools turned out graduates who were poorly prepared for skilled occupations. About 58% of the classes taught in the city school system convened in private buildings, many of which were Mafia controlled.¹⁰ Because there weren't enough buildings for all students to go to school in the morning, the city had to create a second shift, in the afternoon, for 284 classrooms.¹¹ In the 1992–1993 school year, just before Orlando became mayor, Palermo's schools had high dropout rates—up to 40% in poor and Mafia-controlled neighborhoods—which created another barrier to expansion of the formal economy. Cosimo Scordato, a priest who led anti-Mafia efforts in his low-income neighborhood and elsewhere, said that children without education were prime candidates for Mafia work: “Often, the Mafia will recruit young people for activities like *pizzo* [extortion payment for protection] and drug smuggling.”

Although Orlando was aware of other challenges—fixing the city administration and strengthening municipal services (see companion case studies, parts 2 and 3)—he set a priority on reviving the city's soul by interrupting the physical, cultural, economic and educational

decline that had become endemic during years of Mafia domination.

FRAMING A RESPONSE

Orlando believed that reclaiming Palermo meant rehabilitating public spaces, arts and cultural activities, opportunities for entrepreneurship and tourism, and schools. Done right, such investments would help restore a sense of community or civic identity, foster business confidence and job creation, enhance public safety and help reduce the criminal network's revenue streams—for example, rental fees for schools held in Mafia-owned buildings and public works contracts. Orlando had tried to pursue that vision in his first term but with limited success; his second term offered a new opportunity with stronger political and public support.

The mayor stressed the need for residents to assume responsibility for collective resources, to become “citizens” again. Andrea Scrosati, a private communications consultant who worked for Orlando from 1991 to 2000, described Orlando's electoral message in 1993: “Our campaign was built around this: Taking back the city. It is not about politics; it is about freedom and democracy, against fear, and the control of illegal activity.”¹² Or as education commissioner Alessandra Siragusa framed the issue, Orlando's team needed to “reopen the city to citizens.”

Orlando described the philosophy that fueled his actions in office: “In Palermo, before I was mayor, what was not yours, what was not mine, was of nobody. I tried to demonstrate that what is not yours, what is not mine, is of everybody.” He explained his rationale: “I said [that] the most relevant things and the most convenient things are the common things: parks, theaters, schools, streets, squares, arenas. ... The role of the Mafia, the role of criminal power, is to change the border between my property and your property. But if the most relevant things are of everybody, the Mafia plays no role.”

Orlando also emphasized the need to build a new identity that could be a source of pride and that could attract young people. Salvatore Lupo, a Mafia expert and professor at the University of Palermo, said, “Mafia dominated Sicilian identity. This was especially true in a city like Palermo. Orlando’s identity projects aimed to rebuild the city’s identity; to remind people of the Palermo of the past, the 17th century, when a lot of the city’s buildings were built; and to remind them that in the 17th century, Palermo was one of the greatest cities in Europe.”

To help shift public norms and accomplish his team’s other key objectives, Orlando needed a focal point—a visible project or program that would foster new patterns of beliefs and behavior. He decided that focused investments in the city could provide leverage and generate other beneficial spin-offs: restoring historic buildings and common spaces, promoting arts and culture, building opportunities for tourism and economic activity, and strengthening education.

To develop strategies and implement reforms in these four spheres, Orlando appointed four commissioners with strong professional credentials. The commissioners worked closely with Orlando’s other commissioners and municipal company CEOs to implement their projects.

To serve as commissioner for restoration of the historic city center, Orlando chose Arcuri, a member of the city council since 1990. Trained as a medical doctor, Arcuri had expertise in environmental hygiene, public health and urban planning. He had supported a new historic center plan while on the city council. Arcuri described the rationale behind reviving the monuments and buildings in the historic center: “They came to represent [not only] the decay of the city but also the process of erasing the collective identity of the city. What we were doing was creating a sense of identity, which brings pride, which brings a public consciousness and sense of public life.”

Orlando appointed a physician, Francesco Giambrone, as culture commissioner. After his medical education, Giambrone had been a critic, journalist and essayist on music, dance and culture. Giambrone saw a strong link between culture, education and organized crime. “The Mafia’s reign is where there is need and there is no education, because the Mafia needs people who believe that the Mafia is the state,” he said. “And the Mafia needs a state that doesn’t act as a state, so that it can perform as a state itself. Whenever there is no education, in the sense that they don’t read or go to museums, and wherever there is lack of jobs, this is the basis for the Mafia to thrive. So, this is why I believe that culture can fight the Mafia.”

Orlando selected Giuseppe Ferrante as commissioner for productive activities, a position responsible for supporting economic activity and for increasing tourism. Founder of a Sicilian business magazine, Ferrante was regional president of the young entrepreneurs chapter of Confindustria, an employers’ federation of more than 100,000 companies throughout Italy. He cared deeply about restoring Palermo’s image. “When I traveled abroad, our company had the word ‘Palermo’ in it, and people would think ‘Palermo equals Mafia.’ So I felt strongly about our city’s reputation, even in the private sector,” he said. On his first day as commissioner, he said, “I thought back to what I would have wanted from the city as a citizen and entrepreneur. That’s what guided my strategic plan.” With Orlando’s backing, Ferrante decided to concentrate on supporting entrepreneurs by helping them obtain licenses, kick-start businesses and attract tourism.

Orlando tapped Siragusa, a member of the city council and Orlando’s commissioner for education during his first term in the 1980s, as commissioner of education. In Orlando’s first term, he had wanted Siragusa as commissioner for social activities, but she insisted on education. Siragusa explained why a focus on education, in

particular, would be important to reclaim the city: “The efforts to marginalize schools are not accidental,” she said. “Schools mean freedom, determination. We wanted to enhance the role of teachers and put the school at the center of society. Usually, in Italy... school is the stepchild of public activity. People don’t think highly of it, and it doesn’t get a lot of resources.” Siragusa also said children could influence their parents in important ways. “We wanted to get the parents involved,” she said. “We also managed to catch the parents and get some of the messages to the parents through the children.”

Siragusa realized she needed to prioritize two elements: to build a better school infrastructure, thus moving away from Mafia-owned buildings that housed public schools, and to craft a curriculum that would engage students’ civic consciousness.

Orlando’s core principles set the marching orders for his commissioners. First, they had to cut relations with the Mafia at every turn. Orlando explained his understanding of where the justice sector’s responsibilities ended and his began: “I am not a prosecutor. ... But I am responsible for cutting relationships between Mafia bosses and the community.” The team planned to do this in part by adopting hiring and bidding practices that would limit nepotism, patronage and collusion and by making their opposition to the Mafia clear and public.

Second, Orlando and his team made themselves easily accessible to citizens by engaging in frequent dialogue with civil society and religious groups, as well as scholarly and business communities. Giuseppe Prestigiacomo, former president of Confindustria, recalled that Orlando “came here many times. He visited several companies. ... His secret was to have good human relations with everyone. ... He was available at all times. People knew he was open to talking and

was available. I felt I had a partner when he was mayor. He was a reference point.”

Orlando worked to communicate his priorities to citizens by attending events, announcing accomplishments and keeping a high public profile. His communications team also targeted regional, national and international media networks to focus attention on the city. History professor and anti-Mafia activist Fiume recalled: “He had an open-door policy in city hall, and people could meet with him without intermediaries. In a sense, the media campaign and public relations policy enhanced transparency. Everyone could know about what was going on.”

Franco Nicastro, a journalist and anti-Mafia activist, agreed that Orlando was extremely engaged: “There was a continuous exchange. He was always available. The media had a very close relationship with Orlando.”

Third, Orlando and his team borrowed ideas liberally. They attended conferences all over Italy and Europe and brought back novel ideas. A plan to turn factories and industrial spaces into common spaces came from Berlin, and the concept for a cultural education program came from Naples. Orlando hired experts from other cities in Italy and from abroad to craft a plan for the historic city center, and he created an international office that would handle relations with other countries to change the face of Palermo.

Finally, the commissioners prioritized projects with an eye on maximizing the impact on the city’s collective psyche. The Teatro Massimo was an example. “It was very symbolic,” said culture commissioner Giambrone. “It was the most important monument of the city, closed, in the center of the city. Not hidden. It was there in the center. ... This was a very big wound for all of us.” Targeting symbols like Massimo would be key to reclaiming the hearts and minds of Palermitans and the city itself.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

After Orlando’s election in December 1993, he and his team began to revive Palermo by engaging civil society and business leaders and tapping into the groundswell of public support.

Revitalizing the city center

In 1988, during his first term, Orlando had commissioned a plan for Palermo’s historic city center and appointed architects and urban planners from Italy and abroad to contribute. The plan provided guidelines on public and private building projects and proposed a series of actions to the city council to restore the center’s decaying areas. To prepare the plan, the experts had studied religious buildings, civic and residential buildings, and green spaces. The final document, developed over five years and approved by Orlando’s new administration in 1993, comprised four areas of work: urgent interventions and maintenance, public projects, private projects, and administrative services.

To implement the plan, Orlando created a commission headed by Arcuri. Organized according to the four parts of the plan, the commission had a mission to acquire and restore

decaying buildings for residential use, acquire and restore monuments and historic buildings for public use, carry out restorations with the aim of setting precedent for further projects, and upgrade water, sewage and gas services. The commission’s list of proposed actions was lengthy (see Table 1), and the plan directed the commission to consult the public throughout the implementation process.

Arcuri hit the ground running. Regional legislation that accompanied the historic city center plan supported his work, providing permission to expropriate dilapidated property and regional funds (274 billion lire, about US\$151 million) to carry out the plan. Because the previous city administration had not spent anything on restoration, Arcuri had three years of unspent money at his disposal. To cover the high cost of the extensive restoration program, Orlando, Arcuri and others worked to secure additional funding. They eventually attracted 23 billion lire (about US\$13 million) in grants from the European Union and 101 billion lire (about US\$56 million) from the national government. The city council also allocated 185 billion lire (about US\$102 million) to the projects.

Table 1: Historic City Center Commission Responsibilities

- Maintenance and restoration of streets, buildings and other public property
- Restoration of residential public buildings
- Consultation and financial support for private restoration projects
- Installation of a new street-lighting system
- Restoration, maintenance and reuse of fountains
- Improvements at the seafront
- Restoration of sidewalks and streets
- Reuse of publicly owned buildings in the old city
- Design and realization of green spaces and parking lots
- Regulation of shop signs and shop windows
- Promotion and appreciation of monuments
- Creation of pedestrian spaces
- Design of a plan for the public bus service
- Study of waste collection methods
- Research to support historic building restoration
- Development of facilities for artisans

As leader of the commission, Arcuri hired 90 staff and 14 outside consultants to create one of the largest urban planning offices in Italy. He selected staff through a public competition and sent employees for training in restoration and rehabilitation. He emphasized historical research before intervention, the use of techniques and construction materials appropriate to the historical context, and respect for the original structure.

Arcuri's team emphasized quick-win projects the public would notice immediately, such as fixing streetlights and clearing away trash and garbage. "We started with street lighting, which had both practical and symbolic meaning," Arcuri said, "If the streets are illuminated, the small road is like the major road. Orlando and I would go all around and light up the streets and walk around the neighborhood."

After making progress on such symbolic items, Arcuri moved to restorations listed in the historic center action plan. Here, too, high visibility was important. "How do you build trust with the citizenry? How do you show them something is happening? First, you build the scaffold," he said. "People saw this and believed something was happening."

An innovative component of the city center plan involved funding opportunities to restore privately owned property. Arcuri said, "The idea is that there's a public interest in the restoration of private property. If the building falls down, it's too expensive for the public sector to maintain it, but if we help them [private owners] restore the buildings, we can help them maintain the process." The goal was to attract owners who had abandoned their property and thereby repopulate the historic city center. To receive grants, beneficiaries had to live in or rent the property. Projects included total restoration of buildings, improvements to parts of buildings such as facades and roofs, and improvements to individual apartments. Overall, the historic city commission oversaw the restoration of 368 private buildings.

In April 1999, Arcuri's commission began to assess residences and warehouses that had been abandoned and neglected. The panel identified 1,091 properties for expropriation, began to compensate owners the small amounts required by law, and started renovations.¹³

Over seven years, Arcuri's commission completed hundreds of public and private projects, but probably the most notable was the restoration of the Teatro Massimo. Built in 1897 and the largest theater in Italy, it had been closed for temporary work in 1974, when city officials awarded a multimillion-dollar renovation contract to a Mafia-affiliated company. Orlando lamented in his 2001 biography, "Not surprisingly, the years passed, the money disappeared, and the Teatro Massimo fell further into disuse."¹⁴

In late 1995, Orlando made a bold pledge that demonstrated his confidence in his team's efforts to restore the city. He promised the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra that the conductor and his ensemble could come to Palermo two years later and perform a concert on Massimo's centenary.

The first phase of emergency repairs focused on saving the structure itself, especially the roof and facade. The second phase addressed the interior. Orlando's administration encouraged businesses to sponsor items in the theater, such as the wooden floor and the seats. Businesspeople were eager to do so. Prestigiacomo of Confindustria said, "One of the most important things Orlando did was the reopening of the theater. We trusted him so much that when he asked entrepreneurs for help and support, we were ready to dig into our pockets to support him." Sicily's best-selling daily, *Giornale di Sicilia*, sponsored the restoration of the opera house interior and publicized needs in the daily paper, prompting businesses and artisans to become engaged.

Preparations came down to the wire. City employees worked from early morning to late at

night, including weekends, to make the tight deadline. Journalists were nervous to print news about the upcoming concert, fearing the building would not be ready in time. Arcuri's team finished restorations on the morning of the concert, and the concert hall's opening was a success.

Promoting arts and culture

Although the restoration and reopening of the Teatro Massimo was a massive undertaking, amounting to perhaps the most symbolic reform, Orlando's administration supported many other cultural improvements. Culture commissioner Giambrone, who supervised about 30 office employees and 200 museum, library and theater staff, led the planning and implementation. Giambrone said he had two priorities when he took office. "The first priority was to reopen all the spaces that were closed and give citizens spaces devoted to culture," he said. "The second priority was to spend money. At that time, the city of Palermo had loads of money [from the previous administration]. So, spending the money was a priority because the municipal system had not been able to spend in a correct way."

Giuseppe Cappellani, Palermo's commissioner of budget, said he made changes in order to accommodate Orlando's prioritization of culture. "Orlando had a theory. He wanted to change the Palermitans through culture. It was a good idea and a good project. It was hard to put into practice, so I had to increase the budget devoted to culture. I put aside 50 billion lire [about US\$24 million] for culture." Cappellani's prioritization of culture in the budget enabled Giambrone to embark on many large arts and culture projects, some of which were linked to the historic city center's restoration.

One major cultural project involved the restoration and opening of the 16th-century Gothic church Santa Maria dello Spasimo. Known as the Spasimo, the edifice had been used throughout the centuries as a church, theater,

warehouse, hospital and senior citizens' home. During World War II, bombs had destroyed much of the building, and it became a dumping ground for construction material during the city's subsequent decades of decline. Giambrone described how the Spasimo became lost: "The Spasimo was a beautiful church of the 1500s, and it was closed because it was just full of garbage. People didn't even know that this church existed just behind their houses."

After failing to reopen the Spasimo in his first term, Orlando tried again during his second. When the city opened a bidding process for the building's cleanup, the lowest bidder for the contract was a cooperative run by former prisoners. At the encouragement of the Orlando administration as part of a larger cooperative initiative (described further in a companion case study, part 2), a group of ex-convicts had formed a cooperative to earn a legal livelihood rather than return to Mafia activity. Their team cleaned the Spasimo, restored the walls, created a garden and landscaped the grounds. The building opened to the public in July 1995.

Giambrone said the reopening sparked a burst of civic pride in residents of the area surrounding the Spasimo. "There was a change of mentality before and after the opening of the Spasimo," he said. "People were protective. Before, when there was trash inside, that area was abandoned and seen as ... home of the criminals of the area. When it opened, they started feeling about it in a different way. They started to protect the area as if it was their own home."

Orlando said the Spasimo restoration also encouraged entrepreneurial activity in the area. "Because of the hundreds of visitors that the Spasimo and its cultural events attracted, the surrounding area completely changed," he said. "Bars and small trattorias sprang up, and souvenir shops opened. Those doing business there would ensure that the area was kept clean and file a report if a streetlight was not working."¹⁵

Orlando, Arcuri, Giambrone and their colleagues created and opened many cultural spaces within the city and made innovative use of property. For example, in 1994, as part of the city restoration process, the city acquired an abandoned, run-down 200,000-square-foot factory adjacent to the Zisa Castle, a 12th-century Arab-Norman structure. Giambrone and Orlando decided this space should become the Zisa Cultural Center.

Giambrone and his team worked to renovate the property, creating a museum as well as exhibition and rehearsal spaces for music, dance, art and theater. To demonstrate to the community that the city was making progress, they restored and opened rooms one at a time to the public. First, they renovated and opened a gallery for art exhibitions, then created theater spaces, then opened space for music rehearsals. Orlando and his team wanted the Zisa Cultural Center to attract families, so they designed gardens, a playground and a cafeteria. Later, they built a museum, a high-tech 500-seat theater and a Library of Difference, which was a reading room where students and others could debate and discuss the rich religious and cultural diversity of Palermo. Citizens as well as tourists gathered for events featuring local and international artists. Giambrone said, “It became a very important cultural center in Europe. ... The most important directors, choreographers, artists and architects of the world were in Zisa.”

Orlando’s administration also created a series of open-air concerts, called Café Concerto, to promote nightlife in Palermo. The city offered free equipment and licenses to anyone—usually café and restaurant owners—who wanted to host a concert, with the agreement that the organizer would coordinate the performance and keep the noise down. The city publicized the concerts, encouraged shops to stay open during the events, put out suggestion boxes for residents and kept city hall open late for citizens to visit.

The concerts, which took place at various venues throughout the city, were extremely popular and attracted thousands of residents onto Palermo’s streets at night, bolstering the administration’s progress in taking back the city after dark. Battaglia, a commissioner during Orlando’s first term, stressed the importance of the perception of safety: “[The administration of] Orlando paid for there to be music in cafés and bars and restaurants. We, as young people, as women, could walk at night and be safe. We were walking through the streets of the city: me, my daughters, women and everyone!”

Strengthening economic activity and tourism

Ferrante, the commissioner of productive activities, said he understood his challenge when he took the job: “The city center was under curfew. No one would go out.” He decided that increased business activity would bolster security in the city center. He and his staff of about 130 worked closely with commissioners Arcuri and Giambrone to complement restoration and cultural projects with economic development opportunities.

One of Ferrante’s first moves was to improve the distribution and monitoring of business licenses. “Before, if you needed to get paperwork done, you had to bribe and ask friends for favors,” he said. “The process always involved favors, paying people, asking a friend of a friend, etc. This created a very negative cycle. With Orlando, there was an objective of creating ease of performing these tasks.” Ferrante and others conducted a census to understand which licenses were in use, created sectoral plans to issue licenses based on needs and interests, reduced the backlog of 1,600 license requests, and created a one-stop shop to facilitate the license process. (Companion case study, part 2, describes more details of the process.)

At the same time, Ferrante and his team helped entrepreneurs revitalize their businesses.

Ferrante organized meetings with entrepreneurs and told them the city would help attract people to their shops by reserving streets for pedestrians, promoting public spaces, organizing a concert series (Café Concerto), putting police patrols on the street, and publicizing their efforts. “That was really successful,” Ferrante said. “What I found, as I went along, was that I didn’t need all the police, because the entrepreneurs were the best form of security. They made sure the atmosphere was good for everyone. People started taking their children. For example, the street market opens itself at night. Tables come out, restaurants open. It’s a very safe place.”

Ferrante used European Union grants to pay for several projects to kick-start business activity. For instance, he decided to help revitalize the city through a new type of entrepreneurship: traditional Sicilian crafts such as hand-painted ceramics. He applied for and received a European Union grant to provide 73 million lire (about US\$40,000) in seed money for 17 crafts businesses in the city center, selected through public tender. He also raised about 1 billion lire (about US\$550,000) to subsidize fairs that featured Palermo’s artisans, craftspeople and fashion designers. He secured 420 million lire (about US\$231,000) to subsidize development activities within Palermo’s hotel industry. And he worked with a company associated with Italy’s Treasury to invest 80 million lire (about US\$44,000) for high school and university students in business incubators to showcase their work at the Mediterranean Fair, which he said fostered “the development of a business culture in Palermo.”

Ferrante was also responsible for city markets that sold fruit, vegetables and meat. He coordinated renovation of the fruit and vegetable market buildings and helped to improve the market’s image. He also worked with vendors and nearby farmers to encourage sales of locally grown produce. Knowing that the Mafia tended to control access and run extortion rackets in

traditional markets like these, Ferrante said he tried to take a tough stance against vendors who operated without licenses, many of whom were Mafia affiliated. “I was responsible for neighborhood markets, in which 99% of the vendors worked illegally without a license. ... One time, I gathered sellers to explain the regulations: Everyone has to [have] a license and pay a fee. Everyone was very tense. I spoke to the prefectures [provincial officials]. They sent 100 policemen, and I sent the municipal police force. We cleared one area. After that, every time a market took place, we had a police presence. ... People knew the city administration was working together to fight the Mafia.”

As efforts to develop businesses and cultural activities started to pay off, Ferrante worked to promote tourism in Palermo. In 1995, he and his team identified several objectives. The first was to create new coalitions with Palermo’s private sector. For instance, he worked with restaurant owners and ceramic makers near the Teatro Massimo to promote their businesses in a part of the city that would soon be frequented by tourists. He also helped 37 cooperatives and 800 workers create civic assistance points and tourist information centers all around the city, including the outskirts.

The second objective for enhancing tourism was to make the city’s existing resources more efficient. Ferrante and his team worked with the transportation commissioner and others to improve parking availability, bus routes and taxi lanes and to install credit card machines in taxis. They also worked to expand the hours of operation of shops, including Sundays. Finally, they worked with the public works commissioner and others to create and improve pedestrian-only zones.

Ferrante’s third tourism objective was to enhance the city’s tourist locations and identify new opportunities. He worked to fix up public beaches, improve local hotels and promote

Palermitan crafts. Ferrante also created an award called “Welcoming Palermo,” which encouraged artists to create Palermo-related designs. The best designs were featured on packaging for olive oil, wine and other items sold in Palermo. In addition, Ferrante and his team encouraged hotels to give guests small Palermo-related gifts as tokens of hospitality and city pride.

Finally, Ferrante wanted to ensure that tourists and tourism companies viewed Palermo as an inviting destination, not just a place that visitors passed through on their way somewhere else. He noticed that cruise liners often docked at Palermo’s port, shuttled passengers on bus tours of monuments and churches, and quickly departed. Ferrante worked with tour companies to allow their customers more opportunities for walking through the city, shopping and dining. He also forged a relationship with several airlines, creating package deals for trips to Palermo and organizing free shuttles to bring passengers from the airport to shopping areas.

Orlando’s administration supported civil society efforts—including restaurant and ice cream shop cooperatives overseen by a priest, Cosimo Scordato—that promoted economic activity and tourism in the city center. Scordato explained that these initiatives “gave people confidence that they could do business here.” He and other community leaders requested that tourism companies visit the city center rather than just the sites of Mafia murders. Residents in his area opened an agency to lead neighborhood tours. The restaurants, ice cream shops, trattorias, and tourism agencies started reinforcing one another.

As Palermo gained culturally and economically, the people took back the city’s streets. Ferrante noted that the security teams he had originally put in place had become irrelevant after business owners moved in. “The presence of economic activity was the best form of street policing,” he said. “It restricted the activity of the

Mafia, in a sense.” Orlando assessed the outcome of enhanced entrepreneurial activity and tourism on the city: “You can let Mafia control Italy, or you can let the pubs and restaurants control Italy. Movement of people, of course, prevents the Mafia from playing a role.”

Prioritizing education

Education commissioner Siragusa, who was 30 years old when she assumed the position, had two key priorities: building new schools and strengthening the education curriculum to enhance students’ and parents’ civic consciousness and city pride. In designing and implementing reforms, she supervised a team of 150 within the education commission and another 50 who worked in school buildings. Orlando supported Siragusa and gave her leeway to enact her own reforms. “Even though I was very young, Orlando never dictated what I should do. I was given a lot of room to do the initiatives I wanted to do.”

Building new schools was urgent, and Siragusa’s team started from scratch. She said, “When I came in, there was not a single blueprint!” So, she and her team identified high-priority areas for schools, such as low-income communities, Mafia-controlled neighborhoods and neighborhoods from which students had to travel a long distance to get to school. Then her engineers and architects created designs for the schools.

Siragusa said her team’s efforts raised safety issues. “I was really touched,” she said. “People weren’t worried about their own personal safety; they were worried about the safety of the project. For instance, they were worried about the blueprints for the project and that someone would break in and take or destroy the plans.” Her commission installed an alarm system in the building and used tactics like diffused responsibility to curtail Mafia interference. She said, “Even at the level of top management, we were trying to confuse the Mafia. Several people

would be signing off on the documents. We wanted to give the message that there were several people working on this project. Even if the Mafia killed one person, the project would go on. It was bigger than one top-level person. A lot of credit should be given to the city administration and school employees.”

Siragusa’s commission set up a legal bidding process for construction of school buildings. The bidding process adhered to European Union regulations and required every bidding company to submit a certificate from Italy’s Ministry of Interior that verified the company was not Mafia affiliated. Siragusa and her team monitored the construction of school buildings, built relationships with the communities in which the schools were being built, and worked closely with parents’ associations.

Siragusa described one instance in which her team members were threatened but eventually prevailed. “We wanted to build a school in Croceverde Giardini, [the neighborhood of the] home of Greco, a Mafia boss. I sent an engineer, a big tall man. The son of Greco came up to him and said, ‘You will never build a school here.’ The engineer was really petrified because he knew what that meant.” These types of threats meant Siragusa had to assert the presence of the state in some areas, often with police escorts. “We would sometimes go into the neighborhoods and meet the people so that community members knew we were present.” Siragusa recalled the excitement at that new school when she arrived for a ribbon cutting. Students were wearing poster boards that read “Everyone said this school wasn’t possible”; on the back, the signs read, “But we made it possible.”

Siragusa and her team worked to strengthen the education curriculum. They created consistency across elementary, middle and high school lesson plans, conducted assessments to measure educational outcomes, injected classroom lessons into school plays and other projects, and

collected feedback from teachers. Throughout, they emphasized teacher training. “We wanted to enhance teachers’ roles and put the school at the center of society,” Siragusa said. They also incorporated cross-cultural education into the curriculum, teaching students about other cultures, religions and languages and teaching Italian to new immigrant students and their parents. “We were pioneers, because this was the beginning of migration into Italy,” she said. “We were working to build an identity, an art of living together, leveraging Palermo’s identity as a cross-cultural city.”

Siragusa and her team worked to build civic consciousness and city pride into the school system. In one initiative, a local newspaper created space for a daily feature, “Class Assignment,” in which students would write articles about issues such as decaying school buildings and having afternoon sessions because of lack of space in the morning. Orlando handwrote a note in response to the published letters, replying to questions and explaining how the administration would address students’ concerns. Orlando asked police officers to hand deliver replies to the students in students’ classrooms both to engage police in civic activity and to enable students to view the police in a favorable light.

The education team enlisted students’ support in other ways to bolster civic involvement and broaden the concept of shared responsibility. In one such effort, pupils were given paper tickets, with the word “impolite” written on them, to place on cars parked improperly in the city. Orlando reflected on how this initiative could change parental norms: “Do you know what it means when the father has seen ‘impolite’ on his own car? Not from the city police, but from his son? It’s a change of mentality, starting with the children.”

A major program effort called “Adopt a Monument,” received international acclaim. In line with Orlando’s aim of developing ideas from

outside sources, the commission adapted the idea from a similar project in Naples. At the inaugural ceremony in 1994, students received “adoption” certificates for each monument they agreed to restore and maintain. Throughout the year, students worked with their teachers to research the histories of their designated monuments. According to Jane and Peter Schneider, scholars on the anti-Mafia movement in Palermo, many of the adopted structures had been “abandoned, vandalized, or closed to the public for decades, often as the result of political corruption involving *mafiosi*.”¹⁶ Students interviewed local experts and residents, designed brochures and documents, produced videos about the monuments, and offered tours.

The project was innovative because it enabled students and citizens to learn about their city’s history in a unique and memorable way. Siragusa said the project supported other parts of the curriculum as well: “Through adopting these monuments, the students would learn about history, math, science—the subjects they were studying.” She said some parents, who helped clean and sweep the monuments with their students, participated alongside their children. “We wanted to get the parents involved with the Adopt a Monument project,” she said. “They might stay there, then create a booth, distribute brochures, etc.” The project inspired Palermo’s residents to learn about and, in some cases, sponsor the restoration of monuments.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Orlando knew the Mafia challenge intimately. Throughout his political career, he received death threats, had bodyguards by his side, and rarely appeared with his wife and children in public. Battaglia described the personal sacrifices Orlando and the anti-Mafia movement made during the violence of the 1980s and early 1990s: “We lost a lot of family and friends. We lost family relationships because we were all strong

against the Mafia. It was a high personal cost that we paid.”

Although the Mafia’s most violent phase was past, the criminal network remained a stumbling block for Orlando’s administration. While explicit acts of violence were rare, the Mafia still exerted subtle influence on Palermo’s residents, encouraging them to oppose reforms that would curtail Mafia influence. Many citizens benefited from the old way of doing things—the Mafia way. Francesco Miceli, commissioner of public works, said, “I would say that we encountered obstacles because the Mafia didn’t openly manifest any opposition in the first person. They creep and do things in the background. The Mafia always introduces itself with the face of the citizens, who try to obtain something for their specific interest. But of course, behind these interests, there was the Mafia’s hidden interest.”

Orlando said the Mafia’s underlying strength was a constant topic of concern. He said, “People protested, saying: ‘Mr. Mayor, you fight against the Mafia and we lost jobs. You fight against the Mafia entrepreneurs. We work with these entrepreneurs, and we are jobless.’”

Presenting a consistent and united front was important. Orlando’s administration stuck firmly to its tough anti-Mafia stance, created employment and educational opportunities for citizens, continued to cut ties with the Mafia and worked tirelessly to show Palermo residents that they could not only reclaim their city but also have better lives as a result.

Orlando’s administration worked to create and enforce fair and transparent rules. For instance, as in the case of school-building construction described earlier, every public bidding process was organized according to European Union standards, and every bidding company had to present an official certificate, vetted by law enforcement authorities, to demonstrate it did not have Mafia affiliations. Orlando’s commissioners, knowing that the Mafia

often got involved in subcontracts, also did their own research on the companies and individuals involved in public projects.

Orlando's team found ways to interrupt criminal activity without abandoning citizens who benefited from the jobs created through Mafia activity. They tried to ensure that people did not lose their jobs when Mafia-affiliated companies lost public works contracts. In one example, when Orlando canceled the contract of a public contractor that had Mafia ties, he opened the project for public bids according to European Union rules. Then he persuaded the winner of the contract to hire the employees of the former company, so citizens would not lose their livelihood. He said, "We saved people's jobs but cut the relations with the former contractor who was related to the Mafia bosses."

Rather than negotiate with or tolerate the Mafia, administration members set personal examples and cut ties completely. Orlando's team—many of them known for their anti-Mafia stances prior to their appointments—hired workers only through legal processes on the basis of qualifications. And they included their anti-Mafia stance in most public statements.

Orlando did not belong to any of the aristocratic social groups that his family members attended regularly, because the enemy was not just the Mafia but also the politicians, professionals and entrepreneurs who enabled Mafia activity by protecting or hiring Mafia members. Orlando said, "I had to demonstrate I was against the *friend* of the Mafia boss and not just against the Mafia boss. *Everybody* said they were against the Mafia, but the real problem for the poor people in the town was not the Mafia boss but the people living in really nice buildings and giving protection to the Mafia boss. ... I needed to demonstrate I was against my relatives, my colleagues, against the part of the city that was considered the most influential and connected to the Mafia and related to the Mafia interest."

The Mafia's presence persisted in Palermo (and throughout Italy) during and after Orlando's tenure. However, Orlando was one of the first mayors to oppose the organization openly and directly, to join forces with the anti-Mafia elements of the community, to hire staff and enact policies that were consistent with his anti-Mafia message, and to sever Mafia ties with city hall.

Fiume, the anti-Mafia activist and history professor, evaluated the situation in a 2012 interview: "The Mafia is much weaker now. There are no murders of public officials or large-scale killings. The Mafia has not disappeared but has become more like generalized political corruption, which is rising in Italy. And there's no more silence." Fiume recalled that Falcone, the magistrate assassinated in 1992, had said that a realistic goal was not to make the Mafia disappear but to reduce it to a normal criminal phenomenon, so Sicily would become known as a place where Mafia was a *problem* but not *the defining problem*. Fiume said civil society, magistrates, the Orlando administration and others had accomplished that goal by 2000.

In December 2000, Palermo hosted 143 countries and over 600 journalists for a four-day signing conference of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. Palermo was chosen as the site for that convention in part because of its achievements in fighting organized crime. The day after the conference, a year before his term ended, Leoluca Orlando resigned to run for president of Sicily. Most of his commissioners resigned with him. Orlando lost the election the next year, a year in which Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's coalition won each of Sicily's 61 parliamentary.

ASSESSING RESULTS

From 1993 to 2000, Orlando's administration racked up many successes. With the passage of the city center plan, important public spaces were no longer in the hands of the

Mafia, and illegal construction subsided in the city center and periphery. Led by the Historic City Center Commission, the government renovated or reacquired 158 churches, 400 old buildings, 55 monasteries and seven theaters, many of which had been marked for demolition.

The restoration of historic buildings and the reopening of symbolic structures helped dispel Palermo's image of decay and corruption. The city center's population grew from an all-time low of 23,000 residents in 1996 to 27,000 by 2000.¹⁷ By 2000, the Historic City Center Commission had completed 289 expropriations of neglected properties.

Delegations from Barcelona and Sevilla, Spain, and Siracusa, Italy, visited Arcuri's commission to learn about the reviving of city centers. The most popular restoration success story involved the renovation and reopening of Teatro Massimo. Beginning in 1997, the Massimo hosted grand operas and concerts and was open for school and tourist tours.

Palermo's cultural activities were used as models elsewhere, and Palermo also received international delegations. The Zisa Cultural Center attracted popular entertainers and drew other cities' attention. By 2000, the city had renovated 13 of Zisa's 40 small buildings, and Zisa had hosted more than 60 seminars and 80 exhibitions as well as many theatrical premieres and other artistic events.¹⁸

Miceli, the commissioner for public works, recalled, "We received many worldwide artists. It was very popular." Initiatives like Café Concerto especially benefited less-affluent citizens who could not afford to buy concert tickets or eat at restaurants. Ferrante, commissioner for productive activities, said, "With these Café Concerto events, people could walk around the city and enjoy things without having a meal. They could enjoy for free. For some, it was the first time they could enjoy a cultural activity like this because they

couldn't afford it in the past. They were living a dream life, in a way."

Ferrante's initiatives on productive activities also helped revitalize the city. Multiple pedestrian areas were open for citizens and tourists. Restaurants, cafés, bars, pizzerias and other shops blossomed around the city, and that activity continued after Orlando's administration. Ferrante acknowledged that his team did not collect comprehensive metrics to measure the impact of the new economic activity but estimated that "90% of the economic activity you see now in the city center wasn't there in the early 1990s." He offered, as an example, a neighborhood in the center of the city that in the 1980s had one bar and by 2012 had six.

Alongside economic activity, tourism increased in Palermo. From 98,369 visitors in 1993, the number of foreign tourists had more than doubled, to 220,263, by 1999.¹⁹ Orlando described the change. "Palermo was transformed into a touristic city," he said. "Before I was elected mayor, there were only Palermitans in the airplanes landing in Palermo. If you met someone else who spoke English or French, it was only journalists who came to report on Mafia killers, Mafia bosses, trafficking—not to be tourists. But Palermo became a touristic city." He reflected on the improvements: "Tourism creates so many jobs for taxi drivers, restaurant owners ... I remember we had five or six restaurants in Palermo when I was young. Now you find five or six on each street!"

Palermo's education sector also improved under Orlando's administration. During Orlando's seven years, Siragusa's team built 40 schools and opened 14 more for prekindergartners. By December 2000, an adequate number of public schools had eliminated the need for double shifts and afternoon classes. Private individuals owned only 20% of the buildings, and none were linked to the Mafia.

By the late 1990s, school dropout rates had decreased by two-thirds. Palermo city schools received recognition from the Italian Institute of Statistics, the country's most important public research center for national statistics, which cited the Palermo school reforms as a model for Italy.

Under the Adopt a Monument project, more than 25,000 students adopted 160 churches, castles, public and private historic sites, villas, towers, schools, cemeteries, theaters, railway stations, private chapels, fortresses, parks, fountains, streets and neighborhoods. By the time Orlando's administration ended, about 60 percent of the monuments had been restored and reopened, and 20 percent were under restoration.²⁰

Siragusa said the program changed Palermo in surprising ways. "This project was done to change the city for tourists, because outsiders were used to the image of the Mafia," she said. "But by changing the image of Palermo to outsiders, it changed Palermitans' self-identity and self-worth. So, changing the image from the outside, we changed the image on the inside, too."

Orlando wrote that Adopt a Monument was more than a heartwarming story: "It was something more profound: a story of people long denied a map to their lives now regaining control of their own territory, reclaiming it from enemy hands."²¹

The Schneider scholars noted that Adopt a Monument had a broad impact: "In 1999, poor schools no less than rich schools presented their monuments with the help of electronic equipment, notwithstanding having fewer parents with cars and leisure time to transport exhibits, props, and computers to the site. Moreover, the program seemed to galvanize students' energy and imagination across a broad range of schools, provoking them to think through issues for themselves."²²

Not all of the positive statistics could be attributed directly to Orlando's administration. For instance, crime rates decreased drastically in

Palermo, but that was not only Orlando's doing. From hundreds of homicides per year in 1993, Palermo had 11 murders in 1999, none of which were Mafia related. Urban Audit, a database for statistics on European cities, reported that Palermo's crime rate in 2001 was lower than that of Rome, Naples, Milan or Bologna. Perceptions of crime also improved. For instance, according to the Italian National Institute of Statistics, the percentage of families in Sicily that reported a high or fair presence of crime risk in their area had dropped to 23.2% by 2000 from 34.1% in 1993.²³ The national average showed far less improvement during the same period, slipping to 30.6% from 31.4%.²⁴

Orlando's administration did not singlehandedly bring about such a drop in crime rates during his second term. First, because of the Maxi Trial and changes in Mafia strategy, the rates had been moving in that direction. Second, as Orlando acknowledged, his law enforcement responsibilities were limited. Finally, there was a wave of anti-Mafia activity among civil society that had been swelling for decades, and Orlando's success stemmed from his ability to capitalize on that energy to leverage important changes as part of a larger phenomenon. Although Orlando's administration played a role in cutting the Mafia out of politics, Orlando acknowledged that people's protests in the streets together with years of anti-Mafia efforts lessened the violence.

Not all of the results in Palermo were rosy. For instance, according to Urban Audit, Palermo's unemployment rate in 2001 was still high, at 30%.²⁵ In the same year, Rome's unemployment rate was 11%. Furthermore, the goal to move people back into the historic city center had not been fully achieved. By 2000, only about half of the desired number of property owners had returned.

Civil society activists and journalists acknowledged Orlando's successes but also pointed to shortcomings. Umberto Santino,

sociologist and historian, anti-Mafia activist and founder of the Giuseppe Impastato Sicilian Center of Documentation—a research center named for a political activist murdered by the Mafia in 1978—said Orlando tended to minimize the importance of civil society groups, which had played important anti-Mafia roles for decades. He noted that civil society was organizing action against the Mafia long before Orlando and that struggles against the Mafia dated to the peasant movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most significant criticism of the Orlando administration involved what it left undone and what unraveled later. Many reforms stopped or backslid after Orlando left office in 2000—before his mayoral term was finished—to run for the regional parliament. Most of Orlando’s commissioners resigned with him, and the succeeding administration dismissed other key people from his staff. Although some improvements stuck, many initiatives faltered under the new leadership. For instance, Adopt a Monument lost momentum, and the Café Concerto series ended.

Some blamed Orlando’s early departure for the lack of sustainability, while others blamed his administration for not taking more steps to institutionalize their reforms. Franco Nicastro, a journalist and anti-Mafia activist who covered Orlando and his administration, cited lack of sustainability as a critical problem: “This is maybe where Orlando fell short. He started the new process, but he wasn’t able to carry it out to the end. He didn’t manage to get all the success he wanted and thought he could have. He built a new administration locally. He gave us hope, but then the most difficult part wasn’t completed.”

Some felt Orlando did not help nurture a next generation of leaders. Historian Fiume said, “When he left, everyone in his cabinet had moved on to something else. There was no one who stayed to carry on his legacy.” There was no

sustained effort to develop successors—people who could take over and keep the city administration focused on continued progress.

Nicastro drew a distinction: “Orlando gave credit to people he worked with, but he especially did this when he understood that by doing this, his role would be in the first position. He tended to be dominant. He had a strong personality. He tried to customize the politics to himself.”

Other observers—saddened by economic, cultural and political trends throughout Italy from 2000 to 2012—pointed to larger political forces at work in the country, blaming Palermo’s new administration for not carrying on the initiatives. Former Confindustria president Prestigiaco said in early 2012 that he was willing to sponsor Orlando’s projects, such as Teatro Massimo, but “would never give the current mayor money now.” He also lamented that, while he used to be able to pick up the phone to call Orlando or his chief of staff, he did not know whom to call after 2000.

Giambrone, commissioner of culture, said, “Those who came after us, the new administration, went back to the old mentality and the old way of thinking. They didn’t care about the city or about improving the city.” Siragusa reflected on the administration that followed Orlando’s: “Bad politics looks a lot like the Mafia.”

REFLECTIONS

Leoluca Orlando’s administration demonstrated that the effective use of public spaces, culture, economic activity and education could help reclaim a city. Such interventions were parts of the Palermo model, which Orlando exported to other cities—Mexico City, Bogotá, Medellín and others—through conferences and meetings with mayors.

In 1999, Orlando and others founded an organization called the Sicilian Renaissance Institute (1) to spread lessons learned from the Sicilian experience so leaders and cities could learn

and adopt the model and (2) to continue to foster civic renewal throughout Sicily. Roy Godson, professor emeritus at Georgetown University and president of the National Strategy Information Center in Washington, D.C., worked with other members of the board (including Orlando as president) to research, codify and disseminate how the Orlando administration worked with civil society and others to create a “culture of lawfulness” in Palermo in the 1990s.

When sharing the Palermo model, Orlando and others emphasized the importance of identifying a city’s key values, understanding how organized crime or similar problems may have distorted those values, and brainstorming interventions to interrupt the vicious cycle. For example, in Sicily, Orlando identified Palermo’s core values as identity, culture and belonging. Orlando’s reforms were devised to help citizens reclaim the identity of the city through culture and to make services and jobs open to all citizens, not just those who belonged to certain families or the Mafia.

Palermo’s cultural revolution was part of a broader strategy of progress. Orlando often described his administration’s work by using the metaphor of a Sicilian cart. (Historically, Sicily was known for its ornate two-wheeled, horse-drawn carts.) Orlando said the city government had a responsibility to make progress on two fronts. “An image that occurred to me early in my own fight against the Mafia was of a cart with two wheels, one law enforcement and the other culture,” he said. “If one wheel turned without the other, the cart would go in circles. If both turned together, the cart would go forward.”²⁶ Beginning with the Maxi Trial, the police, magistrates, the courts, prisons, and Mafia informants got the law enforcement wheels turning in Palermo. Orlando and his team saw their role as getting the cart moving forward by revitalizing the cultural wheel.

One of the keys to Orlando’s success was that he leveraged the work of already-active civil

society groups. For instance, he supported the projects of Scordato, the anti-Mafia priest who worked to keep students in school, promote tourism and help neighborhood cooperatives. Another element of Orlando and Scordato’s success was to bypass the Mafia rather than confront the organization or strike deals. Scordato spoke of one reason he believed the Mafia didn’t kill him but did kill another anti-Mafia priest in a nearby church: “Father Puglisi was trying to fight the Mafia frontally. It’s you versus them. It’s you or them. Then they have to assert their dominance. But the strategy here was to create an alternative in a neighborhood through a process of awareness building and participation.” This was part of Orlando’s strategy as well: to create public spaces, cultural activities, businesses and stronger institutions that could function as alternatives to the Mafia in Palermo.

Orlando acknowledged that his second-term reforms were more successful because of the powerful context into which he was elected. “Starting in 1993, I got a lot of power,” he said. “I did not have to balance political forces because, in some way, I was the political force. There was a big personalization. I *was* not a mayor supported by coalition. I *was* the coalition.”

Giuseppe Cappellani, the budget commissioner, also reflected on this dynamic: “Under Orlando, we had a majority. He had his own network. So, we had a majority in city council. Leoluca had the support of this council. There weren’t many obstacles. Even when there were differences of opinion among the various parties in the ruling coalition, Orlando could always count on the majority of votes.”

Orlando reflected that he wished he had helped develop other municipal leaders while serving as mayor: “My problem was that I wasn’t able to have other young leaders around me. ... One of my many, many regrets is not having young leaders.” Orlando’s coalition and momentum collapsed when he left in 2000.

Orlando said that another lesson for leaders who find themselves in a situation like his is that they might need to look to civil society or the international community for support, especially in violent settings. “When the Maxi Trial started, I was supported by the people, and I was strongly supported by international opinion,” he said. “I must say thanks to British, German, French and American newspapers. My protection came from outside Italy, from people outside the system in Palermo.” He offered an additional reflection: “I think, to build leadership, you need to build respect for time: memory for the past, hope for the future. If you live in eternal present, without community, you cannot change your city. You need to use the past to build the future. That is building a sense of community.”

Members of Orlando’s team assessed their seven years positively but also offered critical perspectives. City center commissioner Emilio Arcuri, for instance, regretted that some of the common spaces and historic buildings started to decay after he left. Alessandra Siragusa, commissioner for education, lamented that her team did not get to build all the schools it had planned to. Other members of Orlando’s team said they did not have enough time to ensure that reforms would be sustained.

Francesco Giambrone, commissioner of culture, regretted Palermo’s decline after 2000. “A journalist once wrote to me: ‘Dear Francesco. It’s all very beautiful. There is great change; the city is beautiful and open. It is all very exciting. But I fear that when rains arrive, the mountains will erode because the trees have no roots.’ I never forgot the line because the mountain eroded,” Giambrone said. “But I still do not know if it was the fault of the trees, which didn’t have strong roots to save the mountains from the rains.”

EPILOGUE

In June 2012, Orlando began his fourth term as Palermo’s mayor after receiving 72% of the votes in a run-off election. That electoral success capped a political career that included positions in legislatures of the national government, the Sicilian government and the European Union. But he never lost his dedication to Palermo. He had run for mayor in 2007 but lost to the incumbent Diego Cammarata, a former top aide to popular Italian politician and three-time prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Orlando alleged electoral fraud, an accusation that remained under investigation in 2012. Cammarata, in the midst of several investigations of fraud and abuse of office, resigned as mayor in January 2012.

Endnotes

¹ Enzo Lo Dato, 2000, 18, and Umberto Santino, 1988, 238. In *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*. Jane Schneider and Ida Susser, ed. London: Berg, 2003.

² Isabella Merzagora Betsos and Stefano Maffei, “Crime and Criminal Policy in Italy: Tradition and Modernity in a Troubled Country.” *European Journal of Criminology*, 2007, 467.

³ The exact number of deaths from the Mafia wars and their aftermath is difficult to calculate because victims disappeared and reports conflicted, but the martyred Palermo magistrate Falcone’s count cited approximately 1,000 Mafia-related deaths, as reported in an ISS interview with Mafia expert Salvatore Lupo.

⁴ Leoluca Orlando, *Fighting the Mafia and Renewing Sicilian Culture*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001, 91.

⁵ Background on new electoral laws: For larger municipalities, such as Palermo, citizens cast ballots for mayoral candidates and then, in a second ballot, voted for a separate party slate to fill councillor posts. They could split their votes if they wished, casting ballots for a mayoral candidate from one party and a councillor list from

another. More than one party could coalesce behind a mayoral candidate. The mayoral candidate who won a simple majority would win the election. If no candidate won a simple majority, voters went to the polls again to choose among the top two contenders. In either case, the mayor's party automatically received a minimum of 60% of the seats on the council. Further, under the new system, the mayor could appoint commissioners from outside the council's members.

⁶ Orlando, *Fighting the Mafia*, 29.

⁷ Speech by Alessandra Siragusa, referencing Italian legislation of 1968. In *Edited Proceedings of the International Symposium: The Role of Civil Society in Countering Organized Crime: Global Implications of the Palermo, Sicily Renaissance*, Palermo, Italy, 14 December 2000, <http://www.sicilianrenaissance.info/en/pubblicazioni/001214.pdf>.

⁸ *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*, Jane C. Schneider and Ida Susser, ed. Oxford, England, and New York: Berg, 2003, 307.

⁹ Enzo Lo Dato, "Palermo's cultural revolution and the renewal project of the city administration." Symposium on the role of civil society in countering organized crime: global implications of the Palermo, Sicily renaissance, Palermo, Sicily, December 2000. *Trends in Organized Crime: Sicilian Perspectives*, Volume 5, Number 3, (1999), 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10–34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Orlando wrote an open letter to citizens during his 1993 campaign: "Palermo today is not the same as yesterday. There are more and more citizens who are shaking off the old resignation to the connections and the yoke of Mafia and evil politics. The State has done its part: it has pursued murderers and dishonest people; it has punished those who colluded with the criminals. The task now awaiting all of us in Palermo is to liberate and re-build: to restore the city to ourselves, to its people, to its history. What is in front of us is a collective and very exciting undertaking. Not of one man alone, nor of a few; not of groups, nor of corporations. It is the undertaking of the whole city, and the Palermo Renaissance will succeed if this becomes the project of its people." Quoted in Lo Dato, "Palermo's cultural revolution and the renewal project of the city administration," 19.

¹³ Lo Dato, "Palermo's cultural revolution," 29.

¹⁴ Orlando, *Fighting the Mafia*, 190–191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁶ Jane C. Schneider and Peter T. Schneider, *Reversible Destiny*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003, 267.

¹⁷ Lo Dato, "Palermo's cultural revolution," 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹ Orlando, *Fighting the Mafia*, 196.

²² Schneider and Schneider, *Reversible Destiny*, 270.

²³ Italian National Institute of Statistics (2012), "Families who have a high or fair presence of crime risk in the area they live in, by region 1993–2011," http://noi-italia.istat.it/index.php?id=7&no_cache=1&user_100ind_pi1%5Bid_pagina%5D=59, accessed 25 April 2012.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Urban Audit, Palermo City Profile,

<http://www.urbanaudit.org/CityProfiles.aspx?CityCode=IT009C&CountryCode=IT>, accessed 25 April 2012.

²⁶ Orlando, *Fighting the Mafia*, 6.



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