

A documentary by Annalisa Piras and Bill Emmott and a campaign to wake Italy up



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# Girlfriend in a Coma

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## GIAC ITALIAN OF THE MONTH: EUGENIO COCCIA

Lack of meritocracy or even of rewarding achievement is one of Italy's worst sins.

Which is why we want to celebrate Italian talent (#GIACGOTTALENT).

Once a month we will salute an Italian who can make the whole nation proud.

Do you know someone who does just that? Then let us know by sending us your #GiacGotTalent nomination to [YourVoice@girlfriendinacoma.eu](mailto:YourVoice@girlfriendinacoma.eu). We'll select one winner every month.

Eugenio Coccia



Eugenio Coccia is a Full Professor of Physics and an experimental physicist with expertise in astroparticle physics.

In 2009, when he was the director of the Laboratory of Gran Sasso, the first question that assailed him after the earthquake in L'Aquila was: "Who would ever want to work or study in L'Aquila again?"

His answer to that question was the establishment of the [Gran Sasso Science Institute](#) just in the city centre, which opened its doors in November 2013. Eugenio Coccia is our Italian of the month.

What was the process that led to the founding of

the Institute?

It was that question: who would ever want to work or study in L'Aquila again? It came up talking with some colleagues and the Dean of the Faculty, Paola Inverardi. We discussed how to avoid students leaving L'Aquila. We wanted to revive L'Aquila as a city of knowledge and research, with an initiative similar to the one used in Friuli after that region's 1976 tragedy, using the earthquake as an opportunity to create a new school project for advanced studies and doctoral degrees.

Obviously, an initiative like this needed to have credibility at a local level. The Gran Sasso National Laboratory has provided this credibility. I was the director of the laboratory so I knew well the environment. We built the Gran Sasso Science Institute around the concept and the credibility of the Laboratory, one of absolute excellence in the study of astroparticle physics.

We then created four doctoral programmes: astroparticle physics, mathematics, computer science and urban studies.

The project was examined by the OECD, evaluated by a committee and, once approved, it was funded by Italian government and Abruzzo region.

**The next step will come in 2016 when the school will be evaluated to decide on future funding. What do you think you can offer more than other research centres, how do you intend to attract students from abroad and make Italy for once a point of arrival instead of departure?**

After the first three years of the project there will be an evaluation on whether this initiative will become stable and then if we can get the actual status of university.

Our strong point is the level of our teachers and researchers and their international recognition. We had a proof of this already with the first call for doctoral students, for which we received 522 requests, half of them from abroad, for forty scholarships. Evidently they were impressed by the fact that the project was secured by the Gran Sasso Laboratory and that it has different skills that can be applied in many fields, using an inter-disciplinary approach.

**"Without the earthquake, this project would not have been possible" you said in an interview. You managed to create something out of the tragedy of L'Aquila, while the city still seems far from normality. What did not work in the last five years? What, on the other hand, was done?**

My judgment is softened by the fact that in the last year we saw a significant boost to reconstruction. For three or four years very little was done. The priority was just to give a shelter to the evacuated to tackle the winter of 2009. After then the spotlights went off and the usual bouncing of responsibility between local and national politics started. The situation changed at the time of the Monti government with Minister Barca who told us to carry out the project in the city centre.

With the Institute in the city centre, L'Aquila has the chance to revive, with the presence of our students, and the events we organize.

**I have read that you and Antonio Caulk, the coordinator of the PhD in Urban Studies of the GSSI, were called by Minister Trigilia (during the Letta government) to take part in a working group to study new territorial development policies for L'Aquila. How do you see the city in five years?**