

23



DIGITAL

MEMORIES



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The Italian Government Interface

From the Spoils System to the Guidelines

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Interface, Public Communication, Government Website, Design Guidelines, Spoils System, PA Digitization.

Abstract

In 1998, the year Macromedia Flash went mainstream and in which internet users were about 3.6% of the world population, the web presence of the Italian Government began. In the evolution of the Government website, a first period from 1998 to 2014 can be identified, which sees the site as an integral part of that spoils system that has often accompanied the numerous changes of the political majority in Italy and the related Governments in office. We can then identify a second period, from 2015 to today, which begins with the publication of the Design Guidelines for PA Websites that sees instead the establishment of some general principles of interface design based on the usability and accessibility of the contents. These principles have allowed the Government website to become a *super partes* communication structure, independent from the political expression of the Government in office and part of a digital transformation strategy that sees the introduction, for the first time in Italy, of a centralized governance based on technical skills.

Thanks to documentary material and direct testimonies, the contribution intends to highlight both the evolution of the Government website from a political communication tool to an institutional communication site and the very idea of institutional communication in Italy in relation to the growing digitization and the need for an active online presence.

1. Introduction¹

From its proclamation to today, the presidents of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic have been thirty and have presided over a total of sixty-seven Governments. Among the peculiarities that characterize the history of the most recent Italian Governments, we can include the Government's online presence starting from the first initiative undertaken in 1997 by the Prodi Government to communicate Palazzo Chigi to the outside through the internet and the *World Wide Web*.

Starting from this first experience, following the evolution of the Government website allows us to highlight the development of the very idea of institutional communication in Italy in relation to the growing digitization and the need for an active online presence. It helps us in this investigation that the fifteen versions of the Italian Government website (or at least of its homepages) that followed each other over time from 1997 to 2021, before the site actually in operation, have fortunately not been lost, but as official documents to all intents and purposes,² they are archived and can be consulted in a special section of the Palazzo Chigi website named *Siti archeologici* (*Archaeological Sites*).³

A qualitative research methodology was chosen in writing the paper in order to integrate the documentary material with semi-structured interviews with two of the managers who, at

1 Disclaimer: one of the authors, Gianni Sinni, took part in the 2015 Italian government website redesign project.

2 With the law n. 59 of 1997, the full legal recognition of digital documentation is confirmed.

3 <https://www.sitiarcheologici.palazzochigi.it/index.html?page=1>.

different times, have personally followed the project: Claudio Caprara,⁴ journalist and Head of the Palazzo Chigi website for the D'Alema Government from 1997 to 2000, and Roberta Maggio⁵ responsible for online communication with the Letta, Renzi and Gentiloni Governments, from 2014 to 2018.

2. The First Website

The first website of the Presidency of the Council, created and managed externally by the Italian Journalistic Agency (AGI), was presented to the public for the first time in September 1997. As Claudio Caprara and Lucio Picci describe, it was configured as the typical *showcase site*, the result of a journalistic conception of the web and not at all integrated with the “concrete work of the building” (Caprara & Picci, 2001). Created by the Prodi Government with the coordination of the then Undersecretary of the Prime Minister and Head of the Information and Publishing area, Arturo Parisi, those first web pages, with the images mounted on the classic gray background of the early days of HTML (Fig. 1), represented, however, a significant technological advance considering that in 1998 the only wired part of Palazzo Chigi – the large four-storey historic Government building – were the three rooms of the Prime Minister’s secretariat. Executives and officials could access the Internet only using generally obsolete modems, and for the majority of employees, the *network* had, at most, as we recall with undisguised irony, a fishing significance (Caprara & Picci, 2001).

4 Interview to Claudio Caprara, 20/5/2022, videocall.

5 Interview to Roberta Maggio, 5/5/2022, videocall.



Figure 1. Prodi Government and D'Alema Government (1997 - August 1999).

In 1996, in fact, for the general public, the internet was still an unknown quantity. The arrival of Windows 95 and Microsoft's Internet Explorer was progressively making the web more accessible, and more people wanted to get involved in websites, starting to experiment with its possibilities (Ford & Wiedemann, 2019, p. 30). In 1997 Macromedia released Flash, a software that allowed users to create vector graphics and animations, overcoming the limits of the HTML and experimenting with the expressive and narrative potential of the web. These are also the years in which the first reflections on web design are formulated. Giovanni Anceschi (1997), in the first review on Italian web design, underlined the maturing of a "rhetorical or rather directorial awareness" and the shift of attention from the technical structure to look and feel and multisensory quality. While Erik Spiekermann (1999) highlighted its narrative capacity: "a good website has to tell a compelling story, lest it bore any but the hardcore information seekers".

In Italy, it was in the months following the fall of the Prodi Government (October 1998), with the inauguration of the D'Alema Government (21 October 1998 - 22 December 1999), that a process of organization and definition of the project for the Government website was started (Caprara & Picci, 2001). Claudio Caprara says that although all ministries perceived the internet as an opportunity, there was a complete lack of awareness of its potential: the network in Italy was still very limited and concerned a few thousand users. The intuition, in some ways pioneering, was to get out of the logic of the *showcase site*, that is, a site that has the purpose of presenting

information without involving the public, characteristic of the first online phase of public administration in a period between 1997 and 2003 (Lovari, 2013).

A journalistic editorial staff was defined, and the offices of the Presidency were invited to participate with the aim of later bringing the various ministries to use the website as a tool to make daily political activity transparent and accessible.

These are the years of the first reforms of a communication revolution in the country aimed at building and strengthening – albeit slowly and not without ambiguity – an efficient model of bidirectional public communication between PA and citizens, with a view to greater participation and transparency. Law no. 150/00, approved in 2000 and relating to the “Discipline of information and communication activities of public administrations”, recognizes the essential role of the communicative function of administrations as a cornerstone of the democratic system and still represents the main regulatory reference on Italian public communication today (Papini, 2014, pp. 32-34).

The programmatic speech with which D'Alema had gained the Parliament's confidence became the core of the web initiative. The addition of referral links to the Government's proposals then had the purpose of making it possible to trace the parliamentary legislative path, thus offering “a possibility of control over what was objectively the work that was being produced inside Palazzo Chigi”.

From a technological point of view, the Presidency of the Council and its IT department were not ready for the imple-

mentation of the site, which, therefore, through a public tender, was entrusted to the Matrix company, the same company that in 1996 had launched the web directory Virgilio (Bergamini, 1997, pp. 92-93). The infrastructure management was not without its criticalities mainly because the new activity had to be inserted within an organizational structure so settled over time that Caprara defined it as “geological”. The management of the contents of the site was entrusted to an internal editorial staff made up of editors from different offices.⁶

The dynamics described by Caprara outline some elements that will characterize the communication model of the Government website for many years: an intense relationship between politics and communication to support the President in achieving his political goals. However, the uncertainty about the duration of the Government needed to allow it to work on the initial ambition to create a platform independent of political governance. The site’s primary objective was more aimed at promoting the Prime Minister as a politician than communicating Palazzo Chigi as an institution. This connotation of the Government site, together with another peculiarity of the Italian political system – the frequency with which Governments have succeeded in the various legislatures (15 Governments in the last 7 legislatures) – will affect, as we will see, all the future developments of the website.

6 Other ministries opted for different choices as in the case of the Ministry of Justice which had entrusted Cineca with the creation of its website (Bergamini, 1997, pp. 140-141; Galli & Nannini, 2004, pp. 148-149).

However, the time available and the precariousness of the politics are not the only factors that Caprara underlines as critical: the rigidity of the structure, the impermeability to change and innovation of the public administration,⁷ a fragmented majority of Government, the inadequacy of resources and the structure available made the operation, in Caprara's words, *a monstrous effort*, but also of great satisfaction because it allowed the Italian Government to be the first in the world to join the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium).

The site never went fully operational but remained at a work-in-progress level. A great deal of work was done on legislative monitoring. Once online, the idea of having a useful tool for the very work of the Prime Minister and officials was understood and embraced with greater availability.

From the interface point of view, the deliberately journalistic slant gives the site the formal and content characteristics – a three-column grid, names, interviews, and photographic images with a reportage slant – aimed at increasing the credibility of the Government, promoting the idea of a *palace* of power close to the citizens. In the header, the photos of the clerks (real employees of Palazzo Chigi) depicted, in a literal form, the idea of welcome and transparency that inspired the site (Fig. 2).

7 In the essay by Claudio Caprara and Lucio Picci (2001) the authors tell a particularly representative anecdote in this sense: within the project it was proposed to include the electronic press review, but the operation was stopped by the officials involved who literally pulled the plug from the machines because they feared losing their comfortable professional condition.

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

24 Settembre 1999

IN COPERTINA

2000: La finanziaria dello sviluppo

La presentazione completa di slides grafiche

Barometro di immagine del governo

Interviste inviate per posta rilevate nel periodo giugno-luglio 1999

La riforma dell'Amministrazione

La riforma dell'amministrazione centrale e la riorganizzazione della Presidenza del Consiglio

Kosovo: la storia in 79 giorni

Cronologia degli avvenimenti militari e diplomatici della NATO.

Patto Sociale per lo sviluppo e l'occupazione

Sessione di verifica del Patto Sociale per lo sviluppo e l'occupazione

20 settembre 1999
Il monitoraggio dell'attuazione

Servizi Online

- Comunicati stampa
- Provvedimenti
- Interventi
- Agenda
- Eventi
- Fotografie
- Info

NEWS

- Consiglio dei Ministri - Comunicato n. 61
- Incontro D'Alema - Comitato Intermagistratura
- Incontro D'Alema - Cossutta
- Statuto Finmeccanica S.p.A.
- Il ministro Bellillo: "positiva l'intesa con la regione Calabria"

Affari Regionali

Funzione Pubblica

Politiche Comunitarie

Solidarietà sociale

- Rapporti con il Parlamento
- Riforme Istituzionali
- Pari Opportunità

Rapporti con il sistema delle autonomie

Informatica, statistica e telematica

Affari Economici

- Informazione ed Editoria
- Servizi Tecnici
- Italiani nel Mondo
- Biblioteca Chigiana
- Sito Internet

Coordinamento dell'attività di governo

Comitato per la Bioetica

- Biosicurezza e biotecnologie
- Missione Arcobaleno
- Forum Società dell'Informazione
- Comitato anno 2000
- Giubileo 2000
- Masterplan

Figure 2. D'Alema Government - D'Alema II Government (September 1999 - March 2000).

3. The Spoils System Era

Due to the connotation strictly linked to the political communication of the head of the *pro tempore* Government, the subsequent versions of the site maintained a temporary nature linked to the life of the Government and became, in effect, an integral part of a communication model suitable for the *spoils system*.⁸ So for many years – until 2015 – the bell ceremony, the traditional rite of passage of power, also marked the start of a new interface project and the organization of the contents of the Government website. The initial maintenance of the previous graphic version (with a curious dualism that characterizes many Governments, Figs. 3 & 5) was justified only by the development time needed to make the new project operational. The rapid succession of Governments has also affected the technological aspect. Given that the update of the IT structure could have taken longer than the duration of the Government itself, no one has ever taken charge of it.

By maintaining the static structure of the site over the years, with pages created manually with Dreamweaver⁹ even when the CMS, the Content Management Systems, had become widespread, the opportunities for dynamic content management and the offer of services were severely limited.

⁸ The spoils system is the political practice, born in the US, which provides that senior executives of the public administration are appointed by the incumbent Government and are replaced as this changes. In Italy, the Prime Minister must appoint all the new Heads of the Presidency of the Council, in accordance with the provisions of Law no. 400. The appointments also include trusted collaborators who make up the staff, including the heads of the press office and the secretariat.

⁹ Dreamweaver is a software produced since 1997 by Macromedia (later acquired by Adobe in 2005).

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

Incontro con il Presidente del Consiglio
Il Governo si presenta
Dal Governo vorrei sapere
In Presidenza

Comunicati Provvedimenti Interventi Agenda Audiovisivi Fotografie Mappa

30 Ottobre 2000
Oggi parte il nuovo sito del Governo italiano
Alle ore 12 conferenza stampa di presentazione del sito rinnovato www.governo.it e della newsletter "Notizie dal Governo".

entra nel governo
www.governo.it
Invia

Lunedì 30 ottobre parte il nuovo sito! www.governo.it per offrire agli utenti ancora più servizi e più notizie. Martedì 31 gli abbonati alla newsletter riceveranno via e-mail il primo numero.
Per iscriverti alla newsletter digita il tuo indirizzo e-mail Riceverai una mail di conferma alla quale rispondere con un messaggio a vuoto.

Approfondimenti

Il varo definitivo della legge di riforma del servizio militare
Abolizione della leva e istituzione del servizio militare professionale: la legge è stata approvata definitivamente
Roma 27 ottobre 2000

Il Presidente Amato alla Camera risponde al Question-time
Tra i temi, l'esito della gara UMTS, le iniziative del governo per il processo di pace in Medio Oriente, le risorse per la tutela dell'ambiente e degli alvei dei fiumi e le misure in materia di ordine pubblico.
Roma 25 ottobre 2000

Riunione del Consiglio dei Ministri
Roma 27 ottobre 2000

Attivo il sito sui sondaggi politico-elettorali
Presentato oggi. Secondo la legge sulla par condicio, i risultati dei sondaggi potranno essere diffusi alla stampa o alle emittenti Radio-IV (tranne che nei 15 giorni precedenti la data delle elezioni), solo se contestualmente resi disponibili sul sito:
www.sondaggiipoliticoelettorali.it
Roma 25 ottobre 2000

2001 La Finanziaria dell'Italia che cresce
Meno tasse, più lavoro

La campagna sulla riforma della pubblica amministrazione

Le riunioni del Consiglio dei Ministri

Il programma del Governo

L'attività internazionale del Presidente del Consiglio

UMTS

I servizi telefonici mobili UMTS:

- Tutti i dati delle tornate con le singole offerte aggiornati giornalmente
- il bando e il disciplinare della licitazione per il rilascio delle licenze
- la normativa nazionale e comunitaria
- le riunioni del Comitato dei Ministri

Figure 3. D'Alema II Government - Amato II Government (March 2000 - October 2000).



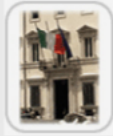
Governo Italiano

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

8 Giugno 2001

Le dimissioni del Governo

All'interno il testo del comunicato stampa.





Il Presidente del Consiglio

Interviste e interventi

Agenda

Fotografie

Dichiarazione Programmatica

- Governo
- Presidenza del Consiglio
- Ministri e Ministeri
- Consiglio dei Ministri
- Provvedimenti
- Comunicati Stampa
- Audiovisivi
- Newsletter
- Dossier
- Campagne di comunicazione

- La visita a Palazzo Chigi
- La Costituzione Italiana
- Links nazionali e internazionali
- Cerca nel sito
- Mappa del Sito
- Internet a Palazzo Chigi



G8



Dal Consiglio dei Ministri un decreto sulla liberalizzazione dei servizi pubblici

Roma, 24 maggio 2001
Esaminati dal Consiglio dei Ministri anche regolamenti e disposizioni legislative in materia di edilizia.
Disposizioni ai Ministri per il passaggio di consegne al nuovo governo.

Quote di ingresso in Italia per il 2001 per i cittadini stranieri non comunitari

Roma, 20 maggio 2001
Pubblicato nella Gazzetta Ufficiale del 17 maggio il decreto che stabilisce le quote dei flussi di ingresso dei lavoratori extracomunitari nel territorio dello Stato per l'anno 2001.

Guida alla redazione di testi normativi

Roma, 14 maggio 2001
Pubblicata sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale la circolare della PCM che indica le regole per la redazione di testi normativi e legislativi da parte delle amministrazioni.

Il Museo della navigazione a Pisa

Roma, 14 maggio 2001
Dal ritrovamento di alcune navi di epoca romana alla creazione del Museo della navigazione.

Fermoimmagine



Roma
15/5/2001
Foto di Palazzo Chigi

ELEZIONI 2001



Speciale

> Guida alle norme

Speciale

> Sicurezza

Speciale

> L'Italia del 2000

Speciale

> Immigrazione

Speciale

> Stato dell'ambiente

Newsletter > Archivio

29 maggio 2001

NEWSLETTER N. 29

Nel numero di questa settimana, tra l'altro:

- Il 2 giugno torna ad essere festa scolastica
- Le azioni contro il divario tecnologico
- La patente informatica europea valida per i concorsi
- Stranieri: come fare domanda per il permesso di soggiorno
- Contributi per l'acquisto di veicoli ecologici

Figure 4. Amato II Government (October 2000 - May 2001).

Governo Italiano
Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

Home Page Personalizza Cerca

11 Dicembre 2002

Ue: Vertice di Copenhagen

Il Presidente del Consiglio parteciperà giovedì 12 e venerdì 13 dicembre al Consiglio Europeo di Copenhagen.

► [Approfondimento](#)

Consiglio dei Ministri n.84
Roma, 11 dicembre 2002
E' iniziata la riunione del Consiglio dei Ministri.

Berlusconi incontra il Presidente dello Stato di Israele
Roma, 11 dicembre 2002
Il Presidente del Consiglio ha incontrato a Palazzo Chigi, il Presidente dello Stato d'Israele, Moshe Katsav.

Berlusconi riceve Primo Ministro Repubblica Ellenica
Roma, 6 dicembre 2002
Il Presidente del Consiglio ha incontrato a Palazzo Chigi il Primo Ministro della Repubblica Ellenica Costas Simitis.

► [Audiovideo della conferenza stampa](#)

Consiglio dei Ministri n. 83
Roma, 6 dicembre 2002
Nel comunicato stampa i provvedimenti adottati dall'Esecutivo.

Devoluzione: prima approvazione al Senato
Roma, 5 dicembre 2002
L'Assemblea del Senato della Repubblica ha approvato il disegno di legge costituzionale di modificazione dell'art. 117 Cost. che passa all'esame della Camera dei Deputati.

Incontro Berlusconi - Miller
Roma, 5 dicembre 2002
Il Presidente del Consiglio ha incontrato a Palazzo Chigi il Primo Ministro della Repubblica di Polonia, Leszek Miller.

Incontro Berlusconi - Toledo
Roma, 4 dicembre 2002
Il Presidente del Consiglio Silvio Berlusconi ha incontrato a Palazzo Chigi il Presidente della Repubblica del Perù, S.E. Alejandro Toledo.

► [Audiovideo della conferenza stampa](#)

Grandi opere: Berlusconi, un sogno ormai a portata di mano
Roma, 4 dicembre 2002
"Abbiamo steso un programma per monitorare lo stato dell'avanzamento dei progetti e della realizzazione delle grandi opere. Ci sono idee chiarissime, quello che avevamo presentato durante la campagna elettorale e tutte le opere procedono secondo un percorso preciso, scadenza con i sistemi più avanzati".
Il Presidente del Consiglio, dopo aver incontrato il ministro Lunardi si è mostrato ottimista sullo stato delle grandi opere ed ha aggiunto che "quel

Entra nel nuovo sito

Da mercoledì 11 dicembre sarà on line esclusivamente la nuova versione di governo.it

Italia.gov.it

Oci sei, Oti fai.
IO VOGLIO ESSERCI

telePA
Conferenza Unificata

Conferenza Stato Regioni

Newsletter Archivio
10 dicembre 2002

NEWSLETTER N. 102

Nel numero di questa settimana:

- Governo.it: on-line nuovo sito
- Governo.it: il motore di ricerca
- Governo.it: l'accessibilità
- Governo.it: "Titania"

Per ricevere la newsletter inserite il vostro indirizzo e-mail

Bandi di gara

Press room

Figure 5. Berlusconi II Government (June 2001 - December 2002).

The political staff was replaced at each passage of Government, while the internal editorial structure, which had gained specific experience in the field, remained steadily in business, being assigned a substantially professional and *super partes* task. With the D'Amato II Government, after a few months necessary for the IT transition, on October 31, 2000, the new site was released, abandoning the testimonial image of the clerk of the previous version in exchange for a more institutional Council Chamber and acquiring the title typographically composed of "Italian Government / Presidency of the Council of Ministers", which from then on will feature on all subsequent versions. The grid is also modified by adding the navigation column on the left (Fig. 4).

With the 2001 elections, the majority returned to the center-right coalition, and Silvio Berlusconi rose to the Government for his second term. It will take over a year and a half before the new graphic design of the website will be released on 11 December 2002. Several elements characterize this version that will accompany the Government until the end of the XIV Legislature. The fixed grid of the page (620 pixels) is abandoned to opt for a fluid layout, while the header becomes a real logo with the tricolor inscription "Italian Government" combined with the emblem of the Republic (the *Stellone*). The wording "Presidency of the Council of Ministers" hints at the calligraphic cursive of the traditional printed letterheads of the ministries (Fig. 6) (Sinni, 2016). It was a particularly intense period for public online communication. In 2002, we can say that by now, almost all administrations, at each central or peripheral level, have their website (Lovari, 2013, p. 97).



Figure 6. Berlusconi II and III Governments (December 2002 - May 2006).

The Berlusconi Government approved important measures regarding the quality of the online presence of the public administration. Among these, the most significant is the *Legge Stanca*, Law no. 4/2004 on *Provisions to facilitate the access of disabled people to IT tools*, which introduced in Italy the legislation, still in force, relating to the accessibility of web-sites for public administrations.

In 2006 the new legislature began under the second Prodi Government and with the maintenance of the Berlusconi web template until May 2007, when an updated version was published bearing the name of *Portal of the Italian Government*.



Figure 7. Prodi II Government (May 2007 - May 2008).

The new version restores the fixed grid and replaces the head with a flag in the wind (Fig. 7). However, it will be a very short-lived layout. The premature fall of the Prodi Government and the return to power of Silvio Berlusconi will lead to the immediate replacement of the website with a version that graphically

refers to the experience of 2002-2006, stabilizing the Government's tricolor logo in a real header. Of note is the presence on the homepage of the oval emblem of the Prime Minister wanted by Berlusconi in the image and likeness of the American presidential seal. Furthermore, the section "Archaeological sites" appears for the first time in this adaptation, documenting the previous versions of the Government site.

In 2010, over 40,000 sites owned by public administrations were registered, and it is to these that, following a Minister for Public Administration and Innovation Directive,¹⁰ the *Guidelines for websites of public administrations* are addressed to "suggest to PA criteria and tools for the reduction of obsolete public websites and the improvement of active ones"¹¹. Since 2012, the Working Group for Usability (GLU) has also been established at the Department of the Civil Service¹² to develop and distribute a protocol (called eGLU) that was affordable for all editors to identify the critical issues of the web interfaces of the public administration.

The 2008 graphic layout will remain in place without substantial changes until November 2015, well beyond the end of the Berlusconi Government, having not had the subsequent Monti Governments (November 2011-April 2013) (Fig. 8) and Letta (April 2013-February 2014) the time (and perhaps not even the will) to make a redesign of the site.

¹⁰ Directive n. 8 of November 26, 2009.

¹¹ https://www.promopa.it/images/pdf/linee_guida_sitiwebpa.pdf.

¹² <https://www.funzionepubblica.gov.it/mission>.

Governo italiano
Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

Primo Piano

Consiglio dei Ministri n.79
Si è svolta, a Palazzo Chigi, la riunione del Consiglio dei Ministri. Nel comunicato i provvedimenti adottati.
Comunicato stampa

Notizie [archivio](#)

- Palazzo Chigi, incontro Monti-López (Nicaragua)
- Monti si rallegra con Letta
- Riunione NATO ministri aff. esteri, dichiarazioni di Monti
- Antonio Maccanico, cordoglio del Presidente Monti
- Consiglio dei Ministri n. 78 del 22 aprile

Novità dalla Presidenza [archivio](#)

- Convocazione Conferenza Stato-città ed autonomie locali
- Logo ufficiale delle commemorazioni della Grande Guerra
- Area Jonica, Tavolo a Palazzo Chigi
- Publicati i decreti per il Bicentenario di Giuseppe Verdi
- Nona edizione del premio Giacomo Matteotti

Notizie dai Ministri [archivio](#)

Multimedia [archivio](#)

- Expo 2015, nutrire il pianeta energia per la vita
28/03/2013 - Lo spot televisivo della campagna di comunicazione
- Incontro Monti-Kerry
28/02/2013 - Dichiarazioni alla stampa dopo l'incontro a Palazzo Chigi
- "Bandi di idee": valorizzazione e sviluppo territoriale
25/01/2013 - Conferenza stampa del Ministro Barca a Palazzo Chigi
- ILVA di Taranto
18/01/2013 - Riunione a Palazzo Chigi tra Governo, Amm. locali, Confindustria e Organizzazioni Sindacali

Dialogo con il Cittadino
Uno spazio dedicato al dialogo, con le domande e le risposte sui temi di maggiore interesse per il cittadino. Vai alla sezione

IL GOVERNO E I GIOVANI
La sezione illustra le misure concrete adottate finora dal Governo a favore delle giovani generazioni. Vai alla sezione

SPENDING REVIEW
La sezione illustra le misure adottate dal Governo per la riduzione della spesa pubblica. Vai alla sezione

TAV Torino Lione
Il punto sull'opera, con informazioni e documenti aggiornati sullo stato di avanzamento dei lavori, le questioni tecniche, le decisioni del governo. Approfondimento

consultazione pubblica
NUOVA DISCIPLINA IN MATERIA DI IMPATTO DELLA REGOLAZIONE

TRASparenza VALUTAZIONE MERITO

INDIRIZZI PEC

NORMATIVA

Link Elenco Siti tematici Siti archeologici Concorsi Bandi di gara Come fare per Visite guidate Privacy Note legali

Figure 8. Monti Government (November 2011 - April 2013).

In this period, the arrival of institutional communication on social platforms should be noted, starting with Twitter, introduced under Mario Monti's Presidency, to which Youtube, Flickr, Storify and Slideshare were added with the Government of Enrico Letta.

4. The Introduction of the Guidelines

The turning point in the transformation of the Government website from a political communication tool to an institutional communication site was in 2014 when on February 21, Matteo Renzi formed the new executive branch. This step was the theme of the interview conducted with Roberta Maggio, former head of new media of the Democratic Party, who arrived at Palazzo Chigi at the end of 2014 as head of the Government's web communication.

With a technological system not updated for almost sixteen years, a geological era from a digital point of view, it was immediately clear that it would not be possible to continue updating the site only at the interface level as had been done until then. A radical change was necessary, starting with the management structure, which, without a CMS, was completely inadequate to meet the editorial needs and, above all, to satisfy the expectations of an increasingly demanding public.

In 2014, internet users reached around 42.3% of the world's population, and online sites were close to one billion (Ford & Wiedemann, 2019, p. 495). In Italy, according to the ISTAT report *Citizens and new technologies*,¹³ the share of families who

13 https://www.istat.it/it/files//2014/12/Cittadini_e_nuove_tecnologie_anno-2014.pdf.

had access to the internet from home and a broadband connection was constantly growing (64% and 62.7%, respectively), while the users who accessed public administration sites to obtain information were 29.8%. The goal was, therefore, to design a government site that “lived in the present” and that, in addition to technological and software updates, could effectively apply the principles of usability and accessibility with a responsive approach to web design. There was also the need to transform the language: in the post-communication era, a bureaucratic model that has its legitimacy in the dimension of *doing* was no longer sustainable, and that left a residual space for dialogue with society (Papini, 2014, pp.13-14). It was, therefore, necessary to undermine the idea that the communication of institutions must necessarily be distant, obscure and monotonous, turning the attention instead to those relational skills useful for seeking hybrid spaces of interaction in which the citizen is no longer considered as a passive subject and uncritically hospitality (Ducci, 2017, pp.14 and 51; Papini, 2014, p.14).

The urgent need to renew the Government website, Roberta Maggio recalls, found essential support in the AgID, Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale (Agency for Digital Italy), given that the online communication of Italian public administrations suffered in many cases from the same problems. In 2015, the Government launched the Italia Login project on the Innovation Advisor Paolo Barberis initiative, which, within the Italian digital agenda, indicated the path to make digital services to citizens finally efficient and usable. Italia Login envisaged a substantial paradigm shift in the administration-citizen relationship from

a citizen-centered perspective: “we must bring all the relationships between the citizen and the public administration and between companies and the state” (Barberis, 2015).

The first result of the Italia Login project was the development of the *Design Guidelines for PA Websites*¹⁴ to define the design perimeter that should, hopefully, characterize the interface and user experience of the public websites of the Italian administration. The alpha version of the 2015 Guidelines presented an *open* identity system based on a limited number of elements to allow for a wide range of variations. The visual identity elements consisted of an institutional color, blue #0066cc, a typeface, the Titillium Web, the layout grids based on the *Bootstrap* framework (Sinni, 2015, 2016) – to which further sections were then added on accessibility and usability, on info-architecture and the editing of contents.

Thanks to this convergence of interests between AgID and the Presidency of the Council, the project of the Government site had the opportunity to make a qualitative leap by becoming the pilot project of the Guidelines and a perfect viaticum for the latter, which were thus applied in the first instance to the most representative site of the public administration. Almost nothing was maintained of the previous site: accessibility, transparency, inclusion, and usability were the reference points of the project and Dreamweaver was definitively abandoned as a web editor in favor of an open-source content

14 The current version of the Guidelines, 2020.1, can be consulted at <https://docs.italia.it/italia/designers-italia/design-linee-guida-docs/it/stabile/index.html>.

management software such as Drupal,¹⁵ which is very widespread in the public administration. In the initial phase, a grouping of two external companies, Lcd¹⁶ and Manafactory,¹⁷ took care of applying the Guidelines and the site development, which will introduce the modular logic typical of design systems.

The internal editorial staff of about six people had the heavy task of manually migrating the contents from the old to the new website. In addition to the technical effort to bring an obsolete system into the present, Roberta Maggio states that the real difficulty was to convey the idea that the new Government site project should no longer be part of the spoils system but rather become a communication tool at the service of the institution and independent from the *pro tempore* political governance. Continues Maggio, the Prime Minister himself – who had always shown a particular familiarity in using the web and social media – was particularly convinced of this approach. Integrating the main social networks within the platform was necessary to increase, simplify and diversify the access points to the new Government site. This naturally required a radical transformation, also in operational terms, of the editorial staff itself, which was required to constantly update various multimedia contents, possible only with a suitable management tool.

15 Drupal is a free and open-source CMS (Web Content Management System) written in PHP and distributed under the GNU General Public License.

16 <https://lcd.it/portfolio/italia/>.

17 <http://manafactory.it/projects/governo-it/>.

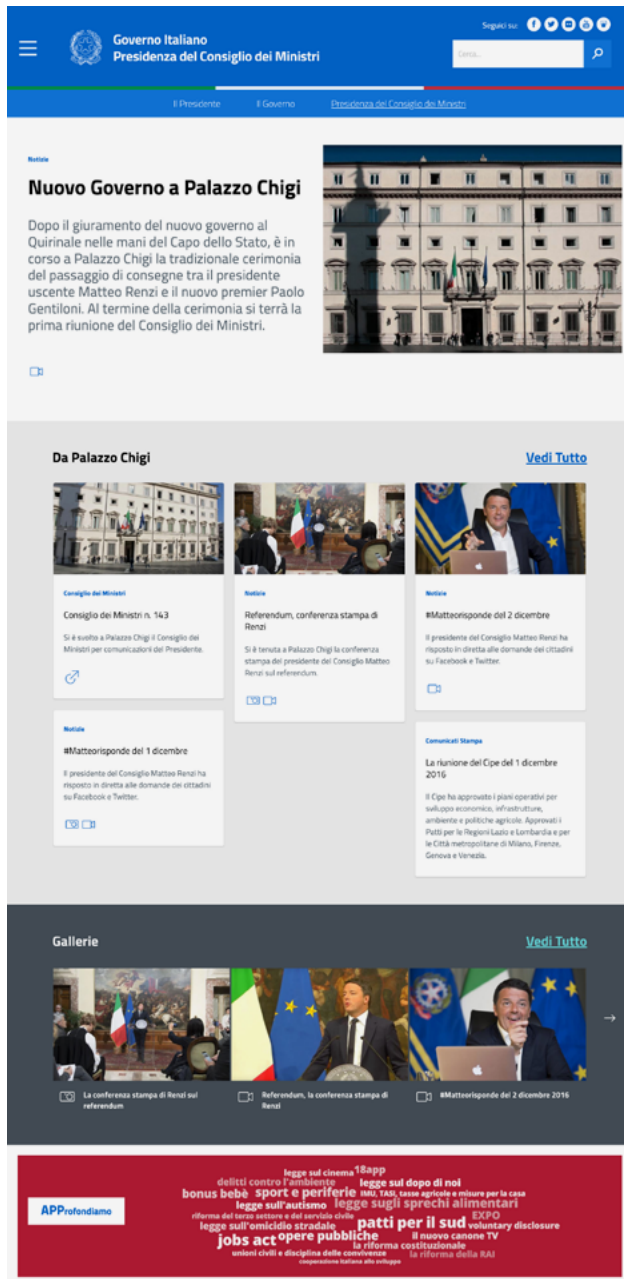


Figure 9. Renzi Government (February 2014 - December 2016).



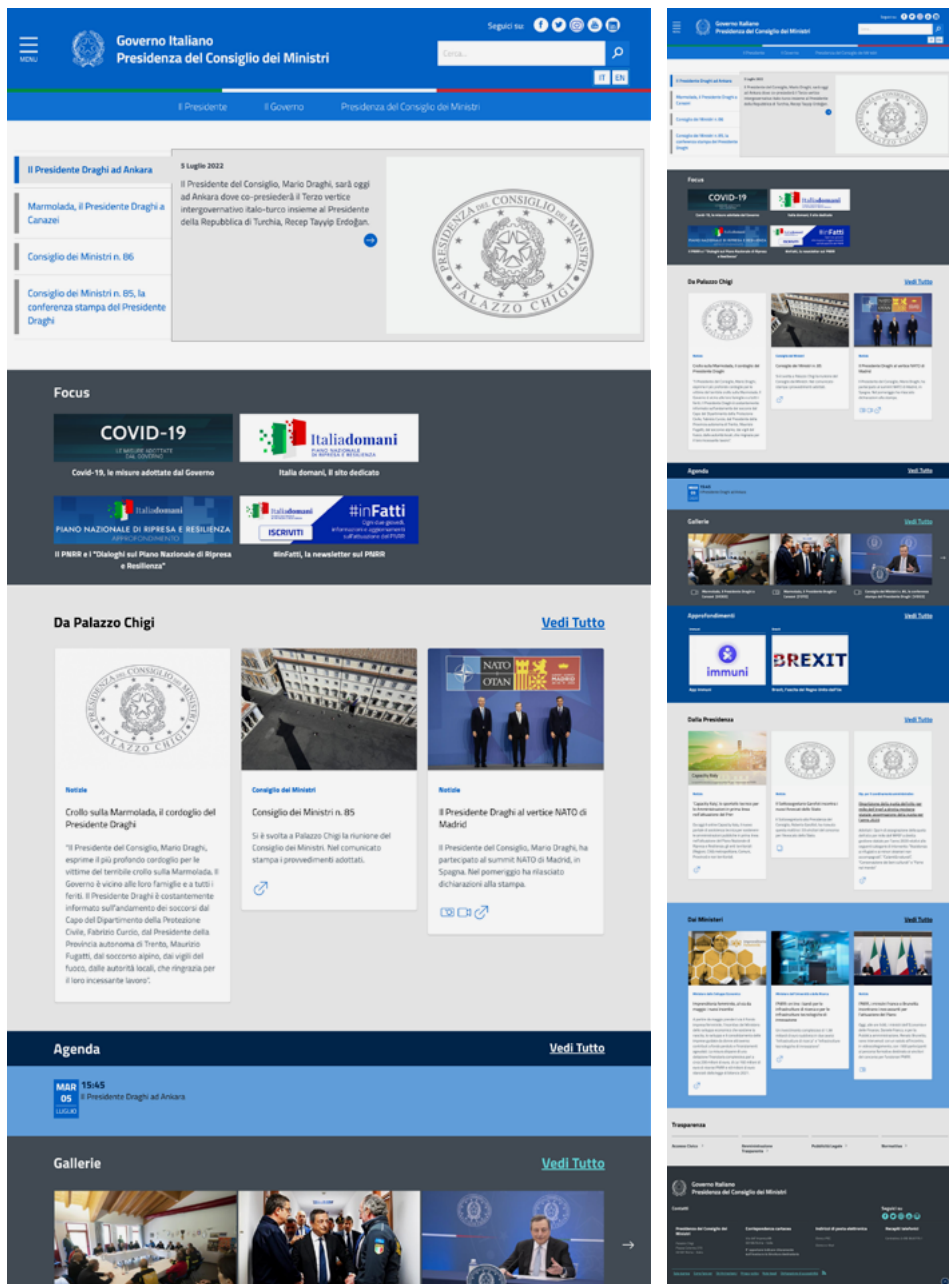


Figure 10. The current website of the Italian Government Presidency of the Council of Ministers (July 2022).

Renzi himself asked the working group to speed up the times to present the project during the first *Italian Digital Day*, which was held on November 21 at the Reggia di Venaria in Turin. According to Roberta Maggio, the effort to meet the deadline paid off from the point of view of communication because it placed the project for the Government site within a national digitization project.

The result that Roberta Maggio is most satisfied with is the fact that the Government website, as she jokingly says, “has set a trend like Jennifer Aniston’s haircut”. After taking the responsibility of starting a pilot project (Fig. 9) – concludes Maggio – seeing that today the model and the guidelines defined at that time are still in use (Fig. 10), it means that it was the right time and way to start a structural transformation of the digital communication of the Public Administration.

The websites of the PA, at a ministerial, regional, and municipal level, that have adhered to the Guidelines have grown exponentially over time, giving substance to a design ecosystem for public sites. It is an ecosystem that has allowed the Palazzo Chigi website to be considered a *super partes* space for public institutional communication and thus remaining stable in the general setting in all successive Governments – Gentiloni, Conte, Conte II and Draghi.

5. Conclusions

In the evolution of the Government website (Fig. 11), we can therefore identify a first period that goes from 1998 to 2014, which sees the site as an integral part of that spoils system that has often accompanied the numerous changes of the po-

litical majority in Italy and the related Governments in office. This policy precariousness prevented the continuous implementation of the “creation of the conditions so that certain technological and work process innovations could take place, and then proceed gradually with the introduction of new systems, involving and making the staff of the PA” (Ducci, 2017, p. 108). In this sense, the analysis of the evolution of the Government website shows how the need to build a design culture capable of sedimenting results and building adequate policies in terms of methods, skills, languages and tools of public communication has, in fact, emerged with considerable delay both with respect to technological progress and other European realities such as the English project gov.uk started in 2011.

It is only in a second period that began with the publication of the “Design Guidelines for PA Websites”, in 2015, that the affirmation of some general principles of interface design based on the usability and accessibility of the contents will allow to make the Government website a *super partes* communication structure, independent from the political expression of the Government in office and part of a digital transformation strategy. In this regard, it may be interesting to note that it was precisely the introduction of a systemic approach typical of communication design that was the decisive element in *institutionalizing* the government website by removing it from the logic of political narrative. At the end of 2016, Diego Piacentini, then Amazon Vice President, was appointed as Extraordinary Commissioner to “support the simplification of the relationship between the Public Administration, citizens and business” (Piacentini, 2016) and the Digital Transforma-

tion Team was specifically created for entrusted, among other things, with the development of the Guidelines.

The activity of the Digital Transformation Team was divided into several phases: as a reference point for the working methodology and technical skills, inspiring other administrations towards agile, contemporary, and inexpensive structures and operating methods; developing a series of digital platforms¹⁸ that act as an open sharing place (Piacentini, 2016).

Therefore, from 2014 onwards, we are witnessing the progressive construction of a shared and effective design culture that persists regardless of the political expression of the Government in office, avoiding that individual administrations have to “reinvent the wheel” each time (Fabbri, 2019, p. 86).

At the end of 2019, the commissioner structure merged into the Department for Digital Transformation of the Presidency of the Council with an institutional formalization of its activities and, with the recent increase in the workforce, the releases of new components, kits and models have multiplied constituting a vast repertoire of reference for the web of the Italian public administration.

18 These include Docs Italia, Developers Italia, Designers Italia and Forum Italia which respond to the need to build spaces for collaboration and sharing of transversal knowledge but also to measure the efficiency of platforms through the analysis of feedback received from users and inform citizens of the activities that take place inside.

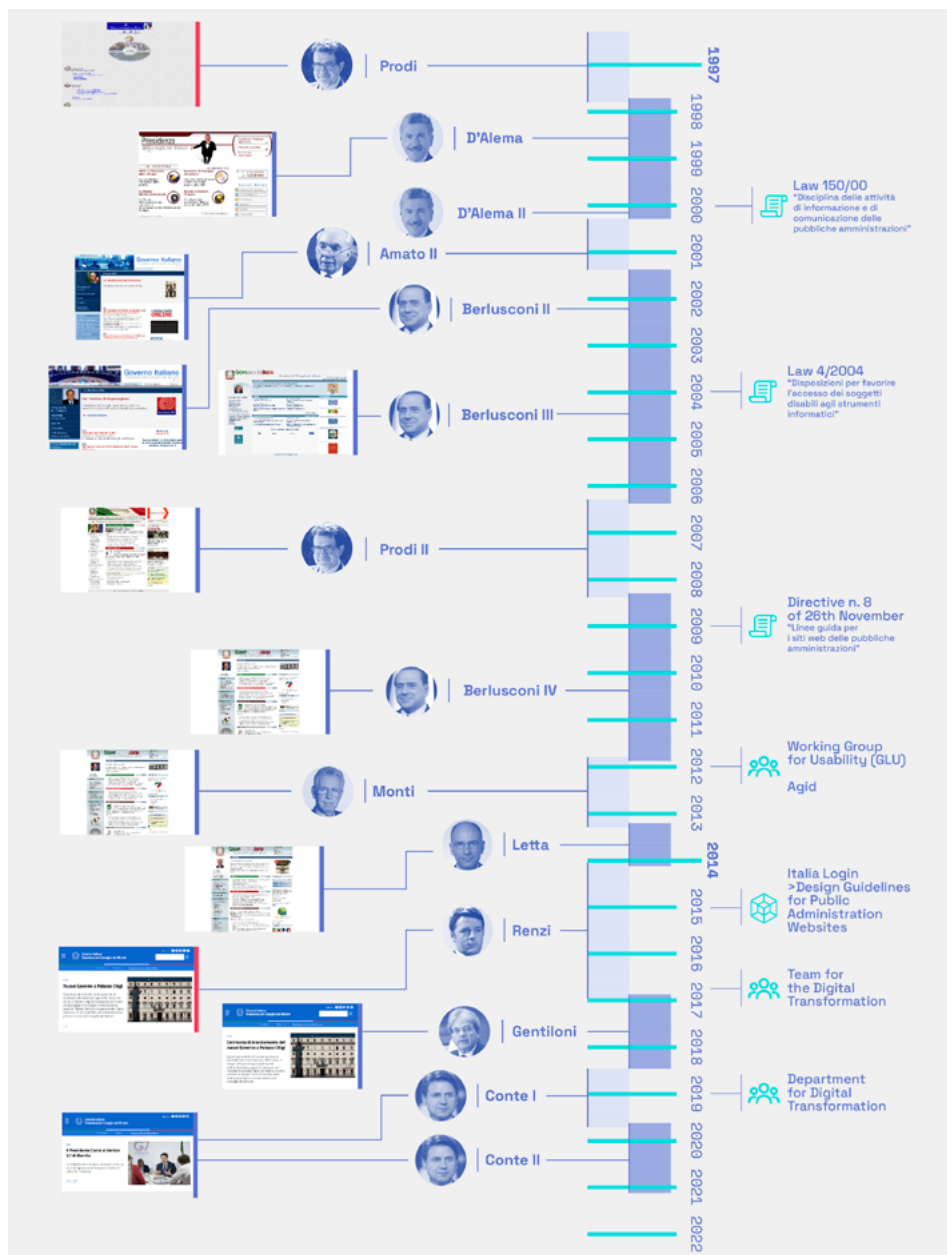


Figure 11. Ilaria Ruggeri, Gianni Sinni. The evolution of the Italian Government Interface from the first website in 1997 to 2021.

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