



The manager beyond the scientist

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Abstract. Professor Nichi D’Amico was one of the most proactive scientist of the Italian astrophysical community. Beyond the outstanding radio astronomer, Nichi D’Amico was also a rare example of manager of science with an acute policy sense. In this paper, I try to shortly describe those peculiar features such as I could observe because of my role of INAF Chief Policy Officer that gave me the chance and the honor of a direct day by day collaboration while he was in office as president of INAF. This contribution has been translated by Andrea Possenti from the originally provided Italian version.

Since almost one year is over from his departure, I can confidently say that prof. Nichi D’Amico will be remembered as one of the main players in the construction of the “common home” of Italian astrophysics that is the National Institute of Astrophysics.

I had the honor and pleasure of collaborating with five Presidents and one Acting President of INAF: for each one of them I can testify their sincere devotion to the cause of the construction of the “common home”, despite the difficulties of the different historical frameworks in which they were asked to operate.

Many are the concrete evidences of President D’Amico’s devotion to the cause that might be listed, as the key contribution he gave to consolidate the global player role that INAF had successfully achieved on the international scene over the years, becoming an outstanding institution called to represent Italy in the main international initiatives in Astronomy, Astrophysics and Space Sciences. The role he played on the pathways started by the previous presidencies to engage the most relevant international collaboration on the XXI century,

such as the consolidation of the Italian financial contribution to the Square Kilometer Array Observatory that allowed Italy to become a founding member, as well as the Italy’s leadership of the intergovernmental negotiations for the establishment of the Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory, are few of the highlights of his indefatigable activity for strategic positioning the Italian astrophysics community on the new frontiers of international scientific research.

The consolidation of the INAF positioning on an international scenario is the key for interpreting many of the actions he carried out during his presidential terms, such as the carefully monitoring of the management efficiency.

He was strongly confident that a full and complete functionality of the Institute could preserve the Community in playing a leading role on the global science.

In such a perspective can be read the setup of the policy for increasing the integration of the different cultural backgrounds of the Community to overcome the historical antithetical dualism “peripheral organization vs.



Fig. 1. Visit to INAF-HQ of the Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Sir Peter Cosgrove, during his Official Visit to Italy on June 27th, 2018. From left to right: Lady Cosgrove, Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove, Prof. Nichi D'Amico, Ambassador Dr Greg French

central organization”, as well as the efforts he made to improve a general organizational efficiency based on of a stable budget and a well planned spending profile.

The most clear evidence of his vision towards the future is undoubtedly the policy for accelerating the generational turnover by the s.c. stabilization of the precariousness, the attempt to re-balancing the pyramid of the job positions and

related salaries by reactivating the various processes to access to the top levels positions and, above all, the increasing empower of responsibilities in favor of the new generations.

A day by day direct collaboration with various presidencies, positioned me in the privileged position to take valuable lessons from great personalities. Many are the anecdotes and episodes that I could tell, but I prefer to keep



Fig. 2. President D'Amico giving his keynote speech at the social event for the first meeting of the inter-governmental negotiation to establish the CTA Observatory as an ERIC, 23/05/2018

those as private memories.

However, in the case of President D'Amico, I feel to narrate an episode relating to the last time I saw him. On that occasion, he asked me to take action on a dossier that he was considering urgent.

While I was confirming my availability on that issue, I took the opportunity to represent my opinion about the need to start the strategies planning for maximizing the scientific return from joining to the largest international initiatives, considering that the intent to consolidate the Italian participation to the front run global initiatives was successfully achieved.

He replied: "I understood, I built the Sardinia Radio Telescope, I'm renovating INAF, you don't want me to go down in History only as a mere *palazzinaro* (slang term, meaning building speculator)!"

This joke was expressed with an enigmatic smile to let me understand he was already working on the issue. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter, he really gone down in History of Italian Astrophysics research, certainly not as *palazzinaro*, but as a noble builder of the "common home" of Italian astrophysics called the National Institute of Astrophysics.



Fig. 3. Meeting with the *Direttori di Struttura* extended to the Board of Directors and to the heads of the UTC and USC and of the Technical Structure of the Presidency, 17/01/2018



Fig. 4. Conference at the beginning of the year: Q&A session in videoconference with all INAF offices, 31/01/2019