Frustrations of life in Italy

Italy is famous for all sorts of things and one of them is its bureaucracy.

If you take up residence in Italy, you will be blessed if the town of your birth in the UK is a short word because you will have to write it more times than you could ever count. Don’t ask me why it’s so important; it just is. They want to know.

Which is really the key to understanding the whole system. People want to know things because there’s a space on the form for it, the reason being lost somewhere in the mists of time.

Why, for example, if you own a house, do you have to fill out a form giving yourself permission to have a water supply? When I omitted this piece of paper from my application, I was phoned weeks later by someone asking me to provide it. It sparked in me the somewhat sour thought that if I’d wanted them to phone me because there was something wrong with the supply, they would never have been able to manage it.

Which brings me to my next example. Gas is delivered to the outside tank on a Friday in our area. That is an immutable law. They do however confirm your phone number when you order it. So when you stay in all day but it never turns up because they were intending to deliver it on Saturday, you have only yourself to blame because you should have phoned them on the Friday morning to confirm it was coming. Then the next time, again when you’d made arrangements but this time noted it in your diary to phone them first thing Friday morning, they deliver on the Thursday when you aren’t there and deny you the discount for paying them the cash you had all ready for them.

When we got the telephone put in our name, I recorded very carefully that the person in whose name it had been registered previously was deceased. So they phone me up, quibbling about some detail, asking if I am the previous registrant! Do I sound dead?

A direct hit from lightning cuts the phone off one Friday night. On the Saturday I register the fault. Because in Italy nothing ever happens unless you guide it through to port like a ship surrounded by a thousand tugs, I phoned on the Monday to check they still knew about it. Lo and behold, because I’d called from a telephone that worked, the young lady I spoke to recorded that it was all solved and took me off their list. And no, my Italian isn’t as bad as all that. The simplest explanation is pure malevolence on her part.

Eventually the fault is registered again and Telecom are provided with contact phone numbers on which I can be reached at any time. Yes, you guessed it. They don’t phone. They don’t in fact even turn up to fix our phone. They turn up to fix our neighbour’s phone, affected by the same lightning bolt. They can’t do ours at the same time because it isn’t on their schedule.

Telecom have discounts for which you can apply for making calls abroad, for example. After perhaps the fourth call your request is registered, but the discount isn’t applied to the bill. You phone them to complain. “We’ll put it on the next bill…” You get the picture.

People assure you categorically that something (a recorded delivery letter, for example) is in a particular location, you go there and it is somewhere else, you go to that somewhere else and it is back in the original place. The only saving grace is if you actually make a human contact in all this, who remembers you and looks after you. A foreign voice can actually help.

So don’t be put off. Things do get done in Italy. An Italian would probably shrug his shoulders and ascribe all this to the way of things. It must be my Anglo-Saxon craving for logic and precision which makes me even notice such anomalies.