

Speech by the Mayor of Salsomaggiore Terme

Good evening, and welcome to Salsomaggiore Terme.

On behalf of the Municipal Administration, and on my own behalf, it is a great pleasure to welcome you all this evening. A particularly warm welcome goes to the Japanese Delegation. You have travelled a very long way to be with us tonight, and I thank you sincerely for it.

I also wish to thank the authorities present, the representatives of our institutions, the researchers, the members of the business community, and every one of you who has chosen to share this moment with us. You are here out of interest and curiosity for an initiative that is, for Salsomaggiore, a demanding task — and, above all, a great opportunity.

Tonight, in fact, we are talking about time. About the years we are given, and about what we make of them. Your journey from Kyoto to Salsomaggiore has brought two distant places together around a single question: how can we live not only longer, but better?

We are here to deliver a clear message. Salsomaggiore Terme intends to take up the baton of the World Longevity Summit, after its first edition in Kyotango, in Kyoto Prefecture, Japan.

Two representatives of that first edition are with us this evening: Ryoh Takakura and Takanori Okazaki. To them goes our deep gratitude for this symbolic handover.

It is a weighty responsibility. Longevity is one of the great questions of our time. Addressing it means going beyond health and medicine alone, and looking at longevity in its full breadth: as an individual, social, territorial, economic and cultural condition.

I believe Salsomaggiore has something of substance to bring to this conversation.

Our city has a long history bound to well-being and the care of the person. For more than a century, people have come here in search of health, well-being and quality of life, drawn by the exceptional richness of our thermal waters and by the tradition that has grown around them. A substantial body of scientific literature already documents the benefits of the waters of Salsomaggiore and Tabiano.

Today, however, we can ask a new question: what does this experience tell us when we look at it through the lens of longevity?

That question deserves rigorous research and an international outlook. The presence of distinguished Japanese and international scholars allows us to imagine Salsomaggiore as a true living laboratory: a place where research and territory meet, to study not how to add years, but how to create the conditions for a healthy, high-quality longevity.

For this reason, I am especially grateful to Professor Satoaki Matoba and Professor Yuji Naito of Kyoto Prefectural University, both scholars of the biology of longevity, for being here and for the interest they have shown in this perspective.

Longevity, however, is not written in our biology alone. It is shaped by the places where we live. This is where the territory comes into play.

Salsomaggiore enjoys a favourable position: 157 metres above sea level, in a landscape of gentle hills and remarkable cultural heritage. Within a few kilometres you find castles, fortresses, theatres, churches and cultural sites. They are not relics of the past; they are living places, offering occasions to meet, to learn and to take part.

Then there is our food culture. We are in Emilia-Romagna, a region known the world over for the quality of its products and its gastronomic tradition: Prosciutto di Parma, Culatello di Zibello, Parmigiano Reggiano — and a way of eating that is an essential part of who we are.

Here too, a question arises: what is the relationship between food culture, quality of life and longevity? We should not take the answers for granted. We should study them.

That, in my view, is the spirit that must guide the World Longevity Summit: bringing together different fields of expertise, different cultures and different perspectives to create new knowledge.

There is a further aspect I consider essential. How do we make a territory truly accessible and liveable for a population that is ageing and, at the same time, living longer?

Salsomaggiore has a strong tourism tradition, and today it is entering a new phase of social and territorial regeneration. This invites us to imagine a city ready to welcome a longevity-oriented population: a city that offers healthcare and well-being, but also real possibilities to experience the territory, to reach services, and to take part in social and cultural life.

This is true for those who come to Salsomaggiore. It is true, above all, for those who live in Salsomaggiore.

Mobility, walkability, access to public and private services, and the freedom to move safely and sustainably are becoming fundamental components of quality of life. Population ageing is one of the great demographic transformations of our age, in Italy as in Japan. We must begin to design our territories not only around the age we are today, but around the longevity society of tomorrow.

The presence of Professor Katsuhiko Nishinari and Professor Sae Kondo of the University of Tokyo, together with Professor Matteo Colleoni, testifies to the urgency of approaching this question in an interdisciplinary way.

Longevity has an economic side as well. What is now called the "longevity economy" is growing fast: an ecosystem of businesses, services, technologies and new economic models that see in the longevity society not only a burden to manage, but a remarkable space for innovation. Salsomaggiore intends to be part of this conversation too.

The presence of Dr Tomoo Matsuda of the Mitsubishi Research Institute in Tokyo, and of Riccardo D'Urso of Tesori d'Europa, reminds us that new ideas, new projects and new enterprises are taking shape around longevity.

On this path, I wish to thank in particular Dr Marco Granelli, President of Confartigianato Imprese, for the message he has sent us and for his support — a clear sign of the interest of the business community in the World Longevity Summit 2027.

Finally, I would like to touch on something that holds a very special meaning for us. Among the treasures of our territory there is one that brings us unexpectedly close to Japan: the Fudenji Zen Monastery, which will take part in welcoming the Delegation at its premises in Bergone.

It allows us to name a word that cannot be absent when we speak of longevity: spirituality.

Living longer does not mean adding years to life. It means asking what those years are for. It means reflecting on the quality of existence, on our relationships, on our community, and on our relationship with ourselves. I am certain that longevity and spirituality will hold an important place in the World Longevity Summit 2027.

The Delegation's visit does not end here. From Salsomaggiore, our guests will travel on to Milan, where they will be welcomed by our partners in the World Longevity Summit 2027, the Ravasi Garzanti Foundation, represented here tonight by Dr Elisabetta Donati.

On 18 September, in Milan, this journey will continue as a further expression of our shared commitment to strengthening relations and cooperation between Italy and Japan, under the patronage of the Consulate-General of Japan and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science in Strasbourg.

I believe this relationship between Italy and Japan is among the most valuable elements of the whole initiative. Two countries, different in history, culture and tradition — yet united by one of the great challenges of our future: building a society in which living longer also means living better.

Salsomaggiore is ready.

We do not see the World Longevity Summit merely as an event that will come to our city in 2027. We see it as the beginning of a journey: a journey of research, international cooperation, innovation, and the enhancement of our territory. A journey in which Salsomaggiore becomes more than the place that hosts the Summit: a place where longevity can be observed, studied and, above all, lived.

Let me conclude with some words of thanks. To all the staff of the Municipal Administration, and in particular to Daniela Isetti, for the commitment and dedication with which they have organised this initiative.

And a special thank you to Professor Stefania Bandini of the University of Milano-Bicocca — born in this very town — who made the connection between Japan and Salsomaggiore possible, and built the bridge that allows us tonight to look together towards 2027.

We take up this baton knowing that longevity belongs to no single discipline, no single country, no single generation. Longevity is a collective matter.

If we face it together, it can become far more than a challenge for the future. It can become an extraordinary opportunity to build communities that are healthier, more accessible, more inclusive — and, above all, better able to give value to life.

You have travelled a long way to reach us. From here, the road to 2027 begins.

Thank you all — and welcome to Salsomaggiore Terme.