

Women's Education Worldwide Student Leadership Conference Collegio Nuovo – Fondazione Sandra e Enea Mattei

Narrated by the participants...

....On a rainy Monday morning, the second Women's Education Worldwide Student Leadership Conference began at Collegio Nuovo. Students from all over the world gathered in the college's lecture hall to receive a warm welcome from Principal Paola Bernardi.

Bernardi spoke about the relevance of women's education in today's world, as such all-women's institutions encourage their students to be agents of social change. The WEW conference, Bernardi explained, will help search for a "common model of female leadership," one which will support women in bringing change to all parts of the world. Despite many cultural differences, Bernardi stressed how women face similar problems around the globe (such as balancing domestic responsibilities with a career). The WEW conference brings together an international coalition of bright, young women eager to question the world and work towards change.

Following Bernardi's inspiring opening remarks, Professor Dario Mantovani provided students with an introduction to the University of Pavia and its history. He charted the university's birth back to the time of Charlemagne, when Irish scholars came to the small city of Pavia and decided to "sell culture." These scholars recognized the value and merit of education for social glorification. Power and knowledge go hand in hand, Mantovani explained to the students.

The professor also gave an overview of Pavia's turbulent history with Milan and the Visconti dynasty to then further explain the origins of universities in medieval Europe. Universities such as the University of Pavia, Mantovani said, were formed as places of cultural dialogue where both masters and students could question each other, and thus learn from each other. Mantovani broke away from his lecture to then advise WEW participants to always give their honest reactions to professors. «It is good students that make good teachers,» Mantovani said. By realizing this, the very same cultural dialogue which first characterized the medieval universities can continue and be enriched.

«History helps us orient ourselves» Mantovani told the participants at the close of his lecture.

As encouraged, participants "oriented themselves" to realize WEW's important presence within Collegio Nuovo and the University of Pavia during the conference week. By learning about the origins of the European university and the University of Pavia in particular, WEW students came to better understand Collegio Nuovo's revolutionary place within academia's history — a history that has so long excluded women.

In the afternoon students were able to visit the University of Pavia as it exists and thrives today. With Mantovani's words about the history of the institution fresh in their minds, students could feel part of both the university's past and present. Participants then, on Thursday, visited University of Pavia's science exhibition that records the institution's landmark contributions to scientific exploration ("Pavia and the Turning Points of Science").

On the very first day of the conference students also heard from Professor Maria Antonietta Confalonieri. Her lecture addressed issues of gender equality in Italy since its 1861 unification. Although it was a landmark for transforming the country into a modern nation, explained Confalonieri, Italy's unification did not solve many of the underlying and long-standing social issues relating to gender equality.

In the years comprised between its unification and World War I, Italy lagged behind other European countries in social advancement and gender equality – a pattern the country continues to see in its current social conditions. Among other factors, Confalonieri stated that maternity leaves have, for a long period after Italy's unification, been a protective measure used to bar women from work. «The Italian law has been protecting women from work, rather than protecting the work of women» she said, referring to the laws introduced in the very first years of the XX century.

Confalonieri moved her lecture to a period of Italian history where advancement of women's issues began to occur: World War II. Offering a gendered perspective on Italy's political conditions during the Second World War, Confalonieri framed Fascism and the interwar period as a watershed period for women's rights. It must be noted that despite the pressure for demographic growth, promoted through the introduction of better paid maternity leaves and a strong fight against abortion (considered as a crime to be punished according to criminal law), fertility continued to decline. Another consequence of Fascism was the political mobilization of many women in a number of party-controlled organizations. Women's political activism was fostered and represented in the Resistance against Nazism and Fascism: political rights could not be denied any longer. Even in the post-war political scenario, it became impossible to ignore the acquisition of capabilities that could emancipate women from a role confined to the household. Confalonieri pointed out that, although women earned the right to vote in 1946, there were no real social rights for women until the late 1960's and 1970's. During those years, and partly as a consequence of EU directives, popular vote sanctioned laws on divorce and abortion. The case of the law against sexual violence represents a sign of the difficulty to reach consensus in favour of women's rights: the first bill was presented in 1979 and the law was approved only 17 years after, in 1996.

As to the presence of women in the workforce, the decrease in female employment in the Fifties was considered as an indicator of the country's prosperity and «happy domesticity» which allowed the fulfilment of the single male breadwinner model. Childcare services and other family supports have seen a very uneven and slow development. As a consequence, mothers traditionally drop-out from the labour market, creating a remarkably «gender asymmetric» welfare regime.

Currently, the women's rights movement in Italy has slowed tremendously. Due to the country's poor economic climate, the work-life balance and other women's issues have been dropped from the political agenda.

Despite the relatively weak state of the women's movement in Italy, Confalonieri ended her presentation on a hopeful note, reminding Italy's membership of the EU. She mentioned that social issues in other European countries are progressing. This will pressure Italy into changing its social conditions, including those related to gender. Committees for equal opportunities could play a large role in this process, and the Italian Ministry for Equal Opportunity was established only in 1996.

The advancement of women's issues is not the focus of Italy's political efforts, added Confalonieri. However, Italian women are using the supportive energy created by the socially-progressive global conditions to reach higher employment positions. Two women currently chair the Confederation of Italian Industry and the Italian General Confederation of Labour. Confalonieri highlighted that this fact, though emblematic of the country's slow process towards gender equality, is a milestone in Italian women's history.

Perspectives on education: theory and practice

Following the morning lectures on the history of the University of Pavia and women after Italy's unification, students received a presentation exploring the value of education. The

lecture, entitled *Education as a Key to Development: 'Education Capabilities* was led by Professor Enrica Chiappero from the Department of Economics, Statistics, and Law at the University of Pavia.

Chiappero explained the “human capital” and “human capability” approaches for defining education and its value. Whereas the human capital approach emphasizes education as a means to production, human capability takes these means to achieve (means provided by education) and makes them an end and achievement within themselves. The approach does so by taking into account education’s effects on the individual, including one’s sense of self-worth and overall well-being. The capability approach, said Chiappero, has the power to enrich, and not simply substitute, the human capital approach to education. Taken together, the two approaches can provide a more holistic and accurate assessment of the impact of education upon society and its citizens.

Complementing Chiappero’s lecture, Collegio Nuovo student Chiara Poselle Bonaventura, a Political Science major, presented *Education Capabilities: Results of the Student Survey on WEW Conference Participants*. Bonaventura worked for Collegio Nuovo alumna Alberta Spreafico, a human development researcher at the Capability and Poverty International Research Centre.

Spreafico created a pilot study to assess the education quality and satisfaction of WEW participants’ universities using the human capability approach. She designed, distributed, and assessed surveys completed by WEW participants before their arrival in Italy.

For her final dissertation last year, Spreafico passed out a similar survey year to the students of Barnard College of Columbia University. Spreafico analyzed Barnard students' surveys and assessed how effectively the college implemented the human capability approach. According to the surveys, Barnard students graduate as empowered, globally responsible citizens capable of living healthy lives. Among other qualities reported by students, these findings suggest that the college successfully uses the capability approach in its goals and structure.

Following her dissertation, Spreafico decided to expand her research with this pilot study survey involving WEW participants. With Bonaventura's assistance, Spreafico asked WEW participants questions about their universities' resources and personal experiences, just as she did with Barnard students the previous year.

Spreafico’s results from this survey with WEW participants suggested that many universities could benefit from more coherent education policies and quality assessments. Among other suggestions, Spreafico and Bonaventura's presentation outlined that schools could improve their student health centres and provide additional opportunities for students to act in leadership positions. Such changes would lead to an educational environment more in line with the dictates of the capability approach, hopefully enriching the value of students' educational experiences.

As a result of these lectures, some students realized that they could benefit from resources and opportunities which they had previously taken for granted — such as counselling services or career development centres in their universities. Yet, the presentations also sparked an ambition within students to improve school policies. For instance, many voiced an interest in expanding their student governments. Hopefully such changes could strengthen their leadership skills and their influence within the university community.

After learning about the human capabilities approach and how it can be used to further assess one's education, WEW participants were given the opportunity to share information about their respective universities. In a roundtable, students prepared short introductions about their country and institution. The conference hosted 41 students from 18 institutions around the world, touching upon five continents.

During the presentations, participants quickly realized the diversity of experiences and cultural backgrounds they each brought to the WEW conference. For instance, one student from Japan described her sociology research on bento boxes — packed lunches Japanese parents prepare for their children. As the roundtable presentations continued, participants grew more and more eager to talk with one another about their respective universities.

Since internationalization is at the heart of Collegio Nuovo mission since its very foundation, students often seize the opportunity given by their college to travel the world. Spread across two days of the conference, four Collegio Nuovo students — Elena Masnada, Michela Pagano, Beatrice Plazzotta, and Laura Di Lodovico — shared their study abroad experiences and their reflections on world travel.

When Laura Massocchi and Elisa Romano spoke about their experiences abroad (France and Belgium to Dubai, the Czech Republic and UK), they acknowledged the support they received from their college to travel: «Collegio Nuovo helped me step out of my comfort zone», said Romano. Making reference to the WEW participants and their experience in the conference, Massocchi and Romano pointed out that only when one has a willingness to step away from her own comfortable ways of thought can she begin to learn and reshape what she already knows.

After their presentation, Massocchi and Romano gave the floor to the WEW participants, asking the young women in the audience to reflect on their perceptions of Italy and the “European Identity.” Students discussed openly their stereotypes and perceptions of Italians, and compared these to their perceptions of Europe as a whole. WEW participants turned the question back to the Collegio Nuovo students, interested to know whether they connect primarily with their Italian or European identities. Both Massocchi and Romano agreed that, although they recognize the importance of their European citizenship, they identify first as Italians. Later, they both shared their personal perceptions of their own culture in Italy. The discussion closed with a common recognition of the value of travel and open-minded conversation, since these are fundamental to reshaping one’s cultural perceptions of a place and people.

In a later presentation, Collegio Nuovo students Plazzotta and Di Lodovico echoed this sentiment and highlighted what they learned during their travels to the Shanghai World EXPO and Tongji University in China. Before travelling, both Plazzotta and Di Lodovico had expectations of China and its culture — expectations which were challenged and changed during their visit to China. After they left the EXPO, they returned home with a more enlightened and complete perception of China’s people, and of the country itself.

In a separate presentation, Masnada and Pagano agreed with the inevitable changes world travel makes to an individual’s preconceived expectations and stereotypes about a country or people. After their first experience abroad, Masnada and Pagano developed a hunger for travel, and have since been travelling the world. Collectively, the two students have studied in 7 different countries, including Italy, the US, France, China, Dubai, Turkey, and Tunis – with more travel plans to come in the upcoming year. While the two spend much of their time abroad, they both underlined the importance of bringing back to Italy what they learn. «A man travels the world in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.» The quote appeared in the presentation, as Masnada and Pagano emphasized the return home moment as a key aspect to world travel.

The 41 WEW participants were reminded that their experience at the conference would be important, not only for their own personal growth, but also as a valuable experience to the communities in their home countries. With every perspective and new insight brought to a place, a space is created for other ideas to develop and eventually actions to occur from these ideas. Though the conference consisted of a small group of students, it is these very small, open-minded circles of people that spur change in the world. Presenting a quotation

from their presentation, Masnada and Pagano encouraged students to apply their potentiality to inspire global change: «A small group of thoughtful people could change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has» – Margaret Mead.

Literature in wor/ds

Tuesday's lectures focused on literature and the arts, beginning with an examination of past and present Italian authors. Professor Carla Riccardi Director of University of Pavia's Department of Medieval and Modern Literature and Art opened with the presentation Modern and Contemporary Italian Women's Writing prepared together with Professor Anna Modena. The lecture gave WEW participants a brief overview of the rarely discussed topic of Italian women authors, introducing them to writers of the late 19th century to the present day. In their writing, many of these authors explored the female condition, particularly themes of self-sacrifice and women's societal expectations. Contemporary women writers seemed to be interested in social issues females still struggle with today, such as the difficult balance women face between worklife and motherhood. Writers Valeria Parrella, Michela Murgia and Silvia Avallone provide examples of women of an ever-changing world. There is the protagonist of Parrella's *Lo spazio bianco* (The white space), a teacher at a night school in multicultural Naples, who is waiting to see whether her newborn son, born premature, is going to survive, against a background of the working-class students who struggle against the system to earn their qualifications. Or take the girls in Avallone's novel *Acciaio*, growing up in the disadvantaged community of steel workers in the town of Piombino. A determined young writer, Avallone's labour has been rewarded as *Acciaio* (Steel) has received a huge print run and many translations. These are women more present than ever in today's society, but also looking backwards to more archaic ways of life: for instance the choice to set a story in the antiquated Sardinian society of the Fifties or the renewed attention to life in the countryside which marks the work of many contemporary writers, as if they share a common sensitivity. In *Accabadora* (a Sardinian word meaning a woman capable of carrying out euthanasia on others) Michela Murgia tells the story of Tzia Bonaria, an old woman who has the ability to grant, if necessary, a merciful death, understanding, tolerant, and sometimes necessary. Now, with unlimited energy and self-assured handling of volatile matters, Murgia has turned in her latest work, *Ave Mary*, to address the theme of how the church has formed and reformed the image of the woman, starting from the image of the Virgin Mary and giving, from a Catholic perspective, a new contribution to the issues of femininity which is rooted in the rites and myths of her own birth land. Their writings allow women's voices to be heard and thus contribute to the collective concerns of the Italian people.

The proceeding lecture centered on the traditional Italian literary canon with an overview of Dante, Machiavelli, Montale, and Calvino. Collegio Nuovo literature student Francesca Facchi guided WEW participants through a brief tour of the history and significance of these Italian literary figures. Unlike the previous lecture, these authors were far more well-known to participants. Throughout her presentation, Facchi explored the question "what is literature," stating there is not one answer. However, she believed literature can be thought of in the broadest sense as providing a discourse for the human condition. She also expressed each person's ability to discover his or her own definition of literature, letting their individual experiences guide their perceptions.

Following these lectures, students participated in a roundtable discussion about their countries' differing views on literature and the arts, exploring their relationship and relevance

to social issues. Topics ranged from government censorship of the arts, public versus private financial sponsorship, international and national translation of literary texts, and the overall importance of literature and the arts to inspire social change. Students from Japan, for instance, explained how few Japanese authors get translated into other languages. With little available translators, it thus becomes difficult for people around the world to learn about important issues these Japanese authors communicate about their society.

Furthermore, WEW participants discussed the benefits and drawbacks of government sponsorship of the arts. Many explained their wariness of public funding, fearing such reliance could easily lead to censorship. This would undeniably stifle the arts' ability to create social change, they argued.

Together, students shared their personal experiences within their countries about the production, presentation, and perception of the arts. They became eager to voice their opinions, sparking conversations which spilled out of the lecture hall and into the College's dining room, just in time for lunch.

An inspiring woman at the *Corriere della Sera*

"If young students are given the opportunity to spend some years in Colleges where they can freely exchange their views, discuss theories and problems, get in touch with students of foreign universities, and read newspapers of many different countries, I am persuaded that women and men will complete their education and will be able to hold high positions of responsibility both in Italy and in many international institutions."

Sandra Bruni Mattei, Founder of Collegio Nuovo - Interview by Sandro Rizzi, *Corriere della Sera*, October 30th 1973

Wrapped around a glossy wooden table, the young women of the WEW conference sit at the headquarters of the Italian daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. Hailing from Sudan to Japan, the students shift in their creaky chairs, snapping photos every few seconds while eagerly awaiting their speaker. Finally, a woman enters the room, standing in front of her audience quietly. She waits for the room to fall silent. The camera flashes begin to fade; students' eyes float and fix forward. The woman begins to speak.

«There is no minority complex here» said Barbara Stefanelli, Deputy Director of *Corriere della Sera*, confidently introducing herself to the participants. Stefanelli presented herself as a female working in journalism, not a female journalist. By the nature of her identity as a woman, Stefanelli has felt the difference between herself and her male colleagues, but also clearly emphasized to the WEW participants that this difference did not and has not affected the way she performs her duties on *Corriere della Sera*.

Before these students suddenly stood a woman who embodied the entire spirit of the conference. Throughout the week, the participants discussed women's education and leadership amongst each other, sharing their experiences from all corners of the world. Yet, it's one thing to speak about the unique challenges women face today. It's quite another to step out of the lecture hall and into the office of a woman holding, as the founder of Collegio Nuovo termed, a "high position of responsibility."

Stefanelli, as unassuming as she appeared, represents a woman changing the way Italy and, by consequence of her profession as a journalist, the way the world receives the news, crafts political agendas, and thereby strives for change.

Currently, the media sector in Italy, and in most other parts of the world, is a male dominated field. Due to the media's underrepresentation of females in "high positions of responsibility," women contribute less to directing topics covered in the news. Without a collective female perspective focusing the Italian community towards issues within the nation, the Italian news remains incomplete. Speaking to the severity of this absence of the female voice, Stefanelli

highlighted family-related policy as one of the most important political projects women in high journalistic positions could benefit from.

After revealing the realities of Italy's media sector, Stefanelli also elaborated on women's presence in journalism as traditionally covering lighter, more local news stories. Editorial and op-ed writing, according to Stefanelli, have become "ghettoes" for many female journalists. Women writers may have a comfortable, established presence in these newspaper sections, yet many are now pushing to write more politically-interested, or "hard-hitting" news. Stefanelli referred to such revolutionary Italian female journalists as Maria Grazia Cutuli, a writer who challenged the traditional framework of "soft news coverage" for women. As she spoke about the late journalist who was killed while reporting for Corriere in Afghanistan, a plaque in honor of Grazia hung above Stefanelli's head at the front of the boardroom. «She was courageous and determined» said Stefanelli. «She never considered herself less than other journalists. [Grazia] wasn't a female journalist; she was a journalist.»

WEW students began asking Stefanelli further questions about women's presence in the Italian media, particularly in regards to the deceptive female presence within newscasting. Women seem far more present in Italian journalistic media, students wondered, than their true statistical representation suggests.

In response, Stefanelli explained how most Italian women find it easier to enter journalism as newscasters, often being hired based on physical appearance rather than merit. She admitted there exists this continuing trend within Italy for women to be «seen and not heard». Yet the trend is undeniably being undermined by such journalists as Stefanelli.

She remained optimistic of women's involvement in the media and in politics, citing growing numbers of female journalists. Despite the presence of body politics, Stefanelli emphasized the female voice's growing presence within the world of journalism.

When asked about her own climb to the top of Corriere's ladder, Stefanelli said she never once thought about her gender, never letting it become something to overcome in order to prove she deserved the role of Deputy Director to those around her.

«I didn't think of myself as being female in comparison to male,» said Stefanelli. «That didn't make sense to me. I just want to be what I am and do what I know».

Stefanelli remained conscious, however, of the unique challenges women face when not merely attaining, but also maintaining leadership positions such as her own.

«You do feel the difference» - she admitted, referring to the challenge of balancing work and family. As a mother, Stefanelli spoke from her own experience when discussing how most Italian women continue to confront this conflict between work and home. It remains difficult for many women to hold onto positions of authority with societal and familial expectations building upon work expectations.

Stefanelli then spoke specifically about the challenges she may face working to the top of a company, supporting her point with statistical figures from Corriere della Sera that illustrated the gender gap that exists at the newspaper. Stefanelli stated that the gender gap between newspaper staff levels on Corriere della Sera as well as other Italian newspapers isn't a result of direct discriminatory practices, but rather the deeply-engrained patriarchal tradition within the Italian work culture - the same tradition that exists and has slowed the advancement of women in the workforce all over the world.

«You have to know it's there, you have to cope with it» she said. «But you can't think you're any less because of it. You have to be optimistic.»

The director looked around the room at the wide-eyed group of students, aware her meeting was drawing to a close.

Stefanelli's words had enlivened the mission and aims of the WEW conference. Just as her work with *Corriere della Sera* contributed to a larger female voice within Italy, so too did the conference; it created a space for women and their particular concerns to be heard. Participants could share their thoughts and experiences freely with others from around the world, learning from and being inspired by each other. That very same female voice Stefanelli spoke of before could, in fact, grow stronger not only within Collegio Nuovo but also the participants' respective countries upon their return home.

But Stefanelli had one final piece of advice for these young women to hear before they left Corriere. She began to speak ardently, yet deliberately, about the power of an individual, man or woman, to change the world. Given confidence in one's self — complete and utter confidence — it can be done.

«You have to feel free to be opinionated in the way you want, not because you are a female journalist» Stefanelli said. «The importance is that you feel free. Think of yourself as an individual, and it is possible to achieve something. Be free».

Comparative advantages and underestimated resources: do it your way!

Following the trip to Milan to meet this inspiring woman, and an all-day visit of the first capital of Italy, Turin, students returned to Collegio Nuovo to hear two lectures discussing the Italian economy. The first of which, given by Dr. Alberto Botta who teaches at the Master in Cooperation and Development at IUSS Pavia gave students an overview of Italy's financial gains and setbacks since its unification. His lecture was entitled *The Italian Economy: Facts and Figures in the Last 150 Years*. In the presentation, Botta summarized the history of Italy's economic progression, focusing especially on Italy's past and present «comparative advantages.» He pointed to tourism and culture as the “niche” that may help Italy stay competitive in the global economy. Botta highlighted Italy's unique and one-of-a-kind culture of art, architecture, and history, and mentioned that Italy must embrace its past in order to be economically competitive in the future.

«The people in Italy must use its creative spirit to redesign the Italian culture.» Botta said, providing his own optimistic suggestion for Italy's economic future.

After Dr. Botta's lecture, students heard a more gendered perspective on today's Italian economy. In her lecture *Gender Economy: An Overview of the Impact of Italian Women in the Workplace*, Professor Paola Profeta (Università Bocconi, Milan) focused on women's roles in the economy, offering insight into an economic strategy that involved the potential roles of women helping to drive the future of the Italian economy.

To explore more about what it means for Italy's people to be living in a country with such deep-seeded patriarchal roots, Profeta provided explanations that aimed to reveal the economic, developmental, and political reasonings for the gender gap in Italy and abroad.

«As a country, Italy is still a remarkably gender asymmetric welfare regime» Profeta said towards the opening of her lecture, characterizing the present condition of the Italian state.

After framing Italy's present-day economy in a gendered context, Profeta introduced her position favor of a woman's right to work. The economic benefits of giving women more opportunities in the workforce grounded her argument. With more women working, women would become richer and spend more, helping the overall economy. In addition, Profeta explained that more women working means more minds working to generate new ideas that will help the future of the Italian economy.

«The female right to work has economic and social benefits,» she explained to the students, rooting her conclusions in the concepts and historical background introduced by Dr. Botta in the lecture they heard earlier.

Profeta then displayed sociological data of the present day, providing empirical evidence to aid the consideration of the gender gap and the presence of women in the working world. To directly address the female presence in the market, Profeta presented the issue of “womenomics”, a socio-economic approach that has been designed to help the economic conditions of an area while simultaneously helping close the gender gap. The argument, Profeta explained, is founded on the principle that women have the right to work. If this right is acknowledged and women are welcomed into the market, they will not only excel in their work, but they will improve the economy; with more women working, more women are spending, thereby stimulating the growth of jobs in various labor sectors.

Directly proceeding Profeta’s lecture, WEW participants shared their ideas and opinions about women in business in the workshop “Wise Ladies in Businessland.” This discussion was chaired by Paola Lanati, MD MA Provider srl and President of the Collegio Nuovo Alumnae Association, along with Anna Lanzani, Trade Marketing Manager of Asia Pacific at Barilla and Alumna of the Collegio. Lanati and Lanzani asked students about their thoughts on glocalization – businesses which are global in scope, yet remain local in their community presence. WEW participants generally agreed that such businesses will become more globalized, given the increasingly connected world of today. The businesswomen also brought up the topic of environmental consciousness, curious to discover what these young women thought of “going green” and the concept of being a globally-responsible citizen. Representatives from America, for instance, voiced their frustrations with the younger generation’s intentions behind going green, fearing it had become a fad that may be transient rather than long-lasting. Yet, WEW participants together agreed upon the importance of perceiving one’s self as a global citizen, particularly in regards to environmental issues.

Following these topics, Lanati and Lanzani encouraged students to ask them about their experiences as, given the workshop’s title, “Wise Ladies in Businessland.” Lanati in particular voiced her opinions on entrepreneurship, believing women should never be frightened to take that risk and start their own business if they approach it thoughtfully yet passionately. She spoke about her own experience deciding to dive into the deep end, so to speak, and forge her own path in the corporate world.

«I want to decide my own life» Lanati said while reflecting on her career choices. «It’s not about a job; it’s about a life.»

When asked about how she thought of herself as one of the few, yet growing number, of women at the top of the corporate ladder, Lanati wanted to assure students that gender should never be thought of as something holding one back. Such a mentality could hinder a woman’s confidence to chase her dreams and create her own life, according to Lanati.

«Don’t think of yourself as a woman or a man» she said. «Do it your way.»

Beauty is intelligence operating as nature

The final morning of the WEW conference centered on fashion and the arts, beginning with a visit to the nearby city of Vigevano, after which came a lecture at Collegio Nuovo.

They received a guided tour of Vigevano’s fashion exhibit *Anteprima: Un Work in Progress Sull’Alta Moda Italiana* led by the city’s Arts and Culture Councilor, Giorgio Forni. The exhibition acted as a prelude to Vigevano’s forthcoming Museum of Fashion (to be completed in the following few years).

Forni also led students through the city’s shoe museum, showing them the world’s smallest

pair of shoes and the famous red flats worn by the pope. In addition, WEW participants visited the art exhibition 2011: *Buon Compleanno, Italia!* to celebrate Italy's 150th anniversary since its unification.

Following Vigevano, participants returned to Collegio Nuovo and listened to Professor Laura Dimitrio's presentation, *Fashion as a Mirror of History: A Trip through the Fashions of the Twentieth Century*. A Collegio Nuovo Alumna, Professor Dimitrio currently works as a fashion and arts consultant.

Although fashion is often disregarded as ephemeral and superficial, Dimitrio's lecture communicated its power to reflect important social changes throughout history. In particular, she emphasized how fashion expressed growing female empowerment over the previous century. She outlined important fashion trends alongside women's struggles and strides for emancipation in the twentieth century. Professor Dimitrio discussed, for instance, the new canon of female beauty which developed after World War I. A more boyish, waif-like look was taking hold. Women began cutting their hair short, raising their hemlines, and slipping into less constrictive clothing. According to Dimitrio, this revolutionary style of the 1920s, led by designers like Coco Chanel, portrayed the rising tides of female emancipation in Europe.

Professor Dimitrio further explained how fashion mirrored an increasing global consciousness, particularly in the later 19th century. WEW participants learned about Japanese culture's impact on Western European fashion design and art. Dimitrio discussed this newfound curiosity and hunger for Japanese art and culture sweeping Europe. Like never before, Europeans began traveling to far eastern lands to return home with a respect and admiration for countries like Japan. Chrysanthemum, a national Japanese symbol, had suddenly become popular. Kimono dresses were seen as exotic. Impressionist artists such as Claude Monet began carrying eastern printmaking traditions into their western paint-on-canvas medium. Professor Dimitrio also mentioned how, more recently, the Italian fashion designer Guido Ravasi used Asian weeping willows to symbolize elegance in his clothing designs.

Quite appropriately, this union of East and West that Professor Dimitrio explained through the lens of fashion and art was reflected within Collegio Nuovo's very lecture hall. Throughout the conference week, young women from around the globe had the chance to not only learn from, but be inspired by different countries. Just as Monet enriched the art of the Western world from his encounters with Japanese culture, so too can WEW students enrich their own lives and their respective countries by carrying home a newfound appreciation and curiosity for the world.

During their trips throughout the week, WEW participants snapped photos and swooned over the architecture of Torino, Milano, and Vigevano in Italy's Lombardy region. In Turin, they received a guided tour of the royal palace, Venaria Reale, as well as the exhibition *La Bella Italia* that featured masterpieces of Italian art. In addition, they visited the Museum of Cinema, learning about Italy's contributions to the history of film. On the bus trips to and from Collegio Nuovo, they marveled at the Italian landscape, all agreeing that Italy must be one of the most beautiful places of all their travels.

When the Italian day trips ended and the final day of the conference arrived, participants heard from Pavia University's Angelo Bugatti, president of the Course in Building Engineering and Architecture. The lecture gave the young women the chance to think conceptually about the scenery and spaces they had been experiencing during their visit. The lecture delivered by Bugatti served as a valuable opportunity for students to appreciate their own appreciation for architecture, landscape, and the beauty of Italy.

«Beauty is the research of human people» Bugatti said. «Beauty is intelligence operating as nature.»

Expressing that humans are unique in their ability to perceive beauty, Bugatti offered insight into the human condition for appreciating beauty, which offered students an intellectual place from which to reflect about their own experience in beautiful Italy.

Following this chance to reflect on their own perceptions of Italy's scenery - also by an extraordinary focus on the landscape of "villas" on the Lake of Como where architecture is intimately linked with landscape, participants saw firsthand what other university students have created from their experience in the Italian landscape. In a lecture delivered by Tiziano Cattaneo, professor of Building Engineering and Architecture, he screened the virtual projects completed by architecture students that involved simulation models for developments to the landscape along the Ticino River of Pavia.

With an understanding for the "active energy" within landscape, Pavia University students created computer-generated models that redesigned the space along the Ticino River to allow people to be alive and active within the river's landscape. Students used architecture and landscape as a venue for social change, their projects aiming to improve the community of Pavia and its interaction with the natural surroundings – a city that has been fixed in its landscape for hundreds of years. Viewing these projects gave WEW participants yet another example of how creativity and open-minded perspectives can lead to active and real social changes within a community.

Changes and new chances... arrivederci!

Before WEW students packed their bags, said their goodbyes, and returned home to their respective countries, Collegio Nuovo Alumna, Grazia Bruttocao, led them in a discussion on what it is they hope to take home from their experiences this week at the conference.

During the discussion, several students expressed how the stereotypes they had previously held about Italy and other countries represented at the conference had been challenged. It seemed unanimous, in fact, that WEW participants gained a global perspective from the week, a perspective that enriched their view of themselves, their university, their country, and even the world. By discussing issues about women's roles in education, about environmental sustainability, globalization and localization, and the importance of literature and the arts for social change, these young women inspired each other to become more globally conscious citizens.

WEW participants left with a better perception of their own national identity and a hunger to empower women in local as well as global communities. Many students planned to create more opportunities for student leadership positions at their universities, others to take part in already available leadership roles upon their return.

A remarkable result, as underlined by Collegio Nuovo Cultural and Academic Coordinator Saskia Avalle, who, in the closing ceremony with the President of the College Bruna Bruni, Principal Bernardi, the Rector of the University Angiolino Stella and the Director of the IUSS Roberto Schmid, stressed on the importance of being capable of making one's own ambitions coincide with the improvement of the society as a whole.

Yet perhaps most important of all, these women gained new friends and new connections that stretched around the globe — from Asia, Africa, America, Europe and Australia. Exchanging email addresses and Facebook accounts before the final day was over, with the music played by students in the background, such important global ties will undoubtedly remain strong despite the distances.

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