Ufficio Stampa della Provincia autonoma di Trento
Piazza Dante 15, 38122 Trento
Tel. 0461 494614 - Fax 0461 494615
uff.stampa@provincia.tn.it

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Gender, Science and Technology

Why are women still largely excluded from the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)? Is the imbalance the fruit of prejudice, voluntary exclusion or objective difficulties? An all female panel discussed the issues in Sala delle Marangonerie at Buonconsiglio Castle on the second day of the Festival. From incentives for “gamification” platforms for scientific disciplines and training from an early age to new less formal techniques for teaching mathematics, there are ways of reversing the trend. The provincial councillor Sara Ferrari also participated in the debate.

There was an all female panel of speakers and an intergenerational audience dominated by women at the session dedicated to the subject of “Gender, Science and Technology”. Are the problems of advancing technology and the risk of a reduction in jobs amplified if we consider the world of employment from the female point of view? Sara Ferrari, the Autonomous Province of Trento’s councillor for equal opportunities, believes that a subject such as technology and jobs cannot fail to concern the 52% of the population represented by women. “We are striving to ensure that there is already an awareness among younger generations that no jobs are automatically attributed to one gender or another”, she stated. “In Trentino we are working together with the regional employment agency and around eighty programmes with parents and schools to bring the world of science and mathematics closer to girls.”

As a sociologist, Barbara Poggio, Prorector at the University of Trento and equal opportunities delegate, calls it “horizontal segregation”. Social scientists monitor gender inequality (at the University of Trento 14% of full professors are women, whereas a few years ago the figure was 10%, but in scientific faculties the percentage goes down to 5%), but it is necessary to work on educational programmes and make recourse to incentives.

There is a paradox in countries where women are entitled to equal dignity. This was underlined by Monica Parrella, from the Department of Equal Opportunities at the Prime Minister’s Office: “Where gender equality is not a problem, women are less likely to study scientific disciplines. Clearly, because they are in a position to choose from many other options. In humanist faculties women represent 78% of students, in computer engineering only 24%”. At the age of 5 or 6 girls already assimilate prejudice and gender stereotypes (women’s greater aptitude for caring jobs than for science and mechanics).

Gianna Martinengo, a businesswoman and President of the «Women & Technologies» association, is convinced that it is necessary to work on training programmes today, to prepare for trades that will develop in the future. Technological innovation must be accompanied by social innovation. Genuine technological innovation is not about increasing company pixels, but rather about improving the quality of life for everyone.

Robotics is already here, explained Fiorella Operto, President of the non-profit-making organisation Robotica. Italy is in second place in Europe in terms of the application of robotics in industry. Sensors analyse the environment, while machines do jobs that are unappealing for us in foundries, mines and spray shops, and robots will clean the roads: “All jobs will be affected by robotics and automation. We must be capable of change. Insurers will need to know about pilotless cars, psychologists will not be able to ignore the world of cybernetics if they deal with cyberbullying».

«Learning maths is like doing sport. It takes training»: concluded Chiara Burberi, who presented the Redooc platform, an entertaining digital tool designed to promote learning about scientific subjects without the formalism still dominating traditional teaching in Italy.

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