More women in panels: the advantages of diversity

The University of Trento has inclusion and gender equality as core values, and adopted new guidelines to promote gender equality and diversity in its events. A set of recommendations, and not limitations, that will be helpful in the organization of events and in the designation of committee members. Rector Collini: "We hope that this model will inspire many other institutions"

Trento, 10 June 2020 – (a.s.) All-male conferences, panels, seminars, with women in secondary positions, are too often the norm, but the University of Trento wants to make a difference: with these simple guidelines, it aims to ensure that women are represented in these settings and to give visibility to their competencies, experience and abilities in public events. A cultural change, but with no obligations attached: the guidelines serve as recommendations for members of the academic community who organize seminars, congresses, round tables and public meetings. They will also be useful when designating the members of scientific committees and panels, where there still appears to be a significant gender asymmetry.

The guidelines were drafted by the Diversity management division and Rector's delegates for equality and diversity policies based on the fact that there are significant gender inequalities in some discipline areas, an issue that has no simple solution given that the representatives of the less represented gender are often overloaded with work. "Universities are a driver of culture because they generate knowledge and create opportunities for discussions – commented Rector Paolo Collini. That is why they have to commit to promote inclusion and gender equality. As University of Trento, we have been working on this problem for some time now and have become sensitive to the issue on many levels. In particular, excluding women because their names do not come to mind when deciding who is going to be a member of a panel or scientific committee is something that cannot happen anymore. We must do something to change things. Different viewpoints, and gender diversity, are essential for progress and the development of thought. We hope that this initiative, as it occurred in the past with other awareness raising campaigns, will inspire action in other universities and institutions".

The six-point guidelines will be forwarded to the academic community in the next days:

1. Define, as far as possible, the list of people speaking at conferences, seminars, round table, in a balanced way, taking into account relevance, gender diversity and other aspects in order to combat gender stereotypes in science.

2. Adopt an inclusive approach that values differences, and gender diversity in particular, when planning and managing events, and promote gender balance in scientific and organizing committees.
3. Encourage an inclusive environment that favours gender equality, ensuring equality when giving visibility to teaching and research work, in networking opportunities, in activities aimed at promoting one’s research, giving everyone the opportunity to acquire social and economic value. In this case, more protection is required in particular for individuals of the under-represented gender in a given discipline area.

4. Adopt and enhance good practices as regards the involvement of people from the under-represented gender and in the inclusion of other diversities in all University actions and events, making sure that measures are in place to ensure the participation of all and using an inclusive language that respects differences, in compliance with the University’s guidelines, in communications regarding the event.

5. Consider the need to reconcile work and family life for people participating in the event, with an inclusive calendar and, where possible, a baby-sitting service for sessions that attract large audiences.

6. As regards funds awarded by the University to scientific events, adopt a provision based on which funding is allocated taking into account, among other things, equal opportunities objectives as regards gender equality and other diversity aspects. In particular, the organizers are required to submit a statement in which they explain why they were not able to involve in the event to be funded an equal number of individuals from all genders.

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