

## 25<sup>th</sup> of November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

### Toxic masculinity and cultural paradigm shifts needed in Italy (and beyond)

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#### Abstract

25 years after the Beijing Platform for Action, data shows us enormous gaps in gender justice. The pandemic makes us fear for the worst. In the last 25 years, in Italy, the adoption of good laws was not followed by law enforcement and access to promotion and protection of women's human rights. Even the Italian success celebrated in the 2020 EIGE report, if read carefully, is deceiving since it relates to a single indicator. Legal change wasn't followed by social change. Implicit stereotypes, unconscious bias, cultural barriers, and taboos are preventing an open and uncomfortable conversation about toxic masculinity and cultural change. This 'elephant in the room' keeps us in the comfortable complacency of not being sexists, without compelling us to become vocally anti-sexists. Culture can play a major and permanent role in nudging this paradigm shift and making toxic masculinity no longer culturally acceptable. In a system change approach, culture can foster social imagination for both men and women and inspire, disseminate and protect social change from backlashes. Everyone is a changemaker, including strategic philanthropy and finance. Starting with mainstreaming gender and intergenerational justice in our own organizations.

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### The long path towards gender justice: historical and perceived times

Twenty-five years ago, the World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a Platform for Action that transformed national and international policies almost all over the world. It impacted on, not millions, but billions of people.

In 1995 in Beijing, social movements from across the globe<sup>1</sup> were successful in achieving a recognition by governments that "*women rights are human rights*". The conference keywords - *gender perspective, empowerment, mainstreaming*, marked a point of no return and became a milestone in the recognition of women's rights globally.

In the evolution of international human rights law, Beijing turned out to be both an arrival and a starting point. Indeed, on one hand, it was the outcome of the claims for the implementation of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women<sup>2</sup> adopted by the UN in 1979; on the other, it paved the way for multisectoral national strategies aimed at engaging different Ministries, national and local institutions, international organizations and civil society.

In 1995, I was 20 and as many law students of my time, a passionate activist for human rights, standing on the shoulders of the activists of the previous generation, but not identifying with some of the modalities engrained in the feminism of the Seventies.

Mine was the first generation of human rights activists after the fall of the Berlin wall. The World Conferences of the Nineties (in addition to Beijing on Women, Rio on the Environment in 1992, Vienna

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<sup>1</sup> To the Beijing Conference, held from the 4th to the 15th of September 1995, participated 5,307 official delegates and 3,824 NGO's representatives; 3,200 media operators and 4,041 journalists coming from 124 countries. Among those, 841 were Chinese, 1,468 came from 18 Asian countries, 1,210 from Europe and Australia, 268 from Africa, 134 from Middle East and 829 from US and Canada. At the same time, at NGO Forum in Huairou 31,000 women were participating, representing more than 2,000 organizations from 200 different nations.

<sup>2</sup> With regards to the national and international implementation of the CEDAW, the main legally-binding text, see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>

on the Human rights in 1993, Copenhagen on Social Development in 1995, the Global Social Forum in Porto Alegre and Genoa in 2001), marked an epochal change for us.

We rejected the binary vision inherited from the 45 years of Cold War, with its entailed dichotomy between civil and political rights versus economic, social and cultural ones.

On a global level, the Nineties enshrined the recognition of the interdependence and indivisibility of all the fundamental rights and freedoms - civil, cultural, economic, political, social and environmental ones – and marked the shift from advocating for the legal recognition towards advocating for promotion and protection policies.

Like the end of the XVIII century was the watershed from ethical and philosophical recognition to Constitutional law, 1948 marked the landmark move from domestic law to international law, the world summits of the Nineties brought human rights out of the rooms of political scientists and jurists as a turning point towards advocacy for action.

### ... Meanwhile in Italy

Looking at the evolution of gender justice in Italy, in the last 25 years, many pulling and pushing factors blended, among which, a widespread cultural arrogance of *double standards* i.e. “human rights issues concern so called Third World countries and not self-proclaimed advanced democracies”.

A siloed system of knowledge and education<sup>3</sup>, of institutions and organizations, that lacks the competences and capacity to embrace a system change approach. A country unable, for instance, to integrate and acknowledge gender equality policies as universal human rights policies and not just related to family and/or maternity policies. On the lack of a systemic approach in Italy, it is striking that today, in 2020, we still do not have an independent national human rights institution<sup>4</sup>.

Italian civil society shows a chronic fragility, with nonprofits strangled by “project-based starvation cycles” and a widespread ideology that funds must go to projects and very little, better nothing, to the organizations,<sup>5</sup> which entails no money for advocacy and lobbying and very little use of the instruments offered by the international human rights’ law<sup>6</sup>.

There remains limited availability of disaggregated data and lack of their structural use.

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<sup>3</sup> As always, Italy offers exceptional excellencies, like the University of Padova in teaching and researching on human rights. Since the visionary pioneer initiative led by Antonio Papisca in 1982, who at the time was Dean of the Political Science faculty, that launched the studies and research center on human rights, transformed in 2001 an Inter-department center. and, finally in 2013 in the [Padova University Centre for Human Rights](#) with not just a multidisciplinary vision but a systemic one.

<sup>4</sup> As result of the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the UN recommended that (UN resolution n.48/134): “Member states commit to create national independent institutions to promote and protect fundamental human rights”. Italy, that has a wide variety of human rights public entities but not a single independent one, is today at the very bottom on the continental level, where only Malta, Estonia, Czech Republic and Romania, besides Italy, are defaulting. Since 2002, a coalition of Italian civil society organizations promote the establishment of a NHRI. Italy since 2008 has received hundreds of recommendations by the UN on this matter. During the last UN Universal Periodic Review (March 2020), Italy received 45 recommendations related to the establishment of a NHRI. With regards to recommendations made by the EU, take a look at the last report adopted by the Fundamental Rights Agency.

<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/strong-effective-nhris#TabPubOverview0>.

At least 10 draft bills have followed one another in the past 15 years. On the 29th of October 2020, the Parliamentary Committees on Constitutional Affairs, Council Presidency and on Interior adopted a unified draft signed by Scagliusi, Quartapelle and Brescia.

<sup>5</sup> On the ideological barriers that prevent Italian donors to provide core support to organizations and movements, like staff cost, digitalization, fundraising, communication, advocacy, training, networking etc., but rather forces grantees to focus on restricted project-cycle financing, you can watch TED Talk

[The Third Sector has to change the world](#) or read the call to action launched in 2018 [Debunking two myths to avoid agony in Italian civil society](#)

<sup>6</sup> The ICTs revolution, since 2000, has opened new frontiers of public scrutiny, offering new tools of peer competition among States, accelerating the translation, publication and dissemination of the recommendations made by the UN treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Reviews. However, civil society organizations are not able yet to fully untap this potential.

Furthermore, there is a reluctance/impermeability of human rights policies and narratives to engage with the private sector, the media and individuals in Italy. The latter is something hopefully the Agenda 2030 will instead achieve thanks to its “systemic sustainability” vision of which gender equality is a fundamental component.

## The power of data

Since I read *Invisible women* by Caroline Criado Perez<sup>7</sup> earlier this year, I cannot stop counting: women in a panel, in an executive board, among the signatories of an appeal, the authors supported by a publishing house, the artists included in an exhibition. It is always a shock for me seeing how in Italy, nowadays, there is still a sort of absence and invisibility of women and, as far as work and education are concerned, a sort of segregation.

Every time I bring up the issue, my interlocutors’ reactions goes from incredulity and embarrassment, to bothersome and annoyance. I can see their eyes go up, thinking “here she goes again”.

Since 2013, the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) monitors the progresses and steps back made by the EU and its Member States regarding gender equality in seven key areas: work, money, knowledge, time, power, health and violence (including additional indicators that encompass intersectional inequalities).

Europe wide, the progress from 2013 to 2020 was slow and irregular, with countries moving forward in just certain areas and others going backwards.

Italy, after being at the forefront of women emancipation in the Seventies, in the following decades, did not keep up with other countries and, in 2010, the baseline year of the Gender Equality index of EIGE, was significantly behind the European benchmark<sup>8</sup>.

Over the past ten years, Italy improved in Gender Equality index by 23.6%.

This is of course an important result, but, if we look carefully, we will notice that it depends essentially – besides the extreme low starting point – on the progress of a single area “power” and, even more significantly, of a single indicator linked to the entry into force of a law called Golfo-Mosca. That law introduced for the first-time ever in the country quotas for women in the boards of public companies and actually, in a decade of implementation, the number of women in the board of that kind of company skyrocketed. Unfortunately, that impact did not have any dragging nor trickle-down effects<sup>9</sup>. No “dragging effect” in unlisted companies or in the number of women CEO (only 8.4%) in listed ones and no “trickle-down effect” in the number of women in leadership positions or with respect to the huge gender pay gap that characterizes the country<sup>10</sup>.

Today, finally, we have the data: the fig leaf dropped. Greater quantity of data provides us an irrefutable and striking picture. However, besides data, it is necessary to go deeper exploring the causes and correlations. Indeed, the use of data will truly make a difference only when it will entail a paradigm shift and it will bring systemic effects.

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<sup>7</sup> Caroline Criado Peres, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, 2019

<sup>8</sup> Italy is low in relation to the EIGE index (see [Gender Equality Index Annual Report 2020](#)). Also according to the [World Economic Forum](#), Italy is placed 76<sup>th</sup> out of 149 country for gender inequality, occupying the bottom places among developed countries. According to World Economic Forum index, Italy has improved in the Political empowerment area, from the introduction of gender quotas in the electoral lists. In the other areas, however, Italy has registered clear worsening of its position.

<sup>9</sup> Take a look at the first report (in Italian) on the implementation of Legge Golfo Mosca 120/2011 on gender representation in boards of public companies issued in January 2020 by Cerved-Fondazione Bellisario, in collaboration with Inps, [https://know.cerved.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PPT-Cerved\\_Bellisario\\_FEB\\_2020.pdf](https://know.cerved.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PPT-Cerved_Bellisario_FEB_2020.pdf) and at the analysis on the effects and criticalities on the advancement of the law in Fuori Quota <https://fuoriquota.org>.

<sup>10</sup> See Economic World Forum report, published December 2019 <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>

Compulsory quotas for women will be meaningless without bold systemic policies on gender mainstreaming<sup>11</sup>. According to the first analysis of the pandemic effects on women, the figures are alarming in all the key areas - work, education, power, money, time, health – while on violence they are just goose bumping<sup>12</sup>. It is therefore crucial that the Resilience and Recovery Plans adopt systemic approaches of gender mainstreaming, including gender budgeting.

## 25<sup>th</sup> of November and violence against women

Since 1999, the 25<sup>th</sup> of November is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The [International Days of the United Nations](#) are a powerful information and dissemination tool and a standpoint: this one, in particular, was an important result of Beijing.

25 years ago, the Head of States came home from Beijing having made the commitment to eradicate violence against women. Since that moment, 154 countries have criminalized it.

As a young legal expert, trained in a positivistic legal culture as the Italian one, I once had unconditional faith in the law as main instrument to leverage social change, in the transformative power of the norms as driving force to shift cultural paradigms. Denouncing, strategic litigation and advocacy were the legal frame cornerstones to enable social and cultural change.

From the year after Beijing, I remember the advocacy campaigns in Italy that led, in 1996, to the recognition of sexual violence as crime against the person and not just, as it was before, against moral decency.

25 years later, data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics show that, in Italy, 92.5% of women, who are victims of sexual violence, do not denounce. At the root of this issue, there is a wide number of factors, the lack of a systemic approach and a series of correlated causes, among which issues about law enforcement, lack of institutional trust, economic dependence of women (on the latter, the data on the unemployment gap between Northern and Southern Italy are appalling as well as the data on “work segregation” in the whole country, an uncomfortable conversation never debated in Italy).

Going even deeper, however, it is impossible not to recognize the intersectionality of a muddle of cultural tradition and unwritten social norms, including: a giant cultural barrier made on taboos, victim blaming, implicit stereotypes and unconscious bias, decades of national TV channels and advertising industry that used women as “pin up”, escorts and sexual objects<sup>13</sup>, and lack of proactive measures for women and girls’ empowerment.

All these abovementioned issues, raise a straightforward question: how is it possible that in 2020 in Italy it is still culturally and socially acceptable that 92.5% of women victims of violence *cannot* denounce?

I use specifically “can” because too often in this country women are blamed for not stepping forward in denouncing the violence endured. As if the reasons of not denouncing - which, let me be clear, is just one step to eradicate violence on women, and certainly not a panacea – were internal to women’s will and not a consequence of external causes.

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<sup>11</sup> “Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realizing gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programs, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.” (EIGE)

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gutierrez 6 April 2020 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>; EIGE Covid-19 wave of violence against women shows EU countries still lack proper safeguards, 18 November 2020; World Bank Coronavirus Live Series: The Impact of the Pandemic on Women and Girls, 15 May 2020 <https://live.worldbank.org/coronavirus-impact-pandemic-women-and-girls>; The indirect impact of COVID-19 on women, The Lancet, 1 August 2020 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30568-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30568-5/fulltext); UN Women COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers, 16 September 2020. On girls see Save the children [The global girlhood report 2020](#)

<sup>13</sup> On the matter of misogyny and #metoo movement in Italy, you can read (in Italian) <https://www.lastampa.it/rubriche/lo-stato-delle-donne/2018/09/03/news/dalle-veline-a-asia-argento-perche-in-italia-metoo-e-stato-accolto-con-scetticismo-1.34042582>

## The psychological roots of inequalities

In one of the most powerful essays that I read this year, Chiara Volpato<sup>14</sup> analyses the psychological roots of inequalities. As of today, mainly economists have been studying inequalities<sup>15</sup> while the contribution of social psychology opens original and disruptive frontiers.

Volpato takes into consideration how inequalities are built, concealed, accepted, interpreted; she examines the absolution, blaming and colonization mechanisms, and the dominance and submissive behaviors, that perpetuate and strengthen these inequalities.

Even though not specifically focused on gender inequalities<sup>16</sup>, this essay can be read through gender lens. At the root of inequalities there are distorted perceptions that systematically underestimate them, and patterns of legitimation processes, deep-seated in the foundation and justification myths, both from the dominant group and the dominated one.

## The elephant in the room

By reading the numerous, significant contributions received in response to Flavia Barca's call for papers, it appeared to me that, once again, there is the proverbial "elephant in the room": something everyone knows about, but do not want or cannot talk about. And that elephant is the male world.

Today gender justice cannot be only a question of women, for women, with women and among women, as it was in Beijing 25 years ago.

In my opinion, in the Italian debate about gender equality, a key sphere of action for a cultural paradigm shift is missing: the systematic, capillary, permanent contrast to toxic masculinity and the promotion of new role models of masculinity, even through, but not limited to, the active participation in first person of men.

Acknowledging the relevance of systemically involving men, is part of the solution. We have finally, very slowly, overcome the idea that men could be an external or neutral target group. Good evidence of this is, for instance, that the UN have been promoting, since 2016, campaigns like [HeForShe The Global solidarity movement for gender equality](#).

## Toxic masculinity

However, this is not enough. To have a paradigm change we do not only need the active participation of men, but also to systematically promote and forge *social imagination capacities* for both social groups, male and female.

Social psychology opens up disruptive analysis between dominant and dominated group, particularly in relation to the concept of *entitlement* and the mechanisms of creation, strengthening and conservation of unconscious bias and implicit stereotypes. These are usually engrained in the first years of life and, often, are even opposite to the explicit attitudes of the adult life (e.g., "my brother does more unpaid work for the family than his wife" or "my best friend earns less than his wife, having the same specialization").

Toxic masculinity<sup>17</sup> does not only refer to violent, rude, insulting or denigratory machismo, which today is – or should be – sanctioned, criminally. It refers to the whole set of behaviors and subliminal beliefs that imply men have to suppress their emotions, mask their discomfort and sadness, keep a stoic appearance, not be seen as acting weak, deferent, caring, or timorous.

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<sup>14</sup> Chiara Volpato, *Le radici psicologiche della disuguaglianza*, Laterza 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, Anthony Atkinson, Branko Milanović, Thomas Piketty

<sup>16</sup> Volpato describes the psychological and social processes that are prerogative not for a specific social group (dominant or dominated), but also to different roles of the same individual as executive -employee, rich and poor, citizen and asylum seeker, dominant ethnic group-minority. All of us can cover the role of dominant or dominated, depending on the moment, interaction, hierarchy in place, position we cover in a specific economic, social and cultural context.

<sup>17</sup> Maya Salam, *What is toxic masculinity?* Jan 22, 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/22/us/toxic-masculinity.html>. Anna Frederica Stumpf, *Making masculinities visible. A gender discourse analysis*. The Arctic University of Norway, master thesis, 2019.

Toxic masculinity's consequences are ample and deep and insinuate, among others, in the "false parity" during the school years<sup>18</sup>, unbalanced distribution on the family-care burdens, strangling women's careers at the beginning of the cycle with child care and at a later stage with old relatives care, in the segregation between males and females in jobs and education, in the dichotomy between work and career for women, in the chronic low self-esteem of women that do not lean in<sup>19</sup>.

As a mother, I was committed to offer not only to my daughter the social imagination capacity of a more equal world, but also to my son the capacity to defy the predominant cultural paradigm, to not conform, to reject the idea that there was only one way to be a man vs the binary subculture of either or: fighter or loser, leader or follower, masculine or demasculinized boy. Taking this stand means that I have often clashed with a cultural barrier that I could sum up with the following consideration: in Italy today, there are- finally! - many ways to raise a girl, but still just one to raise a boy.

If we look at children literature in Italy, for instance, starting from "Dalla parte delle bambine", published in the Seventies<sup>20</sup>, some small publishing houses have done an outstanding job in the past decades, to propose new reference models of "rebel girls"<sup>21</sup>. However, maybe little has been done to introduce alternative role models for boys, based on kindness, solidarity and collaboration.

It is like if in the deconstructing process of traditional gender models, we were missing the non-masculine male world, depriving not only boys, but also girls, of the 50% of social imagination.

Toxic masculinity hurts women, but also men: not only because it does not allow non-conforming talents to emerge, but also because it makes toxic men unhappy and unsatisfied, maybe without being even able to recognize why<sup>22</sup>.

I truly love the campaign [Ring the bell](#), advocating against violence on women in India, because it proposes a way of behaving for boys and men: not as heroes or fearless leaders, but just as persons able to empathize and show up with little gesture of care.

### Shifting the cultural paradigm and social change

Which are the implicit stereotypes and unconscious bias, that make us to accept culturally and socially such astonishing data related to gender inequalities in Italy?

What make us so complacent?

Why aren't we outraged?

What stop us from becoming each one of us a changemaker for gender equality, in the small or big power space we have<sup>23</sup>?

Why is it enough not to be actively sexist and we are not compelled to become anti-sexists?

Which is the role culture plays in demolishing deeply rooted and consolidated social norms?

I dream of a country where gender audit and mandatory training on implicit stereotypes and unconscious gender bias are required by law, for teachers, educators, journalists, lawyers, doctors and board members of any public and private institution.

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<sup>18</sup> Save the children Italy 2020 *Atlas on children at risk* dedicated this year to girl children and adolescents (in Italian) [Atlante dell'infanzia a rischio 2020. Con gli occhi delle bambine, Save the children, 2020](#).

<sup>19</sup> Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean in: women, work and the will to lead*, 2013. Visit <https://leanin.org/>

<sup>20</sup> On the history of the publishing house, Dalla parte delle bambine in Italian <https://unionefemminile.it/dalla-parte-delle-bambine-casa-editrice/>

<sup>21</sup> Take also a look at innovative programs like *Bet she can* for children and young girls <https://www.betshecan.org>

<sup>22</sup> A Lean In Podcast: [Helping boys get out of the "man box" with Peggy Orenstein & Dr. Michael Reichert](#)

<sup>23</sup> On this matter, I want to mention the disruptive tweet by Minister Giuseppe Provenzano published on the 8th of June 2020, when for the first time ever in Italy a man in his public role refused to speak in an only-men panel, giving strength to the boycott of manels in the country "it is not just unbalanced, it is the removal of one entire gender. I apologize with the organizers and participants, but gender equality needs to be practiced even in this way: therefore, I ask to remove my name from the list of panelists. To a new occasion, if not halved."

From the lessons learnt after Beijing, we know that systemic approaches are essential, because they are able to embrace complexity and integrate gender lens.

Legal changes, without cultural and social change, do not bring systemic change. The legal framework (and its enforcement!) is fundamental to delimit the playing field, but it is not enough.

In a systemic approach, culture<sup>24</sup> has a crucial role in forging the social imagination capacity<sup>25</sup> as well as inspiring, sustaining, disseminating and consolidating social change.

Only the soft power of culture can promote alternatives to the dominant toxic masculinity role models and, at the same time, be the permanent barrier against the backlashes or, worse, the involutions that social change always implies<sup>26</sup>.

## Philanthropy and social investment

Private funders' unique autonomy, flexibility and long-term horizon can make a huge difference for gender equality at different levels.

I am not just referring to funding stand-alone projects or programs, nor just to human rights funders or women funders<sup>27</sup> (which unfortunately in Italy and Europe can be counted on one hand).

Instead, I am referring to any funder. Funders in any field can decide to integrate a gender lens (gender mainstreaming) in their ordinary activities: endowment management and investment, grantmaking, operations, communication.

The 2030 Agenda has the potential to make a major difference in engaging a broad variety of private stakeholders on gender equality, since SDG 5 promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a key objective in achieving sustainable development, and not “only” as a human rights issue.

With regards to philanthropy and social investment, as well as in private companies, a paradigm shift will indeed occur only when gender equality will be mainstreamed in the governance and leadership of their own organization.

Data-based evidences finally shed a light on why it is essential to integrate gender equality in our own organizations.

Not just because it is politically correct or “nice to have”, but because it expands and strengthens the vision, the capabilities, the processes and the impact of an organization.

Indeed, recent powerful initiatives in the public companies world, such as [Equileap](#), launched in 2016, and [World Benchmarking Alliance](#)<sup>28</sup>, launched in 2018, demonstrate how gender equality is a key indicator of companies' performance, offering convincing data to invite more and more people to invest on gender balanced firms for the sake of their business. The false choice between doing good or doing business is now over. Today we do know, investing in gender equality is about doing good business.

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<sup>24</sup> On the “minor arts”, women and social justice, listen to the wonderful series of podcast by Jo Andrews on <https://hapticandhue.com/listen/>

<sup>25</sup> On the concept of social imagination, as capacity to imagine a different, fairer, more inclusive, happier society, characterized by new form of wellbeing in peace and harmony with ourselves, our community and the planet, you can read Geoff Mulgan <https://www.demoshelsinki.fi/en/julkaisut/the-imaginary-crisis-and-how-we-might-quicken-social-and-public-imagination/> He illustrates the different reasons why today, more than in the past, universities, think tank, political parties are unable to foster social imagination.

<sup>26</sup> Very interesting, in this moment of extreme polarization and growth of anti-gender movements globally, the role that might have TV series like Mrs. America, released in 2020, about the story of feminist movements of the 70's, led by Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Friedan and confronted by ultra-conservative figure like Phyllis Schlafly and their clash on the ratification of ERA- Equal Rights Amendment, approved by Congress in 1972 and still pending because of the missing of ratification by a sufficient number of States (38 out of 50) <https://www.equalrightsamendment.org>.

<sup>27</sup> [Philanthropy Advancing Women's Human Rights \(PAWHR\)](#), [Women Moving Millions](#), [Philanthropy Women](#), [Women Funding Network](#), [Global Fund for Women](#).

<sup>28</sup> Specifically, on SDG 5, look at <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/gender-benchmark/> with a first baseline report launched in September 2020 on the 36 most important fashion companies.

In a world where mainstream finance, as well as mainstream risk capital (of which women get less than 2%)<sup>29</sup> is still very masculine, we are witnessing a generational change, potentially revolutionary.

“Gender balance” does not interest “only” the niche of social and sustainable finance but potentially all the finance sector, in which the ESG<sup>30</sup> investments represent a new frontier that business is quickly catching on.

The growing interest for “gender lens investments” as integral part of “S” in the ESG and the increasing availability of data and benchmarking tools are already contributing to this paradigm shift.

ESG investments, initially accepted by the mainstream finance in a defensive way (as blame avoidance, if not as tokenism) can now be considered the answer to a real and direct demand, put forward by the *millennial* investors – in the coming decade, the biggest intergenerational transfer of wealth in human history<sup>31</sup> - that look not only at the product but also at how the product is made.

## **New generations and culture’s soft power**

Once again, my hope is that this new generation will lead such a cultural and social change.

Supporting culture, not certainly as a frill or edutainment, but recognizing the lead role that culture has in enabling social imagination and empowering more democratic, fairer and healthy communities<sup>32</sup>, is urgent, especially in this autumn of 2020.

Art and culture are crucial to elaborate grief, violence, discriminations, to imagine social alternatives to dominant role models and bias, to consolidate and disseminate values of equality and justice.

I want to end this article with quoting what Kamala Harris said on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, in her first speech after the election victory, “I am standing on the shoulders of all the people from previous generations who fought for gender equality and paved the way in order to have today the first ever woman of color elected Vice President of the United States”.

My hope is that [Generation equality](#) can really be able to unify women and men to achieve gender equality. Each of us, within our own small or big sphere of power, has the responsibility to open to the next generations the leadership and board rooms of our organizations. Intergenerational justice is another taboo and paradigm shift that we have to take in Italy, intrinsically and intersectionally related to gender justice. Everyone is a changemaker.

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<sup>29</sup> Dana Kanze, The real reason female entrepreneurs get less funding, TED TALK, 2017

[https://www.ted.com/talks/dana\\_kanze\\_the\\_real\\_reason\\_female\\_entrepreneurs\\_get\\_less\\_funding](https://www.ted.com/talks/dana_kanze_the_real_reason_female_entrepreneurs_get_less_funding)

<sup>30</sup> ESG acronym stands for Environmental, Social, Governance and is used in finance to indicate those activities that are connected to responsible investments, which pursue profitable objectives but keeping into consideration the environmental, social and governance aspects.

<sup>31</sup> See globally [Generation pledge](#); in the USA [Resource generation](#); in Canada [Resource movement](#); in the UK [Resource Justice](#).

<sup>32</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 2012.