

VALERIA DAMATO Lunch Talk

On December 1st in the afternoon, freshman of the Global Governance programme with some third-year students entered the warm Library Living Room. A “Lunch Talk” was about to be presented and discussed.

Two women were at the back of the room, Prof. Elisabetta Strickland and Valeria Damato, waiting to start.

What was going to be presented during the “unusual” lunch talk was one of the two women’s experience in the entrepreneurial environment. Valeria Damato was about to tell her story.

Introduced by Prof. Strickland as an example of “how a woman can grow out from traditional roots”, Valeria Damato turns out to be a successful businesswoman and entrepreneur, who decided to reinvent herself in a totally new sector: the Fashion world.

In her designing lies the idea that when women are travelling for business they need a small amount of dress and things to carry. So Damato designed a clothing suitable for any occasion; versatile cloths made with a special material that does not crease. Damato’s successful clothing line is called “Unconventional Jumpsuit”.

The talk, organised as an interview, would have covered two main areas of interest of Damato’s experience. The first, how she got her business dea, and a second, how she implemented it.

Valeria Damato started out as law school graduate. In her first job for the Italian Government, she dealt with regulation text at the Italian House of Representative (“Camera dei Deputati”) in Rome.

As her story foreruns, in 2008 Damato resigned to pursue a new objective and do what she felt was right for her: start her own little Italian fashion firm. Damato’s idea of fashion targed successful women, managers, travellers and especially mothers.

Damato admitted how she had no clue about how to start a business. She researched, she studied, she engaged herself in the realisation of her idea.

At the beginning she was not working alone. When asked about the difficulties she encountered, Damato made reference to other to women and also friends who were working with her. When the moment of planning the production chain and general business came, she entrusted two of her friends to be part of the project. In spite of an initial enthusiasm, distance grew deeper between them and in the end Damato found herself alone at the leading the whole business. She said she felt disappointed, uncertain about her skills, she wanted to give up. Something she did not allow herself to do, though

As she was right to believe, Damato’s idea of fashion business turned out to be successful. She found the right collaborators and in 2011 she was able present the SINAPSI line of handmade swimwears, thanks to which she gained international clients attention.

Making ways into her new carrier, and being herself a great traveller, she had the idea for a new project. What do women wear to go to work? From trainers to high heels and skirt,

crumpled clothes when day have travelled a lot, fancy dresses for dinners. Damato wanted to combine the comfort of a pair of jeans with the elegance.

Sure of herself, Damato designed a new clothing line coherent with that idea, and in 2016 she presented her elegant and comfortable “Unconventional Jumpsuit” collection.

Selling was nearly immediate and easy she said. All she had to do was wearing her jumpsuit while working and travelling and people spontaneously asked her where she bought it.

Right after Damato was asked about her work-life balance. She explained how the greatest help she got was family support. The only thing that seemed “insufficient” was time, she admitted.

Few more points were added. Damato concluded her speech with a powerful and engaging statement: “Women are the greatest invention”.

After a warm applause, it was question time. The first question asked concerned the money Damato was able to invest in her business. From where the funds she had came? During the presentation she explained that the initial amount came from her severance indemnity when she quitted her government job. These funds allowed her to produce Damato’s first bikini collection. A second question was raised, it was about how her legal skills and law school help her in her entrepreneurial activity. “Absolutely” she said, as she is running a business in a highly regulated sector. Next a third-year student focused on a central issue: What it was like to work in a male-dominated environment? Was she accepted by her male colleagues? In this particular occasion Damato did not give “yes” as an answer. She said she was not under the impression of being on a different level: “when men grasp your perseverance, your attitude and consciousness, they respect you”.

It also was the occasion for Prof. Piga to ask about the level of competition she encountered, as Damato’s presentation lacked of any mention of rivals or competitors. On this key question Damato said how if she is able to establish a good relation with another entrepreneur she goes for it. On the other hand when the co-working cannot be good nor productive, she simply “stops contacts”.

Next Prof. Piga deepening his point asked her about the negative impact of “costs of bureaucracy” small firms face in our country. Damato explained how she gets “no sense of this”, not an issue, not an obstacle. Clearly she deals with it, but she has dedicated staff to manage it. Finally when asked about “Delocalisation”, she said that she rather delocalise herself than her production. The “MADE IN ITALY” brand enhances the value of her products. A freshman asked one final question. Does Damato consider the price range of her product fair, taking into account the target consumer group (business women, travelers, socialite? and mothers)? On this thorny question, she admitted that price range may seem high at first, but considering the high quality and the good feedback her products receive, prices seem reasonable to her.

With this consideration, the 1st December lunch talk that hosting Valeria Damato came to an end. Thanks to the lunch talk the Global Governance students had the opportunity to meet an Italian business woman who succeeded in managing the fate of a whole production

with her own ideas and strength.

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