



Contribution ID: 1285

Type: Parallel Talk

Raising awareness on gender issues: a path through physics, outreach and diversity

Saturday, 9 July 2022 17:35 (20 minutes)

When and where it is convenient to start working on a path for raising awareness on gender issues? Our answer is...early! The high school is definitely a good start! And if the need is in the schools we, the Italian (CNR -Italian National Research Council- and INFN -Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics) component of the "GENERA-network" decided to go there.

We act for a few years already, as messenger of this certainty by promoting a school competition devoted to a consideration of the role of women in science and particularly in Physics. Our idea is that outreach activities can have the role of raising the awareness, the knowledge through the active involvement of students and that this is the way to change the culture, to remove the stereotypes. The aim is that new and more aware generations have the chance to make choices more appropriate and based on their real skills and their aspirations, without being influenced by hidden prejudices and stereotypes still able to obstruct the choice of STEM faculties by the girls. In these years we organized 3 competitions, with 226 videos, more than 100 schools and a thousand of students involved.

The students have been asked to produce a video on three main subjects: work on stereotypes and prejudices, well established in the social and cultural background, that condition choices of new generations and weigh especially on the role and image of women in the field of STEM subjects and scientific research; encourage young women to undertake a career in the world of science; know the character of women researchers and deepen aspects of their private and professional life, pointing out the important and often different contribution of women to scientific progress.

The students had the opportunity to produce videos ranging over a wide variety of disciplines and competencies, from the story of woman scientist included in history of their countries, to the use of English language, to the movie production, to the physics itself, and more.

For the organizers, all the competitions have been amazing experiences: watching videos and evaluating them breathing the same air of these youngsters who become actors, directors, writers and interviewer sharing their dreams and enthusiasm, but also perceiving sometimes their fear of disappointing expectations. This experience underlines as young generation can be the real driving force behind a cultural change in which women can always express an interest in science, a confidence in their scientific abilities, and ultimately decide to pursue scientific careers, as men to pursue human science careers. At the same time, we as researchers have to promote this cultural change, from ourselves, also using our outreach activities in a different way as in this case. Scope of the competition is the transition to an environment for learning, teaching and research in physics that is equally attractive and supportive to all genders, at each stage of their education and career path.

In this framework, GENERA Network, <https://www.genera-network.eu/>, originated from the EU-funded GENERA project, combining physicists and sociologists, has the scope to coordinate and improve gender equality policies in physics research organizations in Europe and world-wide.

In-person participation

Yes

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Session Classification: Education and Outreach

Track Classification: Education and Outreach