

"Women of Mathematics throughout Europe. A gallery of portraits" at the ÖMG-DMV 2017

The ÖMG-DMV congress 2017 (September 11-15) included in its rich programme also the presentation of the exhibition "Women of Mathematics throughout Europe – A Gallery of Portraits", which has been on display in the ground floor of the Department of Mathematics of the Paris-Lodron-University in Salzburg and has accompanied the participants throughout the whole meeting.

The exhibition is travelling all over the world celebrating 13 female mathematicians through photographs (by Noel Tovia Matoff) and excerpts of interviews (by Sylvie Paycha and Sara Azzali) which present their personal way of doing mathematics and living their academic career. The organizing committee of the ÖMG-DMV congress 2017 in cooperation with *gendup* (Zentrum für Gender Studies und Frauenförderung der Universität Salzburg) and the *Frauenbüro der Stadt Salzburg* saw in this meeting a perfect opportunity to promote this project not only in both the Austrian and German mathematical communities but also in the city of Salzburg.

The official opening of the exhibition took place on September 11th at 11:15 in the Audimax of the conference venue, but the exhibition had been already announced during the inaugural address by both Prof. Dr. Clemens Fuchs (Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee) and Prof. Dr. Michael Röckner (President of the German Mathematical Society). In this way, the participants were informed about the very first opportunity of visiting the exhibition, that is, the coffee break immediately before its official opening. The panels were exactly placed in the corridor where the coffee breaks took place so that all the participants could easily access them in their free time between lectures and other events. Indeed, this has turned out to be an excellent choice as the exhibition had a continuous flow of visitors during the whole congress.

The exhibition opening consisted of three brief addresses by Prof. Dr. Barbara Kaltenbacher (Vice-President of the Austrian Mathematical Society), Mag. Alexandra Schmidt (Frauenbüro der Stadt Salzburg) and Prof. Dr. Katrin Wendland (one of the mathematicians portrayed in the exhibition).

Prof. Dr. Barbara Kaltenbacher started her address quoting the words by the curators of the exhibition "Entering the field of mathematics can be tough, and women often encounter specific obstacles." which exactly leads to the need of supporting projects to encourage women in mathematics in their study paths as well as academic careers. With a striking mathematical analogy with the solutions of an equation, she perfectly summed up the aim of this exhibition initiative: *prove existence, non-uniqueness and stability of women in mathematics*. She also expressed gratitude to the several institutions and mathematicians supporting the exhibition project such as Prof. Dr. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, who had just been awarded an honorary DMV-membership, and the European Women in Mathematics association, whose convenor Prof. Dr. Carola-Bibiane Schönlieb was an invited plenary speaker in the congress. Prof. Kaltenbacher also gave thanks to both *gendup* and Frauenbüro of Salzburg for the support given to the local organization for showing the exhibition at this congress.

Mag. Alexandra Schmidt briefly described the work and the functions of the Frauenbüro of the city of Salzburg, which is extremely active also in cooperating with local institutions supporting women in science. She pointed out the fundamental *need of role models for young women* and the importance of having supportive and encouraging professors for young students. In fact, she offered a direct personal experience of how her love for mathematics has been instilled in her by one of her

professors at the University of Salzburg and still stays after many years.

The third and last address was given by Prof. Dr. Katrin Wendland who is indeed one of the protagonists of the exhibition. She began her speech by presenting very briefly some data about the ratio of women in mathematics in academia in the last two years from an optimistic point of view. Indeed, she did not only point out the still existing gender gap in mathematics but also the fact that the percentages nowadays show a great step forward with respect to the past. Therefore, she presented the exhibition like 13 very different answers to what we can do to fill this still existing gap. She underlined the richness of the diversity in the 13 interviews included in the exhibition, which gives visibility to individual stories of women who face in their own way the challenges of the mathematical academic world but that all have no regrets in having chosen mathematics as well as the common certainty that they could never let it go. Particularly impressive were her words about how to fight the feeling of insecurity which often blocks the path of several women in mathematics which can be summed up by this direct advice she gave out of her own experience: *“make a strength out of your insecurity, use your doubts to improve your scientific preparation”*.

Immediately after the exhibition opening, Prof. Dr. Ursula Hamenstädt delivered the Emmy Noether Lecture of the DMV entitled “Dynamics on the moduli space of abelian differentials”. During the lecture Prof Hamenstädt honoured two great women who made the history of this area and recently passed away: Marina Ratner and Maryam Mirzakhani, pointing out their extraordinary mathematical and human legacy.

The congress programme gave visibility to women in mathematics not only through the exhibition and the Emmy Noether Lecture of the DMV, but also offering a remarkable gender balance in the choice of the other plenary speakers and a good proportion of women participants, speakers and organizers of special sessions.

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