

Women in mathematics throughout Europe

Opening of the exhibition in Koper, May 15th 2021

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak here today. Let me start by saying a few words about the amazing project behind the opening of today's exhibition. And a word on the role of women in mathematics.

The touring exhibition Women of mathematics throughout Europe began at the 7th ECM in Berlin in 2016. This original exhibition consisted of portraits and interviews with 13 women working in maths at institutions in 13 different European countries. Since its start 5 years ago it has grown into a worldwide phenomenon with over 120 venues throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and Australia, and with several extended and parallel versions inspired by the original: in Cambridge in 2017 supplemented with portraits and interviews featuring local female mathematicians from Cambridge University's Faculty of Mathematics, in Chile in 2018 portraying Latin American women mathematicians, in Australia an exhibition portraying 16 Australian mathematicians that was just opened on May 12th this year, to mention just a few. The exhibition presented here is an extension of the original one by 7 portraits of women from countries on the shores of the Mediterranean.

For me personally it was an exciting experience and an honor to be a part of this project. It gave me the opportunity to meet the two authors of our exhibition, two amazing women: Sylvie Paycha, a professor of mathematics at the University at Potsdam is the author of the idea and the concept of the project, and Noel Matoff, a professional photographer, is the author of the beautiful portraits. The graphic design is due to Gesine Krüger.

So, how was a portrait made? I was asked to give a short black board talk on my math work to Sylvie and Noel who was taking photos. Following this was an interview by Sylvie, where the point was not on the maths, but on my life, my carrier, my point of view. It gave me the opportunity to look back and think about my profession as a part of my whole life, which was extremely fulfilling. I would like to take this opportunity to thank warmly my colleagues Marjeta Kramar Fijavž and Jasna Prezelj who organized the conference Women in Mathematics on the shores of the Mediterranean that took place in Bled as an accompanying event to the annual General Assembly of the Society of Mathematicians, Physicists and Astronomers of Slovenia in 2019, where all this was taking place, and who kindly invited me there.

Today's opening of the exhibition Women of mathematics throughout Europe is one of the more than 120 events going on throughout the world in recognition of May 12th, the day dedicated to celebrating women in mathematics. Among them is another project of Sylvie Paycha, the film "Words of women in mathematics in the time of Corona", an important document on the impact of Corona crisis.

This particular day was chosen since it is the birthday of Maryam Mirzakhani, the first and until now the only woman that has been awarded the Fields medal (in 2014), the highest honor for a mathematical accomplishment. The fact that no other women have ever been awarded a Fields medal tells us something about the position of women in the mathematical world. Firstly, there are not very many of them! And secondly, the Fields medal is awarded

only to young mathematicians, younger than 40, and women are to a bigger extent busy taking care of their families and little children with less time for dedicated and time-consuming mathematical breakthroughs in this period of their lives.

This is one of the points, wonderfully illustrated through the interviews in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition. Another point is that the women mathematicians are of all kinds, young and old, with different cultural backgrounds, outstanding in mathematics and just mathematicians. But the problems we face are similar and so are the joys and the enthusiasm in being a part of this beautiful field of science.

So, what is the role of women in mathematics? Well, it is to do maths.

Finally, I have the pleasant duty to thank again the authors of this wonderful exhibition, the hosting institution University of Primorska, and the local team of organizers that have the credit that, despite the pandemic and all the trouble it brought, the opening is actually taking place here in this historical palace in Koper today.

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