

A Tiepolist's Diary...

Day One

Yesterday I left a snow storm in Stockholm and arrived in Milan to great weather and blossoming magnolias. However, my mission is not to find warmer weather but rather to exchange knowledge with my peers working in the research unit at [Fondazione Cariplo](#). Like the scholars we fund, grant givers also seek to share best practices with each other. And the best way to do this is by meeting up, by sharing experiences and by being curious. This is made possible through the TIEPOLO program organised by the European Foundation Centre, and with Fondazione Cariplo's Secretary General Pier Mario Vello as one of the program's staunchest supporters, Milan is a great place to start. Milan is also where I met Riccardo Porro and Patricia Frias, the two people responsible for the excellent organisation of my visit.

And, no offense to the researchers that we fund, administrators make the best organisers. I have seldom seen such a well-organised plan: a plan completely tailor-made to suit my wishes and curiosities. And so far the execution of the plan has been equally excellent. So my only fear, after my first day, is that the exchange will be mostly to my advantage and therefore a little unfair. However, the research unit staff were keen to hear about our Open Access policy and I was very happy to brief them on it and to recommend them to contact my colleague Britta Lövgren for further information. This morning was spent with a general exchange of how our foundations work and how our selection processes are set up in particular. Then I was briefed by Diana Pozzoli on a very successful programme launched by Cariplo a few years ago: their international recruitment programme. Seven years and some 70 scholarly visits later (four to eight months stay per annum over at least two years), the programme has been deemed so successful that the Lombardy region wants to become a co-funder. I will certainly bring back a report on this programme that so adequately addresses concerns about how to encourage the internationalisation of Italian research whilst also providing tremendous training opportunities for young Italian researchers at the host institution. This topic is much debated in Sweden in the preparations for the research bill due later this year.

To be fair, I did rattle on about my pet project, Flexit, for quite awhile. This knowledge exchange programme is in fact what brought me here in the first

place. Cariplo has extensive experience of technology transfer and my first site visit today was to [Fondazione Filarete](#) which has a few years experience of working to increase joint ventures between business and science in the field of Life Sciences. During my very exciting tour of the premises (650 m²) Mario Salerno and Gero Bongiorno described the on-going projects, and even if some of them were hard to grasp for someone with a degree in humanities, it was evident that they were important, both in terms of their potential for society's and people's well-being in general and for future business ventures. I also learned a new fun word: incubatees are companies spawned from incubators.

Day Two

My second day started with a wonderful walk in the park next to Fondazione Cariplo's beautiful building, but I was soon to be even more awed by what is probably the most magnificent university building in the world. Students attending courses at the University of Milan have the incredible fortune of residing in a former hospital for the poor, [la Cà Granda](#), built in that great period for Italian art and architecture, the 15th century. And I was lucky enough to be there on a graduation day and thereby be a witness to the ritual of jumping over the hedge in the courtyard wearing a crown of bay leaves (a tradition apparently dating back to Dante's days). On the top floor Roberto Tiezzi and his colleagues at the [UNIMITT](#) office reside, where I was given an excellent overview of this technology transfer office's activities. I felt like a student at yet another exclusive tutorial.

This feeling continued when Diana Pozzoli later described Fondazione Cariplo's intellectual property policy. Later, after another delicious lunch in great company, I had a wonderfully rewarding talk with the head of Cariplo's research unit, Carlo Mango. It is clear that Carlo and his team have really developed the research granting side of the foundation's activities in the last decade. I was impressed by many projects and collaborations, too many to mention here, and also extremely pleased with Carlo's interest in possible collaborations with my foundation, Stiftelsen Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and thereby with the idea of expanding the mandate of Cariplo to also fund research in the social sciences. As I am always on a mission to emphasise the importance of research in the humanities and social sciences, when I meet such enthusiasm, it makes my day.

Day Three

My third and last full day begins with a brisk walk with Lucia Brambilla to the offices of [Fondamenta SGR](#) very near Il Duomo and another passionate presentation by about yet another Cariplo initiative. Funded by several banking foundations, this TT venture office has since 2008 been helping companies (or should I say incubatees) sprung from innovative research ideas, to approach the market. Listening to Nicola Redi's presentation, it strikes me that, both internally and externally, Fondazione Cariplo are experts both in finding talents and in matching these talents to causes that excite them. Back at the Cariplo office another enthusiast, Simona Pinnavaia, describes two interesting programmes, both organised and funded by Cariplo and partners, and both in the field of Agrosience.

In the afternoon I had the great privilege of a tour and a description of the history of [The Mario Negri Institute](#) by its founder and enthusiastic leader, the famous Professor Silvio Garattini. We are even taken around to a few labs where we stumble on state of the art research concerning how to detect how drugs are disseminated in tumours, which may do wonders for future cancer treatments. We also look at charts that reveal drug usage in Milan through a method invented at the institute (by analysing sewage water); not surprisingly cocaine usage increases on the weekends whereas heroin levels remain the same. More unexpected maybe is that over the last year cocaine usage has decreased and amphetamine has increased, so the credit crunch also influences drug user's consumption patterns. I immediately envision a potential interdisciplinary project where social science analyses will come in handy. Over and out from Milan!

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