

A local boy, with a global view

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“When he remembers a great match by Yelverton, the overhead kicks of Boninsegna, or the long trips on the hairpin bends in the Swiss Alps, on his BMW motorcycle, his eyes light up.”

It is now six years since the interview that “crowned” **Michele Graglia** the chairman of the **Union of Industrialists of Varese Province**. He is still the same, has the same grit and enthusiasm. And only twelve hours before, he was on the terraces of San Siro Stadium, listening to one of his heroes, the “Boss”, Bruce Springsteen, who, at 63, is still able to thrill his fans for over three hours.

“I remember the concert in 1985. I was still at university at the time.”

We are sitting on the park bench of the LIUC, in Castellanza, discussing the unusual characteristics of this university, which opened at about the time his first child was born. Michele Graglia’s academic background is in engineering, and this has always characterised him. He is passionate about new technologies, starting with how they work. “I like getting my hands on cables, a bit like using bolts in mechanics.”

The new role that he has been given, as the chairman leading the University, both flatters and excites him. “**Working in contact with the academic world is fascinating. The true challenge is to put this into a bigger context**, of the whole of society, starting with the companies in which the idea of the LIUC was formed.”

The University is young, but is now well-established. Apart from the ordinary running, what is there that need doing most urgently?

“We need to get ourselves known, and seen more as a university of the territory. This is an important aspect, because the LIUC is a resource for everyone. Today, it is able to attract more people from far afield, than from Varese.”

Does it suffers from some labels that have been attached to it?

“In part, yes. The LIUC was created by industrialists in Varese, to give a qualified and serious response to the needs of companies. This is still fine, but it’s not enough, because Castellanza is an excellent place to study, and this is the main point. The other myth to dispel is that the LIUC is a place for ‘spoilt young people’. This isn’t true, and the numbers are there to prove it. Just consider the very large presence of foreign students, which puts us at the top in Italy.”

This is a strength. How important is it for LIUC?

“Internationalisation is one of the distinctive elements of our university. The large presence of young people from every part of the world is stimulating, also for our students, because they can learn how to deal with life, starting with these experiences. We also do a lot of international internships, and this broadens the mind.”

Some German and British students we were speaking to earlier, were saying how nice it is to be in a small town. Do you think this really makes the difference from Milan or other large cities?

“Today, I think it counts very little to be in Milan or in another city. What counts is the content of the work you do. Of course, a large city is stimulating, but there’s no guarantee that, by studying there, you’ll experience the international dimension, but here, in Castellanza, this is an integral part and a strength of what we do.”

The LIUC is also experimentation, and one example is Lab#id. We know them well because we got them to develop our Android app, and we’re collaborating on a number of projects for Varese, Smart City. How important do you think experiences like these are for the university?

“Very. There are some interesting resources here, and experiences like Lab#id are a feather in our cap. They mustn’t be just a part, but the core itself of the university, because they characterise this place. This is not only true for companies, which interact on several projects, but for the students who see how possible it is to do research.”

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