

## Mr Como NExT: We need to focus on the innovation ecosystem

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“The future will be innovation, but it must also be attention to sustainability.” We are just a few hours away from the end of the TechMission to the United States, by the Varese Association of Industrialists, promoted by the Lombard Manufacturers’ Association, Confindustria Lombardia, Digital Innovation Hub and the director of the Innovation Hub **ComoNExT**, **Stefano Soliano**, who made an initial assessment of the experience, identifying the moments that struck him most. His position, and the need to keep up with innovation around the world, encouraged him to take part in the **TechMission to Boston and San Francisco**.

The Innovation Hub, **Como NExT**, is a science and technology park based in Lomazzo, Lombardy, between Como and Milan. Its mission is to carry out activities that support innovation and innovative businesses, and, today, 130 companies and start-ups operate within it. Its history and design are certainly fascinating: this hub is a former cotton mill which was completed in 1893. Today, innovation is not the only word used for this place, there are also curiosity and generosity, as Stefano said in his TEDx talk, in Caserta.

The project started with the recovery of the building, which was begun by the Chamber of Commerce and the Cariplo Foundation, inspired by European clusters. Today, the company is managed by Sviluppo Como, a company with mixed public-private capital, in which the Chamber of Commerce in Como, the municipality of Lomazzo, Confindustria Como, the Polytechnic of Milan Foundation and several local banks are also investors. A link with the territory of Varese, is the master’s degree in innovation management, which will be created in collaboration with the LIUC – Cattaneo University, in 2019.”

“The TechMission meeting that struck me the most was the one with **Enzo Carrone**, the deputy director of **SLAC**, the **Stanford Linear Accelerator Centre**, which is the national US laboratory that operates at Stanford University for the United States Department of Energy, because he didn’t talk to us about technology, but about the system and the **ecosystem of innovation, which is what we must focus on**, without thinking about replicating it ourselves, but, instead, considering it in terms of a composite system, where all stakeholders have an interest in making certain things happen. Carrone, more than others, reminded us that **the real theme, when we talk about innovation, is a change of culture and mentality**. Innovation is a state of mind, a bit like the *New York State of Mind* that Billy Joel sang about.”

The next step to be taken by Como NExT’s is a replication of the Lomazzo model, also in other towns such as Novara and Caserta, in order to create new innovation hubs. Experimentation has already started, at the same time as greater integration of the first hub into a broader project, that connects the country’s innovation and projects it into the future.

And how does Stefano Soliano see the future, after his visit to Boston and Silicon Valley? “I imagine it to be very interesting and positive, with a very optimistic outlook. We are facing a trend that is already underway. For 100 years now, the life of man has improved in many respects. We will have to pay particular attention to the great issue of sustainability, working to ensure that science, technology and

economic progress are always compatible with environmental sustainability.”

di Translated by Eliana Poillucci (Reviewed by Rolf Cook)