



Students



Travelers



Volunteers



Partners



Mothers



Professionals



Free Spirits

WIN Forum 2007 - Special Report - Part 1 of 2

**Women's International Networking
(WIN)
Conference, Oslo, Norway**

26 – 30 September 2007

Andrea Martins

This year's 10th anniversary conference (which was my first WIN conference) definitely lived up to WIN's reputation of providing inspiring speakers and a very welcoming environment in which to network with women from all over the world. It was a privilege to attend and I would recommend it to anyone.

Seven hundred women from (predominantly Europe, but) all over the world attended the core conference program, which ran over two and a half days (or four days, if you attended all program sessions).

For those of you who could not attend, please let me share with you some of the program's highlights:

Wednesday 26 September

This first evening hosted three events: the Network President's Meeting; a VIP Cocktail Function; and the open networking dinner. The first was a gathering of about 10 women who were Presidents of their respective women's networks. It included Stephanie MacKendrick (The International Alliance for Women), Diane Morris (The International Alliance for Women), Ania Jakubowski (Geneva Women in International Trade), Patience Allen (Association of International Professional and Business Women) and of course, Kristin Engvig, the mastermind behind the whole WIN concept, who started WIN from a kitchen table just over ten years ago.

Some of the issues discussed in the **Network President's Meeting** included:



Marie O-Hara (WIN),
Kristin Engvig (WIN) &
Andrea Martins (ExpatWomen)



Elisabeth Sille
(Singer)



Gisela Raeber (WIN)
Josephine Okot (Victoria Seeds) &
Joan Lawrence (HP)



Liev Arnesen (Explorer) &
Dr Amany Asfour (EBWA)



Jeanette Huber (Zukunftsinstitut) &
Zohreh Tabatabai (ILO)

- **The challenges of operating women's professional or social organizations on a volunteer basis** (eg. women regularly moving in and out of town, women dealing with other life issues [such as pregnancy, children, relationships, work issues, work/life balance issues etc.], and some women not carrying the responsibility through its full term, perhaps due a "too-casual" sense of responsibility towards the organisation (eg. once the honeymoon phase of being on the board of the organisation wears off).

- **Ideas about how different women's organizations can better collaborate** (to share ideas, resources, networks etc.) – both within your city/country and across borders.

- **What processes in the organization can be automated**, so that board members' time can be focussed more on valuable strategic contributions, rather than spending lots of time on admin and the taking of membership monies and so on. Ideas included using a website (to disseminate information and to link members) and using PayPal (and/or similar applications) on websites, to accept member money.

- **Thinking seriously about employing an administrative assistant** (full-time or part-time), to again alleviate some of the burden of the mundane admin tasks, so that the board members' volunteer time could be used in other ways.

The second and third events that evening were just enjoyable opportunities to introduce yourself to some new faces and learn about why everyone had flown into Oslo for this annual event.

Thursday 27 September

On Thursday, the inspiration started. After some traditional Norwegian folk music (thanks to Gro Elisabeth Sille) and an official opening speech by a Norwegian Minister, **Margherita Agnelli** (Italian/Swiss) took the stage. This woman earned my respect in her very first sentence, when she proudly announced that she was the mother to eight children. As the mother of “only” two, I immediately anointed her with qualities such as strength, courage, commitment and stamina. She was already a new hero to me.

The reason Margherita was on stage was because she is one of the founders of Blue Orchard Asset Management – a micro-finance company loaning money to women in very poor countries, in order to empower them to start businesses and generate new incomes. Her company started with two collaborators, but they now have twenty collaborators and they manage US\$700 million, which they use to finance 100 micro-finance organizations in 33 emerging countries. In a world where more than half of our population live on less than US\$2 a day, one can only imagine that being able to access micro-finance credit from an organization like Margherita’s, could just be the turning point to help many families who struggle to start their own businesses and are crying out for a helping hand. Margherita’s story was wonderful and set the scene for the next speaker to come.

Liv Arnesen (Norwegian) was actually my favorite speaker for the whole conference.

She was a lady who had achieved so much, but was so incredibly humble. In short, at the age of eight, Liv dreamed of skiing to the South Pole. At 41, she realized that dream and became the first woman in the world to ski solo to the South Pole.

If that was not enough, she later went on to ski on a trip with Ann Bancroft (American) - the first woman in the world to ski to the North Pole. Together, they skied across the Antarctic Continent (in reaction to her male critics who said that skiing to the South Pole, a 1200km trek that reached 3000 meter elevation, was "too short" a journey!). Not only did they achieve this great feat, but they remained good friends during and after, which in itself is highly commendable, given how extreme their circumstances and how tired and frustrated they would have been along the way.

But Liv and Ann didn't just ski together to fulfil some inner personal goals. Both from teaching backgrounds, they had invested many, many hours of energy prior and during their trip, encouraging children to join Liv and Ann virtually (via their [website](#)) on their journey and be inspired to follow their dreams. With the help of key US media, by the time Liv and Ann had finished their trek they had 10 million children registered on their site, living the dream with them. What a phenomenally empowering experience.

Following on from Liv, came [Jeanette Huber](#) (German), a board member at Zukunftsinstitut. She was introduced as a "Futurist" and she gave a really interesting presentation about "Mega-trends".

Mega-trend 1: Individualism

Jeanette talked about how in days gone by, our futures were typically decided by our family heritage and that jobs and marriages were "for life". She compared that to today's environment, where more people than ever before, can both "choose and revise" their life plan. She gave the high-profile example of Chile's first (and current) female President, Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria – a woman who is a single mother, with three children of two different fathers. Far from the traditional picture of a Chilean President, President Jeria was described as a symbol of modern opportunity.

Mega-trend 2: Creative Work

On this topic, Jeanette compared the days of old, where industrial-age jobs offered only job repetition, to today's growing "creative class" – and the growing philosophy of work being "a quest for difference". She talked about how the term "creative" was now not just set aside for conventional artists, but how people were adding flair to every-day jobs, with titles such as "Molecular Chefs", "Ingenious Engineers", "Odd Organic Farmers" and "Hip HR Managers".

She presented a matrix whereby she demonstrated status symbols in the old elite (eg. office dictation, the Financial Times newspaper, fountain pens and Cognac) to the new elite (eg. email, Google, laptops and water as the new power drink of choice).

Mega-trend 3: Neo-Ecology

Jeanette described neo-ecology as the era of "LoHaS" – which stood for "Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability". She talked at depth about the new quest for balance between

people, profit and the planet – and how this was slowly transforming the business ethic of an increasing number of companies.

Mega-trend 4: Women

“Female consumption is booming!” Jeannette exclaimed, comparing habits of today’s women to the habits of women of previous generations, who were typically house-bound, child-rearers and stitchers of their own fashions. She talked about women’s increasing high expectations, namely in our search for elite men (ie. intelligent, high income earners, incredibly handsome, giving, sensitive and apparently our list goes on!) - describing this as a cause of the “first-lady frustration”, where women who do not grab those “top (read: perfect) men” become frustrated and do not understand why their expectations are not being met completely.

Google Fight

By the way, if you’ve ever wondered which words/terms are searched more on Google, Jeanette told us about this really cool website called **Google Fight**. Check it out.

Zohreh Tabatabai (Iranian) was next. Zohreh is the Director of Communication for the International Labor Organization (ILO) (United Nations) in Geneva, Switzerland. This lady was an incredible lady. She started as a young Iranian diplomat and she went to the very first UN conference for women in 1975. In her explanation of what the ILO does for women, she gave us dozens of statistics, including the following:

- Almost 800 million people have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write;
- Two-thirds of these people are women; and
- 95 million migrants are women.

Zohreh talked a lot about the ILO’s current push for the creation of “decent jobs”, not just any jobs, for people – particularly women. Zohreh was definitely a woman to listen closely to and respect.

Gabriele Zedlmeyer (German), Vice-President, Marketing and Global Citizenship for Hewlett Packard, then gave us a presentation about both having the courage to take risks in your workplace (in order to shine and get noticed) and about various technologies which she believed we should all be familiar. These were:

- Webcasts – to visually enhance your computer;
- Podcasts – to provide audio enhancement to your computer, MP3 or mobile phone;
- Blogs – to learn “what’s really going on” in your area of interest;
- Wikis – which she described as a unified publishing system to share documents on the web;
- RSS – a delivery mechanism for web updates, podcasts and webcasts; and
- Social networking sites – as a way of extending your network exponentially.

To learn about some of these, Gabriele recommended women visit these links to see some short two-minute videos on CommonCraft.com (note, you can find others on the CommonCraft site also):

http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english

<http://www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english>

<http://www.commoncraft.com/bookmarking-plain-english>

The final speaker for the day was **Josephine Okot** (Ugandan). Josephine is the Managing Director of Victoria Seeds Ltd (which was founded by local women entrepreneurs in 2004) in Kampala, Uganda. She explained how the business's goal is to create a profitable and sustainable business, that not only provides seed options to local farmers, but educates farmers about different farm techniques and helps them look after their land for the long-term. As a 2007 Yara Prize Laureate in Uganda, Josephine didn't take long to command the respect of the audience and her passion for her business was an inspiration to every woman present.

After Josephine, we split into a range of workshop groups, then later all met for a group dinner.

To find out what happened on **Friday and Saturday**, please see Part Two of our WIN Report next month!

Warmest
Andrea.

wishes,

PS. To read more behind-the-scenes snippets, please see our new **Expat Women Blog**.

<http://www.expawomen.com/>