

# Beyond

n.9

The ISI Florence & Umbra Institute  
Studies in International Education



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## **Contributors**

Stefano U. Baldassarri

Dahria Charadnichenka

Claire Chisholm

Michael A. Di Giovine

Bradley Flamm

Serena Giorgi

Spyridon S. Kogkas

Catherine Nardi

Nina Peci

Virgilio A Reyes, Jr.

Paul Sylvester

Francesco Vossilla

Zhang Zheng-Ying

## **Design and layout**

Nina Peci

## **Cover photo**

Bumi SEO, *Scopio*

## **Contacts**

E-mail: [npeci@isiflorence.org](mailto:npeci@isiflorence.org)

[www.beyondjournal.isiflorence.org](http://www.beyondjournal.isiflorence.org)

[www.isiflorence.org](http://www.isiflorence.org) | [www.umbra.org](http://www.umbra.org)

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# Roots and Routes: Sustainability, Cultural Exchange, and The Humanistic Tradition

Once again, the yearly issue of *Beyond* (the ISI Florence and Umbra Institute peer-reviewed journal on international education) proves to be as rich and diversified as our two study abroad programs are. The articles collected in the following pages reflect some of the many, different activities that our institutes organize, promote, and host. These include projects of various kinds by administrators, faculty, students, and alums.

In keeping with the scenario I have just described, this issue of *Beyond* features a scholarly essay, structured as a dialogue, among three experts on sustainability studies: *Offsets and the Path to Carbon Neutrality in Higher Education Study Abroad: A Moderated Conversation* (by Michael A. Di Giovine, Paul Sylvester, and Bradley Flamm). As ISI Abroad academic partners know, sustainability studies have always been a major concern for both our programs. Initially addressed, above all, through a dedicated four-course agriculture track at ISI Florence (mostly in collaboration with University of Connecticut, from 2009 to 2017), sustainability studies have taken center stage at Umbra Institute in the last decade or so, thanks to the efforts and the vision of its director, Professor Zachary Nowak, who holds a Harvard PhD in this disciplinary area. Among the related initiatives is the international food studies conference that Umbra Institute hosts in Perugia every other year, in the early summer.

Another important field of studies investigated by ISI Abroad is East-West relations. This is also due to the presence of a Japanese university (Kanazawa) in our consortium and by the institutional ties we have developed – especially from 2010 onwards – with study centers that share the same cultural interests. For this reason, in 2016 ISI Abroad launched the first Florence guidebook ever in simplified ideograms for Chinese travellers. Focused on the art and history of the Tuscan capital, the guidebook was written by Francesco Vossilla (former ISI Abroad professor) and his wife – as well as fellow art historian – Zhang Zheng-Ying. Francesco

and Ying also participated in the international conference on Italy and the Philippines (the first one ever promoted by a study abroad program in this country) that ISI Florence hosted at Palazzo Rucellai on October 21st, 2025. On that occasion, they gave two papers, which were eventually conflated into their article for this issue of *Beyond*. As the title suggests (*A Summary of the Asian Missions of Two Florentine Dominicans: Angelo Cocchi and Vittorio Ricci*), their essay explores the contribution that the Italian (especially Tuscan) missionaries made to the early modern history of those Asian regions. Together with this scholarly text, the current issue of *Beyond* publishes a revised version of the speech that Virgilio A. Reyes Jr. (Filipino ambassador to Italy in 2011-2014) gave at the conference. Entitled *Florence and the Philippines: An Autumn Encounter in 2025*, Reyes' speech highlights not only the long-time relations between Italy and his country but also the significant presence of a widespread Filipino community on Italian soil today.

Over the past few years, ISI Abroad has expanded and strengthened its ties with European institutions as well. Among them is Imagine Heritage, a Greek non-profit entity based in Athens. Founder and CEO of Imagine Heritage, Spyridon S. Kogkas is also a versatile scholar. Suffice it to say that in the last few months he presented a paper (*The Vatican's Missionary Heritage as a Resource for Global Cooperation*) at the Palazzo Rucellai conference mentioned above, worked with me and Athena Kritikou (founder and president of SKEP, a Greek association that for almost two decades now has been implementing a wide range of educational projects) to organize the disability awareness international conference *Open Minds, Open Doors* at Palazzo Strozzi, here in Florence, on February 20<sup>th</sup>, and has written an article for the current issue of *Beyond*. In his text for our journal (*Medical Humanism: Bridging Ethical Economy and Florence's Heritage*) Dr. Kogkas brings together some of his main ethical, scientific, and scholarly interests by calling for a holistic approach to the notion of "therapy." In doing so, he also stresses the importance of Greek culture and its interaction with the Western world throughout the centuries. Looking ahead, I am glad to announce that Dr. Kogkas will return to some of these

topics in the international conference on Byzantium and Florence that our institute will host in mid-October this year.

Also connected to the recent *Open Minds, Open Doors* event is the article by my ISI Florence colleagues Nina Peci and Serena Giorgi. Drawing from their experience as DEIA Officer and Volunteer Activities-Internships Coordinator, respectively, in this issue of *Beyond* Nina and Serena offer some of the reflections they shared at the conference, suggesting how – in their opinion – society should adapt to fully welcome (and learn from) people with disabilities.

The article by Nina and Serena also comments on a recorded video message that ISI Florence-Tulane University alumna Katie Ciulla sent us for the February 20<sup>th</sup> conference. In the fall of 2022, Katie did a practicum at our institute. As she explained in her video message, that practicum turned out to be an eye-opening experience. This is far from surprising to anyone who has been either volunteering or working in international education for some time.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the other three articles collected here, that is, those by Claire Chisholm, Catherine Nardi, and Dahria Charadnichenka. In *When Discomfort Becomes Your Greatest Teacher: ISI Florence Alumni Tell us Their Lasting Impacts of Study Abroad*, Claire (ISI Florence colleague from the Student Services Office) discusses a series of articles by former ISI Abroad enrollees whose academic terms in Italy have proved most beneficial in a number of ways. Along similar lines, in the article entitled *Gains and Pains of Short-Chain: Post COVID Reflections on Food Policy and Sustainability*, Catherine Nardi (University of Maryland-ISI Florence alumna and, most recently, winner of a Fulbright scholarship) shares the main finds of her latest research, which she conducted during her second stay in Italy. Finally, a few months ago Dahria Charadnichenka (a brilliant Rutgers University student who spent the 2025 fall semester at ISI Florence) interviewed art historian Linda Falcone. Internationally renowned and much admired for her long collaboration with philanthropist Jane Fortune, Professor Falcone and her many endeavours (including the former Advancing Women Artists foundation) serve as

precious testimonies to the moral and civic role of the humanities. Like many ISI Abroad students, Dahria has not only understood the need for subjects like art, literature, and history to create a more humane society but has decided to better assess their importance by meeting with an expert who, like many of our alumni, chose a specific, rewarding career path because of an academic term abroad. I thus find Dahria's interview with such a distinguished art historian to be the "ideal" closing piece for this year's issue of *Beyond*.

Stefano U. Baldassarri, PhD  
*Director, ISI Florence*

academics



# Offsets and the Path to Carbon Neutrality in Higher Education Study Abroad

A Moderated Conversation

Michael A. Di Giovine – Paul Sylvester – Bradley Flamm

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## Abstract

The article is based on a panel discussion hosted by West Chester University's Office of Sustainability. It focuses on the work that the university<sup>1</sup> does to address climate change by reducing carbon emissions in both operations and academics, the role that carbon-offsets for study abroad can play in that effort, and how study abroad more broadly can support sustainability. Participants in the discussion are Bradley Flamm, West Chester University's Director of the Office of Sustainability; Michael A. Di Giovine, Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and Director of WCU's Ethnographic Field School on Sustainable Food and Cultural Heritage in Perugia, Italy; and Paul Sylvester, Associate Professor in the Department of Early and Middle Grades Education. All three have worked on the issue of sustainable study abroad, participated in educational travel abroad, and advised the university's Global Engagement Office on sustainability training for study abroad program directors.

**Keywords:** International Education, Sustainability, Environmental Issues, Anthropology, Sociology.

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Study abroad poses a unique challenge to many institutions of higher education. On the one hand, it offers students high-impact learning experiences (Kuh 2008) that complement their regular schooling and,

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1. West Chester University is a regional, comprehensive public university in southeast Pennsylvania with a student population of approximately 17,000 and a history dating to the establishment of the West Chester State Normal School (for teacher training) in 1871.

often through informal learning opportunities, promises to create more engaged, diversity- and sustainability-minded “global citizens” (see Bodinger de Uriarte and Di Giovine, 2021). On the other hand, study abroad often has several sustainability problems—with its often-high carbon footprint topping the list. Study abroad is predicated on transportation—of moving (often via air transportation, as well as through cars, buses and trains) from place to place. Transportation accounts for 24% of all carbon emissions; while nearly half of this number is vehicle based, the airline industry accounts for nearly 2.5% of all global carbon emissions, which is greater than many countries! (see Ritchie, 2020; Ritchie and Roser 2024).

At West Chester University, the largest of Pennsylvania’s fully funded state liberal arts institutions, study abroad and sustainability both have factored into its long-term plans. In 2010, the university embarked on a path to be carbon neutral—an endeavor that saw the decommissioning of its coal-fired power plant, the construction of several new LEED-certified buildings, and creating one of the largest higher ed geo-exchange heating and cooling systems in North America. West Chester University has also worked to ensure that any student who wishes to study abroad has the ability to do so; it works to keep costs down and to create funding opportunities and special programs for underrepresented groups of travelers. Consequently, prior to, and now following, the COVID-19 pandemic, the university is grappling with how to manage an upswing of study abroad students with the promise of lowering its overall carbon footprint. One idea is to embrace carbon offsets.

Carbon offsets are activities that compensate for a polluter’s emission of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases by providing for—or paying for—an emission reduction elsewhere. Since greenhouse gas emissions are a holistic environmental problem, it is thought that the earth’s environment should benefit from a reduction no matter where the cutbacks occur. However, this is not without contestation; critics point to ethical, social, and economic issues, and the fact that carbon offsets can be bought, sold, or traded in global markets.

The discussion, which occurred in April 2023 but has been updated after transcription, addresses three questions:

- How has West Chester University addressed climate change and why do carbon offsets for study abroad make sense as a next step?
- What are the pitfalls of carbon offsets and how can they be avoided?
- What should study abroad that fosters sustainability look like?

## The Discussion

**Flamm:** Before we dig into this discussion of study abroad, sustainability, and carbon offsets, I want to set the context by highlighting a fact about how our time is different than the rest of human history. The first is that the human population now exceeds 8 billion people (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025). For more than 99.9% of the history of human beings living on this planet there were not even one billion people; that figure wasn't reached until about the year 1800. This is extraordinary in the history of our species living on our planet.

**Di Giovine:** Right. For much of our human existence humans were organized into small bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers. Most anthropologists and human geographers believe that the problems started 10,000 years ago with the birth of agriculture, which allowed us to become sedentary and create villages and larger settlements; the population rose, and with it came new social, economic and environmental problems (see, for example, Diamond 1997). What's interesting is that we were actually quite mobile as foragers; however, the *technologically-fueled* mobility that we embrace today exacerbates the current environmental crisis — not mobility itself.

**Flamm:** Correct. And this leads me to the second extraordinary fact

we need to consider, which is that the climate conditions we've experienced in the last 10 years are different (more extreme) than at any time in the 300,000 or so years that human beings have existed. These are dire circumstances. I am speaking of both the unprecedented size of the human population and the unprecedented heat stored in the Earth's atmosphere and oceans.

Now, let's zoom in to talk about how West Chester University fits into all of this. Dating back decades, there have been students and faculty and staff at this university who have understood this challenge and have encouraged the university as an institution to take action to maintain our educational mission while reducing our carbon emissions, eventually to zero. In the most current climate action plan, we pledged to do that by 2025, and we have not succeeded.

**Di Giovine:** Brad, it's great the university has made these commitments, but how does WCU know if we're meeting those goals? How do we measure the impact of our actions?

**Flamm:** We measure our contributions to climate change, as most institutions of higher education do, by looking at three broad categories of carbon emissions.

The first category consists of those that we refer to as Scope One emissions from on-campus fossil fuels combustion. This refers to all the natural gas and heating oil that we burn to keep some of our buildings warm. We also use a lot of gasoline, diesel, propane and compressed natural gas to operate our vehicle fleet. We have to take responsibility for all those emissions by documenting what they are and calculating how many tons of carbon are emitted.

We also track Scope Two emissions that come from our use of electricity purchased from the local utility company, all the electrons that come through the grid to this university so that we can keep the lights on and have projectors and computers working the way we need them to operate. The actual carbon dioxide emissions don't

happen *on* our campus; these occur at the power plants in the large multi-state electricity grid that we draw from. Some of that electricity is generated through solar and wind, but most of it is generated through natural gas- and coal-powered plants, as well as nuclear power plants that are still operating in this part of the country.

Finally, our Scope Three emissions: we call these *indirect* emissions because the university is not *directly* responsible for them, but we must, nevertheless, document them. They involve emissions from the solid waste we send to landfills, the wastewater that goes to treatment plants, as well as things like commuting to and from campus, and all the travel associated with the university's administration, faculty academic conferences, and, of most importance to our conversation today, study abroad.

So, to get back to your question about measuring our impact, we can report that this university has made very good progress between 2010, which is our base year for monitoring, and FY 2023, the most recent fiscal year for which we have comprehensive data, when our total carbon emissions were approximately 30% lower.<sup>2</sup> That's pretty good. That's almost a third. And many institutions that have been trying to reduce their carbon emissions have not made that much progress.

What's more, that happened at a time that our student body increased by almost 20% and we added new buildings on campus with total square footage of building space higher by about 16%. On a per person basis our emissions dropped by almost 40% over that timeframe. That is really good progress. But it wasn't sufficient to get us to that goal of carbon neutrality by 2025. We're not even on track to reaching that by 2050.

With this in mind, the Sustainability Council at the university, work-

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2. To be more precise, WCU uses a standard unit of measurement for our greenhouse gas emissions, MTCO<sub>2</sub>E, that accounts for the climate warming potential of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides, and other emissions that our operations produce. "MTCO<sub>2</sub>E" stands for *metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent* emissions. Because "carbon emissions" is a more intuitive and broadly understood concept, however, it is the shorthand term we use in this paper.

ing with the Office of Sustainability, has undertaken an update to our Climate Action Plan (West Chester University, 2022). The new *Climate and Sustainability Action Plan*, or CSAP, will focus on carbon emissions reductions, as well as important strategies and objectives for dining services on campus, our transportation systems, waste and recycling, purchasing, green spaces, and our teaching and research priorities and practices, bringing concepts of sustainability into all areas of our academics and operations.

Our CSAP update will include strategies to reach carbon neutrality in both Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions in the next 15 or 20 years. Scope Three emissions on the other hand are much, much harder to address. The transportation sector, in which our fossil-fuel-intensive campus commuting occurs, is a tough nut to crack in terms of carbon neutrality. It is going to take time for us to get there particularly in that the university doesn't control the individual decisions of the 20,000 students (about the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden), faculty, and staff who are part of this community.

That challenge and the fact that we want to work as urgently as we can means that we need to think about carbon neutrality using a variety of strategies. And one strategy, as part of a greater mix of strategies, is the purchase of carbon offsets.

**Sylvester:** Let me jump in here with a primer on carbon offsets for those who might not be familiar with them. Carbon offsets are a fee paid by polluters to support projects that reduce or store greenhouse gases. Offset providers set rates for how much it will cost to offset one ton of gases, and then, polluters pay the amount required to offset their damage.

When people think of offset projects, they often think of reforestation projects or projects that preserve and allow people to grow new stands of trees, which remove carbon from the atmosphere and fix it in the physical structures of those trees. There are also carbon offset programs that focus more on the reduction of fossil fuel use, such

as wind farms or energy-efficient cookstoves, regenerative farming methods, and other projects. Interestingly, reforestation projects are actually some of the least effective ones. But I'll get back to that later. Carbon offsets have generated a small industry of organizations that help buyers and sellers connect. There are four types of actors involved here. The first are the buyers and sellers: there are organizations that want to purchase carbon offsets and organizations that want to sell them. Together they play an important role in this because they create the market and the demand for it.

Then there are registries that identify projects meeting certain criteria to be bought and sold as carbon offsets. There are four big carbon registries: the American Carbon Registry, Verified Carbon Standards, a group called Gold Standard, and another called Climate Action Reserve.

There are also third-party validation and verification bodies that work to ensure a project that says it's going to sequester 100 tons of carbon does what it promises.

And then there's a fourth group of actors, service providers who conduct monitoring, reporting and verification.

**Di Giovine:** Keeping in mind that carbon offsets are one strategy that we could use, how can we think about the right and appropriate places in which to use them?

**Sylvester:** Travel for business, conferences, and study abroad makes a lot of sense for carbon offsets. For this kind of travel, as opposed to commuting, we just don't have a lot of mobility options that don't emit greenhouse gases.

**Di Giovine:** Brad, you said that transportation emissions are a tough nut to crack, which is why carbon offsets seem like a logical decision. But what's the scope of our transportation emissions, and why are we specifically targeting study abroad?

**Flamm:** In a typical year, we estimate that students, faculty, and staff drive more than a combined 25 million miles to commute to and from our campuses. Of course, some members of our community walk, bike or take public transportation, but they represent a smaller percentage of all WCU commuters, substantially fewer than those who drive.

Study abroad by WCU students, on the other hand, averaged about 4 million air miles of travel annually in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, but has been lower than that in recent years. For 2022-23 we calculated 3.15 million combined miles, and in 2023-24, 2.58 million combined miles.

Based on those numbers, study abroad travel accounted for over 650 and 530 tons of carbon emissions in those years. Much less than emissions from commuting, but substantial, nonetheless.

**Sylvester:** I agree with you that those estimates of study abroad carbon emissions are “substantial,” but more than that, they represent well-documented and discrete sources of carbon emissions—ones that we can use as a teaching opportunity on campus.

Because we can track those trips, and because we want our students to be able to have the learning experiences that come with study abroad, this type of travel gives us the chance to educate students, and faculty and staff too, about the pros and cons of modern mobility. To talk about the benefits that come from traveling, but the costs too in a time of climate crisis that carbon-intensive air travel contributes to.

**Di Giovine:** I’d like to step back a minute before we get into your argument for carbon offsets for study abroad travel, because that strategy sits within a larger discussion of sustainability in study abroad. You know, study abroad is defined differently for different institutions, but I tend to talk about it as a form of mobility in which students voluntarily and temporarily travel elsewhere—off-campus

certainly, and most often outside their familiar environment or culture—to supplement more formal education through cross-cultural learning (Di Giovine and Bodinger de Uriarte, 2021). The learning in study abroad is increasingly being formalized, with specific learning outcomes tied to it, but just like during its predecessor, the Grand Tour of the 1800s when aristocratic men would do a multi-year trip through Europe, a lot of informal learning is also involved as students get out of their comfort zone and cultural norms, and experience different ways of living and doing things.

Sustainability, also, is talked about in different ways but I like to use the traditional definition, from the United Nations' Brundtland Report (United Nations 1987), that says that it's about ensuring that the needs of the present are met while not compromising future generations from meeting their needs. This is a bit broad, but the UN further conceptualizes this as three pillars: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and socio-cultural sustainability (see Di Giovine, 2023, xxv-xxvi for an evolution of this conceptualization). Environmental sustainability—as Brad discussed earlier—deals with ensuring that we do not adversely impact our environment, our planet. Economic sustainability entails ensuring both that a program (in this case study abroad) is economically viable and, I'd say, consistently affordable over time. And socio-cultural sustainability (which, as an anthropologist, I'm particularly sensitive to) ensures that a program does not adversely impact hosts, their ways of life, and their cultures.

A sustainable study abroad program should balance all three of these pillars.

Germane to our discussion, since study abroad is a form of mobility—it involves physical movement to and from a place—and programs do need to take their carbon footprints seriously. Air travel, followed by private in-country transportation, is the largest contributor to a study abroad program's carbon footprint. But we also have to remember that, since study abroad is voluntary, we need to be

sensitive to economic and other resource constraints, both on the part of the program and of the student-consumer. And we shouldn't cut corners in our treatment of host communities. That studying abroad is about formative, yet temporary, cross-cultural experiences means that it should place students in contact with a host culture in a way that is not imperialistic, that does not adversely affect hosts but instead supports them and valorizes them.

So how we lower or offset a program's carbon footprint while being economically viable and not compromising the livelihoods of our hosts remains the challenge.

**Sylvester:** Here's why offsets for studying abroad should be the first priority for achieving the carbon goals that West Chester has set but failed to meet.

It's a matter of triage; some environmental projects matter more than others. It's not a metaphor and it's not alarmist to say that the world is on fire. As we know, people are dying from fires, from flooding, from drought, and from hurricanes and all predictions are that it's going to get drastically worse. This year a UN study found that nearly a quarter of the world had been having drought conditions in 2022 and 2023, mostly in lower or middle-income countries (Diallo, 2008). This has an impact on food security and, in turn, increases migration. When we're setting priorities for sustainability – addressing carbon emissions in the biggest and most immediate way needs to be the priority.

There are three reasons that offsets for studying abroad are the most important next step the university should take toward carbon neutrality. First, it's a high impact intervention. If we do it right – and, admittedly, it's easy to do it wrong – offsetting study abroad flight emissions would give us a tremendous bang for our buck. In comparison to our millions of miles of study abroad travel, our administration talks about greening the university's fleet of vehicles. Low-emission vehicles on the face of it would be a good thing but

the cost would be high. I think carbon offsets would be a much more effective way to use that money.

Second, it's an "easy A." While West Chester commuter travel has greater carbon emissions, it's a harder nut to crack. If anyone knows how to change the commuter patterns of 17,000 students and associated faculty and staff, then that should be priority #1. But I haven't heard anyone with a solution for that.

Third, it's temporally discrete. A flight to your study abroad destination has a clear beginning and a clear end in the way that heating of a building does not. It's easier to see and easier to quantify.

Fourth, as Michael said, studying abroad is a choice. So, if educated about the carbon emissions of flight, people can feel guilty about it. No one feels guilty about having a heated building or driving to a university that, for many, is difficult to get to using public transportation. Guilt often gets a bad rap. But here guilt is good; it can be productive. We need it as a motivator. Remember: take no prisoners.

**Flamm:** Yes. *And* there is a lot of helpful debunking happening about carbon offsets. It's becoming clearer and clearer that many carbon offset programs are a sham. The criticisms relate to the credibility and transparency of projects. There have been well-documented problems with lots of high-profile carbon offset projects, in terms of their promotion, their commercialization, and their verification.<sup>3</sup> What's more, some argue, is that the possibility of carbon offsets creates a mindset in which people feel they can just conduct business as usual and buy their way out of the impacts of the carbon emissions that they are responsible for.

**Sylvester:** I think one of the most fundamental issues with offsets

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3. See, for example, *Revealed: more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by biggest certifier are worthless, analysis shows* (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoe>), by Patrick Greenfield in *The Guardian*, 18 January 2023.

is that the price of the offsets is often underestimated. People who buy offsets want to spend as little as possible to not feel guilty and providers want the buyer to choose them rather than the other guy. So, the providers are motivated to estimate the lowest cost to offset a ton of carbon. This race to the bottom raises the question of whether we're all fooling ourselves.

But the question is whether students are going to fly across the world to study abroad; and, at least for the foreseeable future, they *are* going to do that (cf. Di Giovine and Bodinger, 2021a). In which case, my next question is: are carbon offset programs efficient ways to actually make a difference? I think there are. The University of California system came up with five criteria for judging offsets that I find very helpful (Berkeley Public Policy, n.d.).

The first criterion is about additionality: Would the project occur anyway without the investment raised by selling carbon offset credits?

The second criterion concerns accurate baselines: Is the baseline – the measure they use to gauge how much carbon is being offset – an accurate one?

The third criterion is about leakage: Does the project create carbon emissions outside of its boundaries? So, for example, does the project require materials whose manufacture produces emissions?

The fourth criterion regards the methods for estimating reductions/removals: Are the methods used to estimate emissions reductions/removals conservative and aligned with the latest science?

The fifth is about double counting: Is the project claimed as carbon offsetting by more than one organization?

**Flamm:** That's a good list.

I would add two general principles for buying offsets that come from Oxford University in the UK (Axelsson, et al, 2024). The first is to prioritize reducing emissions so you have as few carbon emissions to offset in the first place. Where you can't avoid all emissions, focus on offsets that actually remove carbon from the atmosphere

rather than just reduce other carbon emissions. And finally, when carbon offsets are purchased, prioritize high-quality, verifiable, transparently managed carbon offsets.

**Sylvester:** While I agree that cutting emissions should be the first priority, there are some aspects of our university's operational carbon emissions for which there is no realistic strategy to actually reduce them to zero. With criteria from Oxford University in mind, WCU should tap the expertise of *Second Nature*, a membership organization of higher education institutions committed to climate action. The organization's Offset Network recommends two options. First, they say that UC's Berkeley Carbon Trading Project has done an extensive over/under crediting analysis on cookstoves offsets and identified circumstances leading to high-quality emissions reductions and co-benefits in projects following their recommended criteria (Berkeley Public Policy, n.d.). They have an overview of this process and their findings, and examples of quality offset projects. These would be well-vetted offsets that meet the criteria listed above. The second recommendation that Second Nature makes is a company called Tradewater that destroys legacy refrigerants and halons and offers carbon offsets for that work. Brown and Duke Universities have worked with Tradewater and, with Second Nature, have worked hard to verify that the company's efforts are effective.

**Flamm:** Paul, how are you imagining that we pay for the offsets for studying abroad? My role at the university is in administration, and this is, not surprisingly, a question that inevitably arises.

**Sylvester:** There are four possibilities I see for funding the offsets: The first is to make offsets an option – a checkbox where students opt in when they sign up for a study abroad trip. Every university that I know of that tried this option gave up because it wasn't working. None of us want to opt in to pay more. This past summer I

went to Guatemala. It took me two months to get around to paying for offsets. If I weren't giving talks in favor of carbon offsets, would I have gotten around to it? Probably not. Whenever I buy a plane ticket I think "Oh that was expensive! I don't want to pay anymore!" When we create a system to fund offsets for study abroad, we can't rely on ourselves choosing to do the right thing. Most of us won't. The second option is that offsets could be funded out of the University's operating budget. I'm thinking of what you, Brad, learned when you spoke to senior administrators about this possibility: that, in general, state funds can only be spent on things that have a direct educational purpose. On the one hand, that seems like an easy out for things administrations don't want to fund – there are plenty of things that the university pays for that don't seem to have an educational purpose. Planting annual flowers is the first thing that comes to mind. But on the other hand, that presents a worthy challenge to those of us who want offsets. After all, they can and should serve an educational purpose.

A third way is through grants. The problem with soft money is that it's soft. It often goes away so it's always unclear how long the funding will last.

The fourth way is for the office that does our study abroad programs – the Global Engagement Office – to add an offset fee to the students' general study abroad fee, which is currently somewhere around \$100.

**Di Giovine:** I think this is really interesting. However, I want to ask if we are talking about sustainability in a larger sense, or are we primarily concerned with carbon neutrality when studying abroad? These matters are interrelated for sure. But sustainability is more than simply being carbon neutral. When I think of a sustainable study abroad experience, I ask how it can be more holistically sustainable. That is, how can it balance competing and often conflicting environmental, economic and socio-cultural concerns? For example,

we can add \$100 or so to every trip, but will that still be economically sustainable for our students? Will it compromise the potential student's ability – actual or perceived – to participate?

This is an ethical, as well as practical, issue. Ethics balances different and often competing moral stances. There are different ways of ethical decision-making – different configurations – based on one's perspective and what they hold as most important. There are professors here who admirably limit their international travel specifically because of the carbon footprint it would create – even if it means foregoing an opportunity to teach students about sustainability study abroad, attending a conference that could aid in their sustainability research or teaching, or even helping host communities. There are others who, like me, travel quite a bit giving talks on sustainability and sustainable travel, because they see the value in spreading the word and supporting local communities while doing so.

You might call me a hypocrite, because while I talk about and teach sustainability, I take students every year to Italy, which has a pretty high carbon footprint. I intentionally keep the price way down, and welcome as many students as possible – which only adds to the adverse environmental impact of our flights. But I think that there other deliverables offset this.

On the one hand, there's the educational component, one that is predicated on getting the students out of their comfort zone and learning-by-doing in the location. Study abroad promises to provide an incomparable high-impact learning experience, one that can't be replicated in a classroom at home. I lead an ethnographic field school on sustainable Italian food systems in Perugia, and the way that sustainability factors into their broader identity and notions of their cultural heritage. Teaching sustainability on location, we conduct fieldwork at markets, Slow Food restaurants, and small-scale farms and vineyards. We talk to people. We taste the food. We help them plant and harvest. We learn more about sustainability than we could in the classroom, and this might have repercussions all the

way into the future. But am I going to be carbon neutral? No, but the potential to create more virtuous, sustainable global citizens of the future may have a greater impact.

On the other hand, we also make intentional programmatic decisions that enhance the sustainability of the trip. Sure, the carbon footprint of the flights and the impact of the airlines' operations are readily measurable. But many other components contribute to one's carbon footprint abroad. Take food choices, for example. We focus on sourcing local, organic food from small-scale agricultural producers. Being "zero-kilometer" products, or at least local products, should have a smaller carbon footprint than eating industrial food or non-local food. And they support local entrepreneurs, a key component in social sustainability. Not to mention they are more nutritious!<sup>4</sup>

We also don't do a whirlwind "Grand Tour" trip of Italy – the typical Rome-Florence-Venice type of trip. Rather, we are intentionally based in a medieval city with a pedestrianized historic center, and we stay there for a month and a half. Students walk everywhere, and we take primarily public transportation, when necessary, to site visits outside of the city. Students get a real feel for the city, which is pedagogically important, but many also start cultivating more sustainable living habits, immersed as they are in the topic and in this way of life. Some of these stem from the education they are getting: we teach them how to utilize and cook the food in season and make their own fresh pasta (which is economically sustainable as well), and many end up replicating that in their apartments! But some are also gleaned from being immersed in the culture. They walk everywhere instead of taking cars, they eat local food because that's what's available in most restaurants, and (like in many parts

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4. While local food systems in general tend to be significantly more sustainable than the global industrial food system (see Heinrichs 2003), it is important to avoid the "local trap" (Born and Purcell 2006)—that is, to avoid assuming that all local food is necessarily more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, or that it is necessarily more nutritious or treated with less chemical pesticides or fertilizers (see also McWilliams 2009).

of Europe) they must even separate their waste into five different receptacles. We can see that these students enjoy a smaller carbon footprint while abroad than here at home, even if there's a somewhat significant carbon footprint associated with getting there.

My colleague, Jennifer Coffman at James Madison University, is an environmental anthropologist who leads short-term study abroad trips to Tanzania and other places. She and her colleagues have studied students' greenhouse gas emissions on campus in Virginia and compared them with their carbon footprints abroad. Tracking consumption across the categories of food, water, electricity and transportation, and using UN-approved metrics, they were able to measure, with great precision, exactly how much lower a carbon footprint her students have while in Tanzania than at home, and then, based on that net-negative in-country carbon footprint, calculate how long they would have to stay in-country to off-set the flight over. She found that this net-zero footprint occurred in Tanzania after about six weeks. Her trip is now 8 weeks to properly offset the carbon footprint (see Coffman et al., 2022). So, you can literally structure a trip to offset the flight over, if the destination is right.

**Sylvester:** This is doable, but I imagine it would take considerably longer in Italy.

**Di Giovine:** Right, and it's time that, unfortunately, more and more students don't have. We see the length of time of study abroad trips decreasing; far fewer students go abroad for a whole academic year (which would offset the flight), as I did, and more are going on 10-day spring break trips.

Coffman and her colleagues also looked at other trips offered by their university (from a 3.5-week trip to Malta to a 3-week trip to Laos and Thailand). In both of those cases, the trip was simply too short, and there were simply too many in-country flights and transportation, to reasonably modify the trip to have a net-zero carbon

footprint (Coffman et al., 2022). I imagine it would have to be significantly longer, based in one place, and utilize accommodations like homestays rather than hotels.

But I also think it's important to talk about the structure of the trip with students, to let them know that we are modeling sustainable lifestyles and have made ethical decisions on what would create the best, most lasting impact for them.

So for my own trip, hopefully not only do you have a lower carbon footprint than you would in West Chester, but when you come back home, you take some of those lessons with you – so that in the future, as hard as it is to measure, you reduce your carbon emissions and cultivate a more sustainable lifestyle. This is what Aristotle would call “virtue ethics”: inculcating small steps that build over time to create more virtuous people.

**Sylvester:** Respectfully, I think Aristotle was wrong. I think often it cuts the other way: we do a little thing, we feel pretty good about ourselves, and don't do the bigger thing. I agree that studying abroad can be transformative. It can change how a student or a professor sees themselves in the world, their way of life once in the United States, and it can lead to long-term changes in behavior.

That could be great. I say “could be” because it could also actually be counterproductive. If students are only learning about individual choices and they come home thinking that if they change their lives by buying local food and driving an EV and so on, then they're doing their part. It can divert energy and attention from the collective and systemic changes that need to happen. That's why oil companies have spent millions to promote recycling (Sullivan, 2020).<sup>5</sup> They know that if we focus on rinsing out our beer cans we'll take our eye off the ball.

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5. NPR and PBS Frontline found that oil companies spent millions of dollars promoting the idea that most plastic was valuable and could be recycled while knowing that this wasn't true, all the while making billions producing it.

A little while ago, there was an article in the *Washington Post* (Rivero, 2024) about being environmentally conscious about our houseplants with world-changing suggestions like “buy durable pots and tools.” Really? This is madness!

**Di Giovine:** It may be true that making lifestyle changes can divert attention to societal changes, but I’d think carbon offsets can also be seen as absolving one for a potentially unsustainable study abroad program, one that has high environmental impact and adversely affects the social and economic fabric of host communities. I think students would be more transformed by a program that models sustainable action – even if it has a higher carbon footprint – than a whirlwind, superficial trip that has a higher carbon footprint but pays for offsets.

**Sylvester:** Point well taken. I think you’re right that it can cut the other way – offsetting can make it seem ok to make bad choices. I call it the low-fat Oreo problem. I buy low-fat Oreos and then I feel ok eating so many of them that I end up getting fatter than if I just ate the regular ones.

So, we need to avoid study abroad students being placated by a focus on individual change and that we can’t let them or us feel like carbon offsets let us off the hook for learning about sustainable choices in-country. But if we’re talking about our ideal for study abroad I think there is a third element. Beyond individual responsibility students need to learn about systemic change.

**Flamm:** What do you mean by “systemic change”?

**Sylvester:** In our market economy, the kind of systemic change we need are ones that change the conditions so that it is most profitable, first, to not pollute; and second, to innovate by creating products that promote sustainability.

The way we bring about that change is to turn the profit motive to our advantage (Ikeda & Glynn, 2023). How do we make sustainable practices the most profitable choices? There are a lot of different ways to do this: cap and trade, taxes on emissions, government subsidies for sustainable practices, charging for clean-up and remediation costs, requiring information disclosure to the public and so on (US Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.).

What am I saying students need to learn regarding sustainability? They need to learn about system thinking. Right now, what we teach students is about the choices of individuals – like recycling or reducing one’s carbon footprint. What we need to begin teaching is about the systems that promote pollution and systems that can change this and promote sustainability. And it’s not that we just need to teach them about what we old folks know, we need to enlist them in innovation and change, whatever field of study they’re in. Systems don’t change easily, so they’ll know how to advocate for change.

So then, for us as educators, the questions become “What kind of learning experiences – whether on-campus or abroad – do students need so that they are prepared to both change the lightbulb in their apartments *and* to change the system that incentivizes the company to use coal-burning plants that light it up?”

**Di Giovine:** I think there can also be ways to teach collective action in a class if the instructor sees that as a viable component. For example, on our own trip we do talk with the head of a major organic farmers’ trade union and have some discussions on food movements. Oftentimes there’s a strike going on as well, and students get to experience that firsthand. Though I don’t know how much the WCU administration would want us to actually participate in a strike!

But I want to emphasize again that study abroad isn’t just about formal educational experiences and measurable learning outcomes. I think study abroad students learn more through informal means: living in a place, talking with people, observing cultural practices

around them, seeing something new, making mistakes and being self-reflexive. It's very hard to capture in a syllabus such student learning outcomes, however, that self-reflexivity, that understanding, is what hopefully leads students to become true global citizens. Part of this concept of being a "global citizen" is that they highly attuned to issues like climate change from a systemic and global perspective; they are aware of the world around them, they understand the broader contexts of their actions and their impacts, and that they are often more engaged. This, I'd argue, would cultivate the potential for engaged collective action more readily than teaching it in a classroom.

**Flamm:** Ok, your program might do this, but how can others, not associated with sustainability as a topic, build in these types of lessons and opportunities? Yours may seem a little idiosyncratic to a professor planning a study abroad trip to Costa Rica focused on language acquisition or to the UK with a program focused on the history of modern physics.

**Di Giovine:** There are two barriers to bringing sustainability into study abroad. The first is awareness (or maybe the will) on the part of program directors and administrators. This calls for a challenging but rather straightforward solution. The Global Engagement Office (GEO) can educate study abroad program directors through workshops like WCU's Brandywine Project workshops do.<sup>6</sup> GEO can also take persuasive actions to get program directors to be more sustainable by offering incentives such as small grants, or to qualify for special designations. The Global Rams Fellowship, which covers a significant amount of the cost for minority and underrepresented students, can only be used for programs that meet specific criteria;

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6. WCU's Brandywine Project workshops teach how to incorporate sustainability concepts into faculty teaching, staff work responsibilities, and student learning and engagement.

teaching sustainability is one of them. Other fellowships could also be created specifically for students participating in designated sustainable programs. Finally, GEO could also simply require certain sustainable practices to be taken, such as perhaps working on the cost of carbon offsets.

The second is a little harder nut to crack. There are many study abroad trips that are simply not focused in any way on the concept of sustainability: they may be a language learning program, or an art history program. They could even focus on the antithesis of some of these basic tenets, such as industrial food production. For these, does it make sense to teach students about sustainability? How? Each program director would need to feel comfortable integrating this concept into their classes and see its relevancy. But all could work to programmatically make their trip more sustainable: staying in one location and deeply engaging with the site is not only more environmentally sustainable, but also socially and economically sustainable too; if you have to travel, do so through public transportation or by biking or walking; eat at local restaurants rather than chains; and so on.

**Sylvester:** I agree. Changing study abroad program directors' consciousness, knowledge base and planning is a challenging and never-ending process. It requires education and support for those faculties. It makes the most sense for that to be a project of our Global Engagement Office (GEO).

**Di Giovine:** It's challenging, because GEO could certainly require applications for faculty-led programs to specifically address sustainability, and maybe even take some measures (including building in a cost for carbon offsets), but this may impinge on the autonomy and vision of individual faculty directors. I should also mention that we program directors of "faculty-led" study abroad programs also face competition from for-profit operators who have larger opera-

tions and negotiate lower in-country costs; I haven't seen many program offerings that explicitly mention their sustainability measures. So, we have to be conscious of the economic sustainability of our programs as well, or else students may simply opt for the cheaper option and not travel on our more sustainable programs. Missing the opportunity to educate our students on sustainability, however the means, would be the biggest loss of all!

**Flamm:** Great conversation. Let me try to sum up where we have come in today's seminar.

First, the climate crisis is real and daunting; humans have created climatic conditions we've never had to live with before, and there are now 8 billion of us to deal with the consequences.

Second, higher education institutions have a responsibility to do what they can to address the problem by examining their own operations and committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero or as close as possible. We need to do this both because it's the right thing to do to take responsibility for our actions and to use the intellectual, human, and financial resources they command to show leadership to their students, employees, alumni, and neighbors. Third, our educational mission, insofar as it recognizes the global connections that modern economies, technologies, and cultures reveal, requires us to create meaningful and high-impact learning opportunities for our students. Studying abroad is an obvious and effective strategy for this, one that should be democratized to the extent possible. But in pursuing this strategy, we unavoidably contribute to the carbon emissions that are making the world a hotter and less hospitable place for humans and other living creatures.

Finally, there's the question of how to solve the conundrum of the good of studying abroad versus the bad of the travel carbon emission. The answer isn't obvious. Ideally the answer involves both a) teaching about sustainability and the complexity of the concept in its environmental, social, and economic elements and b) directly ad-

addressing the negative aspects of the experience. Curricula and learning objectives woven into study abroad programs can send students home with personal and systemic appreciation of the challenge; that addresses Part A of the answer and is what Michael has described as a core element of his annual summer study abroad trips to Italy. Part B can be pursued by buying carbon offsets – high-quality and fully vetted – and using that action to teach students, faculty, and the broader campus community about the climate crisis.

We've got our work to do.

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# Lives Beyond Borders.

A Summary of the Asian Missions of Two Florentine Dominicans: Angelo Cocchi and Vittorio Ricci

Francesco Vossilla – Zhang Zheng-Ying

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## **Abstract:**

This article seeks to outline the trajectories of two Dominican friars born in Medici Florence who found themselves drawn into the international dynamics unfolding in the Far East and in the Philippines during the seventeenth century. It was a century in which the horizon of missionary activity and intercultural exchange—defined by intersecting forms of alterity—was shaped, as it is today, by dramatic historical events: the fall of the Ming dynasty in China, the progressive isolation of Japan, and the expansion of European colonial powers in East Asia. Within this geopolitical framework, the lives of Angelo Cocchi (1597 – 1633) and Vittorio Ricci (1621 – 1685)—who served in the Philippines, Taiwan, and mainland China—appear as particularly informative. Their experiences, lived beyond the confines of Europe and Catholicism, illuminate the complexities of cultural mediation at a time of profound transformation. In an age such as our own, characterized by global instability, a concise reconstruction of their trajectories may offer a first point of access to serve a didactic aim. In the process, it will also celebrate early modern encounters between Florence and some Asian cultures.

**Keywords:** Angelo Cocchi OP, Vittorio Ricci OP, Manila, Fujian, Dominicans in Asia, Taiwan, Spanish-ruled Philippines, Koxinga.

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## **An epoch of trades and conflicts before the arrival of Cocchi and Ricci in Asia**

The aspiration of the Portuguese monarchy to establish a presence in the fabled realm of Cathay can be traced to the early years of the sixteenth century. By 1508, the *fidalgo* Diogo Lopes de Sequeira had already gathered intelligence on Chinese military organization and religious practic-

es.<sup>1</sup> The decisive turning point came with the conquest of the Sultanate of Malacca in 1511 by Alfonso de Albuquerque. This operation granted the Portuguese access to the strategic Spice Islands. From this base, they interacted regularly with merchants from Ming China, inserting themselves into pre-existing commercial circuits that had long connected Southeast Asia with the Chinese littoral.<sup>2</sup> Acting under Albuquerque's orders, Jorge Álvares reached the estuary of the Pearl River in 1513, followed shortly thereafter by Rafael Perestrello in 1516. Álvares is credited with establishing a trading station on the island of Túnmén.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1513 and 1553, the Portuguese attempted to secure a foothold along the coast of China. These efforts were conducted at the margins of legality. Portuguese traders engaged in illicit commerce, collaborating with Han intermediaries and, at times, with outright criminal networks. Ming sources accuse them of participating in smuggling and in the trafficking of vulnerable populations, including the abduction and sale of impoverished Han women and children.<sup>4</sup> Alarmed by these barbarous activities, inflamed Ming officials branded the foreigners as human traffickers and cannibals. Hence, in 1549 they were expelled from modern-day Fujian Province.<sup>5</sup>

The Florentine trader Giovanni da Empoli (1483–1517) took part in these Lusitanian expeditions and encountered Han commercial elites exactly when European mariners first brushed against the established order of Ming China. He served with Ferdinand Perez de Andrade who arrived

1. See S. Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 220-223.

2. See Ch.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415–1825*, London, Hutchinson, 1969, pp. 31-35. See also M. Laven, *Mission to China. Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2011), 9.

3. See J. de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia*, Dec. III, bk. II. See also J.E. Wills Jr., *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 28-30.

4. Ming Shilu, entries under the Zhengde and Jiajing reigns; see also Gang Deng, *Maritime Sector, Institutions, and Sea Power of Premodern China* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 125–130.

5. See Jin Guo Ping - Wu Zhiliang, *A (Des)canibalização dos Portugueses*, in «Revista de Cultura», 16 (Macau: Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, 2005), pp. 94-104.

at Túnmén and Canton in 1517, where da Empoli succumbed to illness.<sup>6</sup> Previously, writing to his father (November 1515), Giovanni recorded one of the earliest Italian impressions of China. He describes the country as extraordinarily rich and well governed, noting both the abundance of goods and the disciplined order of its inhabitants, “who are great merchants”.<sup>7</sup> In this brief account, one perceives a poignant recognition: Europe has encountered a highly organized and economically formidable counterpart.

To spread Christianity within his dominions, King João III entrusted the task to the newly founded Society of Jesus (1540).<sup>8</sup> In December 1549, Ignatius de Loyola created the Province of India (the largest and the first non-European Jesuit province), stretching from Mozambique to Japan and China. As the Portuguese settlers and merchants were dealing with non-Christian believers in multi-cultural trading posts, the Lusitanian monarchs perceived an urgent need to shelter Catholic values from the erosion caused by their prolonged encounter with exotic mores.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in 1553, the Ming authorities granted Portuguese seafarers to establish themselves in Macao, soon to become a particular Luso-Chinese enclave and a Catholic bastion in Asia.<sup>10</sup>

The Catholic exploration of the Middle Kingdom started in 1556 with the Dominican Gaspar da Cruz (1520 - 1570). He landed on the island of Lampacau, near Macao, and obtained permission to visit Canton for a month. His 1569-70 *Tractado em que se cõtam muito por estêso as cousas da China* describes a talented civilization producing quality artifacts, such as porcelain and silk. Da Cruz was also impressed by the non-phonetic Chinese writing system with its 5000 characters. This system, Friar Gaspar notes, worked best to communicate among people of different regions

6. See G. Bertuccioli – F. Masini, *Italia e Cina*, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 1996, pp. 84-85.

7. See Giovanni da Empoli, *Lettere*, in *Relazioni di viaggiatori italiani del Rinascimento*, ed. by L. Firpo, Turin, UTET, 1977, pp. 603-612. See also Subrahmanyam, *The Career*, cit., pp. 300-305.

8. See J.W. O'Malley SJ, *The First Jesuits*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 23-45.

9. See Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 261-270.

10. See Jin Guo Ping and Wu Zhiliang, *Revisitar os Primórdios de Macau: Para uma Nova Abordagem da História*, Macao, Instituto Português do Oriente, 2007, pp. 11-42.

of the Ming empire and with foreigners such as the Japanese smugglers or the Westerners. Da Cruz underlined how it was the Chinese who managed to learn Portuguese. On the contrary, the Portuguese were relying on the aid of Muslim sailors who introduced them to the Southern Chinese.<sup>11</sup>

As studied by Rogério M. Puga, the English scholar Samuel Purchas (1577-1626) published a significant collection of travel narratives, including sources contained in the manuscripts of Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616). These pages were based on contemporary sources about Lusitanian trades in the East and West Indies and on Jesuit papers coming from Asia. Here is Purchas' summary regarding Macao as an epicenter of various trades, both commercial and spiritual, between East and West:

In that place was an Idoll, which still remayneth to be seene, called Ama, whence the peninsula was called Amacao, this is Amas Bay. This Rocke indeed rather than peninsula, began to bee inhabited not onley of Portugals, but of confluence of all neighbouring Nations, in regard of the commerce of Commodities of Europe, India, and the Moluccas brought in Portugals Ships, and especially love of the Silver Coyness, brought the Chinois thither to dwell. In continuance of time, a Citie began by degrees to bee built, and the Portugals made not onley contracts of Merchandise, but of Marriage, with the Chinois, and so the peninsula was filled with private houses, and out of a barren Rocke arose a noble mart. Purchas also mentions the privileged Jesuit base in Macao:

And as gayne brought Merchants thither, so the care to keepe and to get soules, brought thither Priests and Religious men, and the Portugall Kings priviledged the place with the title of a Citie, and made it a bishops See. There the Jesuites fixed a residence, and first erected a Church to our Idie, and after that divers others. For it seemed convenient to their designes, the world of China lying to the North, the Moluccas to the South, Japon, and the Philipinas to the East, to the West Cochinchina, Camboia, Siam, and others. From hence, many intended the China employment without suc-

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11. See Laven, *Mission to China*, cit., pp. 86-87.

cesse, those fields not then white to the harvest.<sup>12</sup>

By the papal bull *Onerosa pastoralis officii cura*, issued by Clement VIII in 1600, missionaries were forbidden to enter China except through Portuguese-controlled routes, thereby reinforcing the primacy of the Jesuit base in Macao. This monopoly, however, was weakened in 1608 by the bull *Sedis Apostolicae* of Paul V, which permitted missionaries to travel by any route. The result was rivalry—Jesuits, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Franciscans contending with one another in a long struggle across the South China Sea.<sup>13</sup>

Spanish rule across the Philippines began in 1565 when Miguel López de Legazpi founded a settlement at Cebu Island. By 1571, the city of Manila, on the island of Luzon, became the colonial capital.<sup>14</sup> Soon elevated to an archbishopric, Manila stood at the intersection of various worlds. Long before the arrival of the Spanish businessmen and missionaries, Islam had reached the archipelago from Southeast Asia. Manila had flourished under the influence of the Sultanate of Brunei as a northern node in the trading networks linking Malacca, Borneo, and beyond.<sup>15</sup>

The structure of this commerce is captured in the so-called Selden Map (Bodleian Library, Oxford), a remarkable artifact of Ming cartography depicting the maritime networks radiating from Fujian to Japan, Luzon, and Malacca. Its routes reveal a world already bound together by exchanges before the ambitions of Europe sought to master it.<sup>16</sup> Hence, besides the notorious trade between the Philippines and the Americas,

12. S. Purchas, *Hakluyt Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World*, in *Sea Voyages and Land Travells by Englishmen and others*, 12, pp. 246-247, cited in R.M. Puga, *Macao in Samuel Purchas's Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625), in *Forgotten Chroniclers of the Far East* (16-18 centuries), Macao, Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, 2002, pp. 17-40: 30.

13. See D.E. Mungello, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, Nettetal, Steyler Verlag, 1994, pp. 22-25.

14. See J. Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1959, pp. 11-13.

15. See C. Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, Quezon City, UP Press, 1999, pp. 56-60.

16. See T. Brook, *Mr. Selden's Map of China*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 45-60.

the prosperity of Manila depended on a commercial network reliant on Chinese mariners to supply the goods that sustained it.<sup>17</sup> One contemporary observer noted:

Of all the neighboring countries of the Philippines, only China can supply Manila with the goods it requires. Although Spanish officials often complain about the profits earned by Chinese merchants, they also fear what might happen should the Chinese cease their trade.<sup>18</sup>

Spanish authorities were dependent on the Ming commerce of silk, ceramics, Chinese medicine and more. At the same time, they were threatened by Japanese and Han pirates operating in the surrounding seas and confronted by rival European powers (first the Portuguese, then the Dutch and the English) competing in both Southeast Asia and the Far East. After the war of the Portuguese succession, Philip II of Spain began the reign of the House of Habsburg over Portugal and its Asian dominions. Writing in Florence, as we do, it is worth noting that Roberto Strozzi took part in this war. Strozzi (1510-1566) commanded a French-backed expedition to the Atlantic islands, aiming to challenge Habsburg dominance along strategic maritime routes. His campaign culminated in the Battle of São Mateus in the Azores, where Spanish-Portuguese forces confronted the French fleet. Wounded and captured, Strozzi died shortly afterward—reportedly executed or left to perish.<sup>19</sup>

Recognizing Macao's importance in the exchanges between China and Japan, Philip II avoided any interference that might provoke a harsh reaction from Ming authorities. He maintained Portuguese administrative structures, safeguarding the annual Japan trade promoted by the Jesuits, and ensuring that Macao remained economically viable without exposing it to military pressures typical of Spanish colonial governance

17. See T. Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, London, Bloomsbury, 2007, pp. 63-66.

18. Phelan, *The Hispanization*, cit., p. 87.

19. See F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. II, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 1143-1146.

elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

With regard to Manila, Philip II moved to restrain the disruptive influence of Mexican merchants in the galleon trade between Acapulco and Luzon. A permit system—the *boletas*—was introduced to regulate cargo space. However, as Birgit Tremml-Werner has shown, permits accumulated in the hands of a privileged few, sustained by corruption and by collusion with Chinese seafarers.<sup>21</sup> In January 1593, faced with the overwhelming influx of Fujianese merchants into Manila, the Spanish crown issued a decisive decree: Spaniards were henceforth forbidden to sail to China and Han merchants were to bring their goods to Manila at their own peril. Contemporaries were struck by the rigidity of this system. The Florentine merchant Francesco Carletti, visiting Manila in 1596–1597, found it impossible to obtain trading permission—an indication of how tightly commerce was controlled.<sup>22</sup>

As Paulo de Sousa Pinto noted, the Catholic enterprise in Asia followed two distinct paths: in Macao and in Ming China, Jesuit efforts proceeded cautiously, adapting themselves to the political and cultural constraints of the Han world. In the Philippines, instead, evangelization advanced under the shadow of conquest across the islands and elsewhere. Certain Spanish officials—among them the Manila governor Francisco de Sande (1540–1602)—entertained the possibility of subduing China by force.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, the well-armed fleet of the Guangdong warlord Lin Feng (1499–1575) raided Manila in 1574. This event made it clear to Madrid that any invasion of China would shed a lot of blood. Lin Feng himself had been expelled from Guangdong by an efficient Ming navy. The Middle Kingdom could not be won that easily, contrary to what

20. See Boxer, *The Portuguese*, cit., pp. 119–123.

21. See B. Tremml-Werner, *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571–1644*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, pp. 112–115.

22. See F. Carletti, *My Voyage Around the World*, Engl. trans. by H. Weinstock, New York, Pantheon Books, 1964, pp. 135–137.

23. See P. de Sousa Pinto, *Missionary Strategies in East Asia*, in *The Portuguese and the Pacific*, ed. by F.A. Dutra, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 89–91.

the Spaniards, fresh from the conquest of Mexico, had first envisioned.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in the last decades of the sixteenth century, even a few Jesuits were invoking the fatal use of military force to enter the Ming state. For example, Alonso Sánchez and Francisco Cabral—the controversial superior of the Jesuit province in Japan and head of the Chinese mission between 1582-1586—presented a bold design: that China might be opened to the Gospel by arms through a joint expedition of Japanese samurai and the Visayan peoples of the Philippines under Spanish command. This perilous scheme was firmly set aside by Philip II and by the Jesuit General Claudio Acquaviva d'Aragona, who perceived the grave risks such an enterprise would entail.<sup>25</sup>

Even the Dominican mission across the South China Sea was connected to the broader trans-Pacific networks of the Spanish Empire. The initiative had been organized under the leadership of Domingo de Salazar, the first bishop of the Philippines, who worked to expand Dominican activity throughout East Asia. In 1582 the *Provincia del Santísimo Rosario* was initiated, placing the missions of the Philippines, China, and Japan under a single administrative structure.<sup>26</sup> In 1587 a group of fifteen Dominicans led by Juan de Castro arrived in the Philippines to strengthen that order's presence there.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning with Isabella I of Castile's instructions for the Americas, the Spanish monarchy developed a universal notion of colonial governance in which political authority and apostolate were intertwined.<sup>28</sup> This framework continued with Philip III, whose administrations in Asia maintained the connection between missionary expansion, commer-

24. See C.J. Peers, *Soldiers of the Dragon. Chinese Armies 1500 BC-AD 1840*, Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2006, p. 213.

25. See Ch.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1951, pp. 142-145.

26. See Á. Santos Hernández, *Los Dominicos en Extremo Oriente, 1587-1835*, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1958, pp. 55-58.

27. See Phelan, *The Hispanization*, cit., pp. 82-84.

28. See J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716*, London, Penguin Books, 2002, pp. 55-58.

cial ventures, and imperial authority. During Philip III's reign, Spanish forces—supported by Filipino warriors from Bohol—launched an attack against the Sultanate of Ternate in Indonesia. The ruling sultan, Said Din Berkat, who had maintained alliances with the Dutch, was captured and deported to Manila together with his court. There, he was compelled to convert to Catholicism.<sup>29</sup>

In the Middle Kingdom, sovereigns and bureaucrats regulated foreign trades with zeal. Already by the early decades of the Ming dynasty, the Hongwu Emperor (1328-1398) defined maritime policies that would, with varying degrees of enforcement, shape coastal trading activities for much of the dynasty. Private overseas trade was forbidden, while foreign merchants were allowed to enter China only through regulated tribute missions.<sup>30</sup> Chinese ships had arrived at exotic Aden and Ormuz and imposed tributes to Malacca and Ceylon.<sup>31</sup> As early as 1373, a ruler of Luzon had responded to the diplomatic overtures of the Ming court by dispatching a tribute embassy to China. Han merchants from the Fujian province had long established themselves across Southeast Asia, forming diasporic communities that predated the Portuguese and Spanish expansion. Even in the age of Western conquest, these networks endured, binding together the commercial and familial worlds of Fujian, Luzon, and the Malay Archipelago.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, if Chinese mandarins, soldiers, or commoners constructed large multi-masted ships beyond the officially permitted design, loaded them with prohibited goods, sailed abroad for private trade, or colluded with “barbarous pirates”, they faced capital punishment. Rather than eliminating piracy, the early Ming prohibition

29. See Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, cit., pp. 280-282. See also L.Y. Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1993, pp. 150-156.

30. See R. Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 23-26. See also *The Veritable Records of Taizu, the High Emperor of Ming*, vol. 70, available online at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=882945>

31. See Bertuccioli - Masini, *Italia e Cina*, cit., pp. 80-81.

32. See W.H. Scott, *Prehispanic Source Materials for the Study of Philippine History*, Quezon City, University of Santo Tomas Press, 1984, p. 67 and A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, 2 voll., New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993, II, pp. 45-48.

drove maritime trade underground. Illicit commerce expanded along the southeastern coast, linking Han merchants, Japanese traders, and eventually European intermediaries (including Jesuit missionaries) in a shadow economy. A major turning point occurred in 1567 during the reign of the Longqing Emperor (1537—1572). Acting upon a proposal submitted by the Fujian provincial official Tu Zemin, the court authorized limited maritime trade. The reform (known to historians as *The Longqing Opening of the Sea Ban*) sought to “open the maritime markets and transform illicit traders into lawful merchants.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, the court remained cautious. Only the port of Yuegang in Zhangzhou (present-day Fujian) was authorized, and only merchants from Quanzhou and Zhangzhou were permitted to participate in overseas trade. Direct commerce with Japan remained prohibited, reflecting concerns about regional conflicts.<sup>34</sup>

The collapse of the paper currency system and the shortage of copper coins increased the demand for silver within the Ming economy. Silver (used as a medium of exchange during earlier periods) reemerged as the dominant currency circulating in the late Ming dynasty.<sup>35</sup> Japan initially became China’s principal source of silver. Han merchants exported silk and other luxury goods in exchange. Driven by this appetite for silver, Portuguese and Spanish traders cooperated with Fujian smugglers to transport bullion from Japan and later from Spanish America into the Ming market between the 1540s and the 1640s. This profitable situation helped sustain the growth of the Portuguese settlement at Macao, that is, the key intermediary port with the tacit approval of the Ming authorities. Trade with Macao was organized as part of a wider exchange with Goa, the Portuguese base in India. European and Indian goods were shipped to Macao, where they were traded for silk, which was then exchanged for Japanese silver in Nagasaki. A Portuguese Head Captain (initially the Captain of Malacca and

33. *Veritable Records of Emperor Muzong of Ming (Ming Muzong Shilu)*, Volume 10, entry for the third month of the first year of the Longqing reign (1567), Academia Sinica punctuated edition, 259–260.

34. See K. Pomeranz – S. Topik, *The World That Trade Created*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, 2006, pp. 74–76.

35. See T. Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, pp. 113–115.

later the Captain of Macao) commanded the international crew aboard the ships to Japan. As Lúcio de Sousa wrote, along the Macao-Nagasaki route sailors were mostly Han and Japanese with their own leaders.<sup>36</sup> The end of commercial relations with Japan was ultimately caused by the expulsion of all Portuguese from the country by order of the shōgun in 1635 and then by the edicts of country closure (*sakoku*).<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the reach of the Ming administration, Formosa (now Taiwan) also functioned as a convenient offshore trading point. There Japanese merchants/pirates exchanged silver with Han traders and bandits from Fujian, integrating the island into an evolving oceanic world situated between the Chinese mainland, Japan, and Southeast Asia.<sup>38</sup> Besides smugglers, even Catholic missionaries arrived in Formosa with a twofold project: to convert the local non-Han Taiwan peoples and to have another base to enter China. After unifying Japan, the Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi envisioned overseas expansion. In 1593 he issued a directive commonly referred to as the *Letter Summoning the Surrender of the Kingdom of the Mountain People of Taiwan*. Through this document he attempted to assert Japanese authority over Formosa, which Japanese sources of the time referred to as Takayama-kuni.<sup>39</sup> Hideyoshi dispatched his envoy Harada Sonshirō to demand tribute from the local chieftains. The mission, however, encountered obstacles. Northern Taiwan was inhabited by several indigenous communities, including groups speaking the Basai language, and no centralized political authority existed that could be identified as the “king” mentioned in the letter. Unable to locate a ruler to receive the

36. See L. de Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, p. 17, available online ([https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004388079\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004388079_003)).

37. See Brook, *Vermeer's Hat*, cit., pp. 76-78.

38. See T. Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 41-42. See also J.E. Borao, *The Spanish Experience in Taiwan, 1626-1642: The Baroque Ending of a Renaissance Endeavour*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2009, pp. 38-39.

39. See R. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1984, pp. 92-94.

document, the envoy returned to Japan without accomplishing his task.<sup>40</sup>

Although this Japanese project failed, it raised concerns among neighboring powers. Ming officials strengthened the defenses of the Penghu Islands to prevent Japanese incursions along the Chinese coast. At the same time, Spanish authorities in the Philippines considered the importance of Taiwan as an outpost for blocking Japanese expansion southward.<sup>41</sup> Tensions increased further in 1596 when the Spanish ship *San Felipe* was blown off course and landed at Urado in Japan. The execution of several missionaries shocked the Iberian authorities in Manila. In response, Commander Mathos de Landecho proposed the occupation of a port in Taiwan that could serve as a forward base to invade Japan.<sup>42</sup>

In 1597 a military council convened in Manila under the leadership of Francisco Tello de Guzmán, governor of the Philippines. Many officials advocated an expedition to occupy Taiwan arguing that it would serve two purposes: facilitating Chinese trade with Manila to outflank Macao and defending the Philippines against Japanese incursions.<sup>43</sup> After the Ming maritime opening of 1567, the volume of silver flowing into China increased dramatically. Vast quantities of bullion mined in the Americas ultimately reached the Ming market. According to modern estimates, between the Longqing reform of 1567 and the fall of that Chinese dynasty in 1644 roughly 330 million taels of silver entered the Middle Kingdom from overseas.<sup>44</sup> Following the death of Hideyoshi, however, the new shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu managed to regulate foreign trade. His shift gradually reduced tensions between Japan and the Philippines, and the Spanish

40. See Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese*, cit., pp. 32-33.

41. See K. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2009, pp. 254-256.

42. See W.H. Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society*, Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994, pp. 180-181.

43. See Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., pp. 16-18.

44. See D. Flynn – A. Giráldez, *Born with a "Silver Spoon": The Origin of World Trade in 1571*, in «Journal of World History», 6, Fall 1995, pp. 202-221: 205-207.

plan to occupy Taiwan was temporarily abandoned.<sup>45</sup>

The strategic situation changed dramatically in the early seventeenth century. In 1619 England and the Dutch Republic formed an alliance designed to challenge Iberian dominance of Asian commerce. Operating from their Japanese base at Hirado, English and Dutch fleets began to patrol the waters of both the Taiwan Strait and the northern Philippines, intercepting Spanish and Portuguese vessels bound for Japan and obstructing Chinese shipping destined for Manila.<sup>46</sup> Faced with this growing threat, Spanish authorities in Manila tried to establish a military base in Taiwan. By September 1624 the Dutch East India Company had already established a stronghold at Tayouan, transforming the island into a key base for Dutch operations in East Asia.<sup>47</sup>

The journeys of our Florentine protagonists (across the South China Sea aboard merchant ships sailing from Manila to Taiwan, to southern China) traced the larger trade system, both legal and illicit, linking Far East Asia and the Americas. Since the late sixteenth century this system moved commodities and people (merchants, warriors, smugglers, and Catholic missionaries) across the Pacific Ocean and the Spanish empire, which also controlled also the Portuguese dominions, such as Macau. These activities worked thanks to the Manila galleon trade connecting the Philippines with Mexico, the so-called New Spain, Manila and Acapulco. Spanish Manila and Portuguese Macau were the most important transiting seaports for the exchange of commercial artifacts such as Chinese porcelain and silk, European firearms, and, most of all, silver materials and silver coins. Furthermore, even many American domesticated plants (sweet potato, maize, tobacco etc.) were transferred into Ming China by the Acapulco-Manila galleon and finally from the Philippines to the Southern coast of the Middle Kingdom. Products were going beyond national, cultural, spiritual, and linguistic borders while Latin missionaries were spending

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45. See Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, cit., pp. 102-105.

46. See F. Gastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, Zutphen, Walburg Pers, 2003, pp. 29-31.

47. See Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese*, cit., pp. 42-45.

time in transit posts and centers preparing for the Christian apostolate for China and Japan. First Angelo Cocchi and later Vittorio Ricci spent time in Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines to familiarize themselves with Asian multi-culturalism. As silver mined in Bolivia and minted in Mexico circulated to Manila and to China European missionaries, accompanied by local converts and often by smugglers, were preparing to evangelize in the complicated lands of Southern China, Japan, and even mysterious Korea, as Vittorio Ricci wrote in 1674.<sup>48</sup>

### **The beginning of the Dominican Mission in Taiwan**

The Catholic mission to Formosa was a responsibility of the Dominicans based in Manila. They aimed to transform Keelung, northern Taiwan, into a strategic base for missionary expansion into Fujian, since entry into China through Macao remained impossible for them.<sup>49</sup> The Dominicans gradually expanded eastward, toward the Yilan Plain, and southward along the Tamsui River basin. Their apostolate was complicated by conflicts among native groups/tribes, and several friars were killed during ritual headhunting raids conducted by local warriors.<sup>50</sup>

When the first Spanish expedition to Taiwan departed in 1626 under the command of Antonio Carreño de Valdés, five Dominicans joined the fleet. They were led by Bartolomé Martínez, the provincial superior of the order.<sup>51</sup> Soon after the construction of Fort San Salvador, the missionaries established a small chapel on Heping Island dedicated to All Saints (*Todos los Santos*). According to the Dominican chronicler Diego Aduarte (1566, –1637), the first individuals baptized were two daughters of a Japanese Christian who had long resided on the island and who had

48. See *Lettera di Vittorio Ricci OP ai Padri di Propaganda Fidae* (1674), cited in B. Racine, *Storia Ecclesiastica divisa per secoli. Con riflessioni*, vol. XXI, Florence, Cambiagi, 1784, pp. 92-98: 97.

49. Hernández, *Los Dominicos*, cit., pp. 210-214.

50. Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., pp. 121-123.

51. *Ibidem*, pp. 41-42.

married a Taiwanese woman named Islena.<sup>52</sup>

Recognizing the need for additional personnel, Martínez requested reinforcements. In response, the archbishop of Manila, Miguel García Serrano wrote to Philip IV of Spain, explaining that Taiwan was densely populated and that the Dominicans had assumed responsibility for its evangelization. In August 1634 the governor Juan Cerezo de Salamanca reported to the king that the inhabitants of Taiwan were “wild and unreliable” and that the missionaries had failed to achieve significant conversions. He even questioned whether maintaining a Spanish garrison and missionary presence on the island was worthwhile.<sup>53</sup> Although the Dominicans pursued their work with determination, the complex social structures of native communities, the dangers of frontier life, and the limited resources available to the colony all constrained the effectiveness of their efforts.

The life of Martínez himself illustrates the precarious conditions of missionary work in Taiwan. Hoping to expand missionary activity closer to China, Martínez advocated establishing a mission at the port of Tamsui, near present day Taipei. Spanish authorities likewise wished to consolidate their control over the area following earlier conflicts with local inhabitants. Consequently, in 1628 a Spanish expedition occupied Tamsui and constructed a fortified settlement there. Martínez accompanied the expedition and attempted to preach among nearby indigenous communities. Before any significant results could be achieved, however, he met an untimely death when the boat carrying him back toward Keelung capsized during a violent storm.<sup>54</sup>

### **Angelo Cocchi from Florence to Manila, Formosa, and China.**

In 1630 the Spanish governor of the Philippines, Juan Niño de Távo-

52. See D. Aduarte, *Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario de la Orden de Predicadores*, Manila, En el Colegio de S. Thomas, 1640, pp. 412-413.

53. Borao, *The Spanish Experience in Taiwan*, cit., 120-123.

54. *Ibidem*, pp. 128-129.

ra, tried to promote diplomatic relations with Ming China. He sent a set of silver tableware to the Spanish commander in Formosa (Juan de Alcarazo), instructing him to dispatch an official mission to Fujian. The objective was to present the gift to the Ming provincial governor and negotiate stable commercial relations between the Philippines and the Chinese southeastern coast.<sup>55</sup> Alcarazo entrusted the task to the Friar Angelo Cocchi OP then serving as vicar of the Church of All Saints in Keelung. Cocchi was accompanied by the Sardinian Dominican Tommaso de Sierra, several interpreters, and a small escort. On 30 December 1631 the party boarded two merchant vessels and departed from Keelung toward the Fujian littoral.<sup>56</sup>

Angelo Cocchi (known as Gao Qi in Chinese) was born Tommaso Cocchi in Florence in May 1597. He entered the Dominican Order in 1610 and professed his vows three years later. After completing theological studies, he traveled to Salamanca for further training, where he resolved to become a missionary in Asia.<sup>57</sup> In 1620 he sailed from Cádiz on a transoceanic voyage to Mexico. He was ordained a priest in Acapulco in 1621 and reached Manila the following year. Cocchi then served in Batan, Abucay, and Cavite, where he studied local languages and worked among both Filipino and Chinese communities.<sup>58</sup> By 1628 Cocchi was transferred to Tamsui in northern Formosa, where he began studying Chinese in preparation for a possible mission on the mainland.<sup>59</sup>

Cocchi's diplomatic mission of 1631 ended in tragedy. During the voyage the Chinese crewmen revealed themselves to be pirates. They killed six members of the expedition, including Friar de Sierra.<sup>60</sup> Cocchi later described the incident in a letter dated 3 March 1632. According to

55. *Carta del gobernador Juan Niño de Távora al rey* (Manila, 1630), in Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Filipinas, leg. 7, ramo 6.

56. See Aduarte, *Historia*, cit., pp. 423-424.

57. See Hernández, *Los Dominicos*, cit., p. 238.

58. See Phelan, *The Hispanization*, cit., pp. 93-95.

59. See Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., p. 151.

60. See Aduarte, *Historia*, cit., p. 425.

his account, the voyage had begun peacefully. A Chinese captain had convinced the missionaries to transfer from their fragile boats to larger junks. Shortly afterward, however, the sailors turned against them. Cocchi alone survived, drifting at sea for several days before being rescued by fishermen along the Fujian coast.<sup>61</sup>

He was first brought to Funing and then transferred to Fuzhou, where the provincial governor (Xiong Wencan) interrogated him. Since Cocchi had lost his official documents, the governor regarded him with suspicion. Furthermore, tensions between Chinese communities and the Spanish authorities remained high following earlier massacres of Chinese residents in Manila. For all these reasons, the provincial authorities decided that Cocchi should eventually be sent back to Taiwan.<sup>62</sup> While recovering from illness after the ordeal, Cocchi wrote to his Dominican superiors. He observed that his position as an official envoy of the Spanish governor did not mean much to Chinese authorities, who showed little interest in foreign diplomatic titles.<sup>63</sup> Cocchi concluded that missionaries hoping to enter China would need to adopt different strategies. They should wear Chinese clothing, learn the local language, and adapt to Ming society in the same way that Jesuit missionaries had done. Attempts by missionaries to land on China's coast and immediately begin preaching, he warned, were misguided and destined to end in expulsion.<sup>64</sup>

While in Fuzhou, Cocchi secretly contacted a Christian physician from Fu'an named Lucas Liu. Around the same time several Christian scholars from Fu'an (including members of the Miao and Guo families) were also present in Fuzhou. These scholars had previously been converted by the Jesuit Giulio Aleni (1582-1649).<sup>65</sup> A true follower of Matteo Ricci's paradigm of cultural accommodation, Aleni had achieved consid-

61. *Carta del P. Angelo Cocchi al provincial de Manila* (3 March 1632), AGI, Filipinas, leg. 86.

62. See Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., pp. 153-155.

63. See Angelo Cocchi's letter dated 3 March 1632 in AGI Filipinas, leg. 86.

64. See Hernández, *Los Dominicos*, cit., 240.

65. See Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., p. 158.

erable influence in Fujian. Local scholars called him the “Western Confucius”.<sup>66</sup> He even became the dedicatee of several poems by Fujianese scholars. Some of those compositions were eventually collected in the anthology *Poems Presented by the Gentlemen of Fujian*, a volume attesting to the degree to which Aleni had been symbolically incorporated into the social and intellectual networks of the local elite.<sup>67</sup>

Surrounding the city of Fu’an there was a remote mountainous region where no Catholic missionary had worked yet. When local converts learned of Cocchi, they invited him to the mountains. Before he could depart, however, an imperial directive arrived ordering the provincial authorities to send the foreign missionary back to Taiwan. To prevent this, a Japanese Christian preparing to travel from Fuzhou to Manila disguised himself as the sick Cocchi. He deceived the guards sent by Governor Xiong, allowing the real Cocchi to remain secretly in Fujian.<sup>68</sup> With the help of Doctor Lucas Liu, Cocchi hid in the city of Fuzhou while learning the local dialect. After his hair and beard had grown long enough to help him blend in, he traveled secretly to Fu’an in 1632.<sup>69</sup>

Cocchi was impressed by the character of the local Christian community. Many converts were educated scholars who enjoyed influence in their communities. With their assistance he established the first Catholic church in Fu’an and began building another chapel in Dingtou Village. He also developed cordial relations with local officials, which helped protect the mission.<sup>70</sup> Local historical sources like *The Fu’an County Gazetteer* confirm the

66. See N. Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635–1800*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, pp. 332–334.

67. See *Minzhong zhugong zengshi*, Fujian anthology (17th century). See also E. Zürcher, *The Jesuit Mission in China, 1570–1610*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, pp. 412–415.

68. See Aduarte, *Historia*, cit., pp. 430–431.

69. See Hernández, *Los Dominicos*, cit., 241.

70. Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., pp. 160–161.

presence of early Christian communities in the region.<sup>71</sup>

Recognizing that the mission required more personnel, Cocchi wrote on 24 December 1632 to the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary in Manila requesting additional missionaries. In response the province sent several reinforcements, including Friar Juan Bautista de Morales (1597–1664), who had preached among the Chinese community in the Parián district of Manila while learning the Xiamen dialect.<sup>72</sup> Morales departed from Cavite on 9 March 1633 and arrived in Taiwan on April 2nd. Cocchi sent a young Christian, Guo Ruohan, to Taiwan to teach Morales the Fu'an dialect and local customs. Soon afterward Guo's father Guo Bangyong personally escorted Morales and several companions by boat back to Fujian. On 2 July 1633 Morales finally met Cocchi.<sup>73</sup>

Although Morales's arrival strengthened the Dominican mission, Cocchi did not live long to see its expansion. On 18 November 1633 the Florentine missionary died in Fujian.<sup>74</sup> Morales and other Dominicans continued to expand the mission with the help of local scholars. Unfortunately, Morales became entangled in the Chinese Rites Controversy, the theological debate concerning the compatibility of Confucian rituals with

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71. See *Fu'an County Gazetteer*, Qing edition, juan 12 (*Foreign Religions*), which reads as follows: "The region of Fu'an, situated in the eastern corner of Fujian, has long been known for its simple and refined customs, and its mountains and rivers are magnificent and steep. By the middle of the Wanli period, foreign missionaries arrived from distant seas, carrying books of foreign origin and performing rituals in Fujian. They initially propagated the Way of Tianzhu (Catholicism), and were sometimes called *Western scholars* or *Priests (God-father)*. They lived among the villages, preaching and teaching. At first, the local people, seeing their unusual clothing and hearing an unfamiliar language, did not know where they had come from. After a few years, through interactions with local officials and village associations, the number of followers gradually became apparent, and the baptized population reached several hundred. The rise of this faith, as recorded in the local gazetteer, was considered an extraordinary affair outside the usual customs. The believers lived mainly in farming villages. Occasionally they prayed for the sick or performed acts of charity and medical aid. Many of the local gentry regarded these practices as strange; the local magistrates sometimes attempted to suppress them, while at other times they simply waited for the missionaries and converts to disperse".

72. Aduarte, *Historia*, cit., 432–433.

73. Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., 162.

74. Hernández, *Los Dominicos*, cit., 242.

Christian doctrine.<sup>75</sup>

According to the Dominican scholar Giuseppe Gentili, Cocchi may also have written a devotional text in Chinese explaining the Rosary, although no surviving copy of the work has been discovered.<sup>76</sup> Despite the brevity of his mission, Cocchi's activities opened an early Dominican pathway into mainland China and demonstrated the importance of adapting missionary methods to Chinese cultural conditions.

### Vittorio Ricci

Cocchi's main successor was another Florentine, who disguised himself under the Iberian name of Victorio Riccio de San Raimundo.<sup>77</sup> Cocchi's mission took place amid conflicts between Christians and non-Christians, and between the Jesuits and the mendicant orders, as explained by Riccio himself.<sup>78</sup> No portrait survives of the Florentine friar. Yet he has left us one of his own making. Writing of himself, he observed that he was "too tall and too pale" ever to pass unnoticed in China—a remark betraying both the limits of disguise and the consciousness of difference that marked every European who ventured into the Middle Kingdom.<sup>79</sup>

Riccio was born in S. Maria a Cintoia, near Florence, in 1621 as Francesco Ricci. With the religious name of Vittorio Giovanni Battista, on 1 January 1632 he was admitted to the convent of S. Domenico, Fiesole, where he professed solemn vows on 2 February 1635. After completing his studies in Rome and Madrid, he arrived in the Philippines in 1648. Assigned to China, to prepare himself, he began his ministry in Parián,

75. Mungello, *The Chinese Rites*, cit., pp. 34-38.

76. See G. Gentili, *Missioni Domenicane in Cina nel XVII secolo*, Rome, Angelicum, 1956, p. 67.

77. See Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., pp. 631-633.

78. On Vittorio Ricci's, *Hechos de la Orden de Predicadores en el Imperio de la China*, 1667, see E. Menegon, *Christian Loyalist, Spanish Friars, and Holy Virgins in Fujian during the Ming-Qing Transition*, in «Monumenta Serica», 51, 2003, pp. 335-365, especially pp. 338-342.

79. Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., p. 632.

the Chinese quarter of Manila, where he studied the Fujianese dialect.<sup>80</sup>

To evoke the world in which Riccio laboured, one may turn not to likeness, but to image. A woodcut of 1593, engraved in Manila by the Sangley printer Keng Yong, offers a striking impression of the missionary encounters in international Manila. It accompanies the *Doctrina Christiana en letra y lengua China*, composed by the Dominicans Juan Cobo and Miguel de Benavides. In this scene, a Dominican friar instructs a Chinese gentleman from an open book; behind them rise, respectively, a Christian church and a structure suggestive of Chinese architectural form. The text itself unfolds as a dialogue, rendered in the Chinese vernacular of Manila, serving as an early testament to the delicate art of translation from a linguistic, cultural, and spiritual point of view.<sup>81</sup>

Later, Riccio was at Xiamen (in Fujian) where he first met the Ming supporter and warlord Zheng Chenggong—the grand master of the oceanic routes from Fujian to Japan, Taiwan, the Malay Archipelago. Under his protection, in August 1655, Riccio opened the first Catholic church in the city, especially caring for plague-stricken orphans and Indian slaves who had escaped from Macao and then joined Zheng's army.<sup>82</sup> Zheng Sen, Zhilong's half-Japanese son, is better known as Chenggong (1624–1662) or as Coxinga. The latter is a Fujianese rendering of *Guoxingye*, Lord of the Imperial Surname. The title denoted the imperial adoption by the Longwu Emperor in 1645; it means that Zheng Sen was treated as an imperial agnate. Even the name Chenggong ("Triumphal Service") was bestowed on him by the Ming emperor.<sup>83</sup> In 1662, he conquered Formosa, expelling the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Despite his evident reluctance, Vit-

80. See P. Carioti, *La missione del domenicano Vittorio Ricci (1621-1685) tra Cina, Formosa e Filippine: diplomazia e Guerra*, in *Studi in onore di Luigi Polese Remaggi*, ed. by L. Vaccaro, Naples, Università degli Studi di Napoli l'Orientale, 2005, pp. 23-44.

81. J.E. Borao, *The Chinese in the Philippines*, in Id., *The Spanish Experience in Taiwan*, Hong Kong, HKU Press, 2009, pp. 45-47.

82. See E. Menegon, *Ricci, Francesco (Vittorio) OP*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol., 87, Rome, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2016, pp. 243-247.

83. See R.C. Crozier, *Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myth, and the Hero*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1977, p. 20.

torio Riccio was drawn into the strategic designs of Koxinga for East Asia. In May 1662, Koxinga—angered by Spanish hostility toward his commercial networks—used Riccio as an intermediary to convey a stark ultimatum to the authorities in Manila. Through him, a letter reached the governor, Sabiniano Manrique de Lara, demanding that Spain recognize his authority and accept tributary status. Failing this, the Philippines would face invasion.<sup>84</sup>

The message exposed the structural fragility of the Spanish position. Rather than opening negotiations, it provoked alarm. Spanish officials, long wary of the substantial Chinese community in Manila, feared that it might align with Koxinga's forces. This suspicion triggered drastic countermeasures. Plans for mass expulsion were considered, and violence escalated. Disorder spread through the city: looting and killings struck the Chinese quarters, forcing missionaries—particularly the Dominicans under Riccio's leadership—to intervene to restore order and protect civilians.<sup>85</sup> These efforts proved insufficient. A Chinese uprising erupted but was brutally suppressed by Spanish and allied indigenous forces. The episode left a profound scar on Manila's social fabric, reinforcing mutual distrust.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, Riccio set sail for Taiwan on July 10, 1662, bearing De Lara's rejection and the grim news of the massacre. His journey was harrowing, undertaken in an overcrowded junk and marked by severe storms. Upon arrival, Riccio reached Zheng Tai, only to learn that Koxinga had died shortly before, at the age of thirty-nine.<sup>87</sup> Amid this intricate web of exchange and rivalry, Riccio moved with purpose. He navigated between the Spanish authorities of Manila, and the Zheng maritime

84. See T. Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, pp. 283-286.

85. *Ibidem*, p. 299.

86. See E. Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965, pp. 5-9. See also Andrade, *Lost Colony*, cit., pp. 287-290.

87. See F. Vossilla, *Francesco Sambiassi SJ, Vittorio Ricci OP and their contacts with Zheng Zhilong and Zheng Chenggong*, in *Europa ed Estremo Oriente. Relazioni, incontri e conflitti nella prima età moderna. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi ISI Florence - Università di Kanazawa, Firenze, 6-7 marzo 2024*, ed. by S.U. Baldassarri, Florence, Le Lettere, 2025, pp. 177-194: 192.

regime—powers locked in contention—yet he remained steadfast in his apostolic mission. Though he contended with the Jesuits, he sought above all to become a mediator: a man capable of speaking across cultures, whose vocation lent him credibility in the eyes of both European and Asian communities.

As noted by Carlos Busquets Alemany, his life exemplifies the adaptability of certain Catholic missionaries to the shifting strategies of what might be called a global contest among empires. Riccio's influence extended beyond the confines of his own mission. He became, in effect, a guarantor of relations (both commercial and political ones) linking Fujian, Taiwan (under the Zheng family), and the Spanish Philippines.<sup>88</sup> Riccio himself, reflecting in 1665 upon the labors of his life, offered a testimony that still resonates: "Both parties chose me as an envoy to negotiate peace [...] after having faced a thousand dangers."<sup>89</sup>

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88. See C. Busquets Alemany, *Vittorio Riccio and the Spanish-Zheng Relations*, in *Studies on Spanish Formosa*, ed. by J.E. Borao, Taipei, SMC Publishing, 2011, pp. 145-150.

89. Borao, *The Spanish Experience*, cit., p. 632.

# Florence and The Philippines

An Autumn Encounter in 2025

Virgilio A Reyes, Jr.

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**Abstract:**

The author (Philippines ambassador to Italy in 2011-2014) was invited to speak at the International Studies Institute conference in Palazzo Rucellai titled *Vittorio Ricci, OP, and Other Missionaries in the Philippines and the South China Sea (1500-1800)* on October 21, 2025. This text re-elaborates the introductory speech he gave on that occasion.

**Keywords:** Vittorio Ricci OP, Missionaries, Italy and the Philippines, East-West Relations.

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There is more to meet the eye than one would think when juxtaposing the Philippines and Florence. Most people automatically think of the latter in terms of its splendor and the birth of the Renaissance in a city now internationally renowned for its palaces, museums, and rich history. On the other hand, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Philippines was an unexplored Southeast Asian archipelago of 7,000 islands with small kingdoms and no central authority. In 1571, Spain began to transform those islands into its Asian bulwark. Islam had been introduced to the Philippines in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Like their neighbors, the *Islas Felipinas* (as they came to be named) had maintained trade ties with mainland Asia. The islands' most important trading partner was China; the chieftains from Butuan and Sulu had sustained political and economic contact with both Fujian and Beijing. The Philippines thus happened to be a vital link between Asia, Latin America and Europe, as the so-called Manila Galleon and its annual route would prove. For Spain and the Roman Catholic Church, it was also a ground for missionary conversion to Catholicism.

It is at this complex convergence that the Dominican friar Vittorio

Ricci, himself a Florentine and possibly a distant relative of the famous Jesuit Matteo Ricci (Macerata, 1552 – Beijing, 1610), became a subject of interest for the International Studies Institute in Florence, bringing together scholars and participants from multiple institutions. Organized by ISI Florence and the Società di Studi Giuseppe Castiglione, with support from Accademia La Colombaria and Destination Florence, the conference examined the endurance of these historical ties. As ISI Florence director Prof. Stefano U. Baldassarri pointed out in his opening speech, the conference also aimed to highlight the continuing relevance of these early modern networks in fostering intercultural dialogue.

Born in Fiesole (the village perched on a hill just north of Florence), Vittorio Ricci (1621-1685) distinguished himself as a Dominican missionary, a scholar, and a diplomat in the Philippines and southeast China. Once ordained, Ricci was sent by the famous Dominican scholar (and expert on Chinese language and culture) Juan Bautista Morales to Rome, where he successfully advocated for the Dominican college in Manila to receive pontifical university status. Founded in 1611, that college eventually became the University of Santo Tomas. In 1648, Ricci traveled from Mexico to the Philippines, where he learned Chinese. He then proceeded to the Dominican mission in Amoy (Xiamen). It was there that Ricci developed close ties with Koxinga (also known as Zheng Chenggong, 1624-1662), the founder of the short-lived dynastic maritime state in Taiwan commonly called the Kingdom of Tungning.

In 1662, Ricci returned as an envoy to Manila on behalf of Koxinga, whose later invasion of the Philippines was repelled by Spanish troops and their Filipino allies. Ricci thus came to be viewed (using modern terminology) as a “double agent”, representing both Spain and China in different periods of his career. Being both Italian and a missionary, Ricci was a multi-faceted reflection of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century “clash of cultures.” Speaking of Italians, it is worth remembering that a forerunner of Vittorio Ricci was Antonio Pigafetta (ca. 1485 – 1531). Pigafetta left his native Vicenza, in the Veneto, to accompany the famous Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan to the Philippines in 1521. Because of this experience, Pigafetta



Virgilio Reyes Jr. speaking at the *Vittorio Ricci O.P., and Other Missionaries from the Philippines and South China Sea (1500-1800)* conference at Palazzo Rucellai, 21 October 2025.



From Back Left: Francesco Vossilla, Spyridon St. Kogkas, Stefano Baldassarri. Front from Left: Zhang Zheng Ying, Lolita Valderrama Savage, and Virgilio Reyes Jr. at Palazzo Rucellai, 21 October 2025.

left us what is universally regarded as the first chronicle on the Filipinos and their initial encounter with the Europeans. A century later, the Philippines was already taking the political and cultural configuration that it still bears today.

In a nutshell, here is a concise summary of the papers read at the ISI Florence conference, following the order in which they were given:

Gabriele Capeocchi traced Florence's historical links to the Philippines through explorers and naturalists. In particular, he focused on Georg Kamel (1661-1706), the famous Jesuit after whom the *camelia* flower is named. As is well known, Kamel lived and worked in the Philippines,

where he died (in Manila) on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1706.

Carlo Cinelli examined Vittorio Ricci's role as missionary, cultural mediator, and diplomatic envoy, providing precise and most helpful insights into his life.

Spyridon St. Kogkas explored how the Vatican's missionary legacy can serve as both a historical reference and a foundation for contemporary intercultural dialogue and global collaboration. In doing so, Prof. Kogkas pointed out that the Filipino *cofradias* acted as a bridge between the Church and local communities. This helps to explain why Filipino devotional festivals today are neither purely European nor purely indigenous, but hybrid forms of global Catholicism.

Taiwanese scholar Zhang Zheng Ying examined Vittorio Ricci and Angelo Cocchi's relations with the Philippines, Taiwan, and Ming China.

Finally, Francesco Vossilla analyzed Ricci's diplomatic missions involving Koxinga and the Dutch East India Company.

As for me, in my introductory remarks I noted how the Philippines is today the largest Christian majority nation in Southeast Asia. Its political and cultural background remains strongly connected to the Western powers and their allies in that region. The Philippines is clearly implicated in whatever military and political developments occur in Southeast Asia, facing the reinvigorated and emerging power of China and its autonomous neighbor Taiwan, itself an economic power.

The ISI Florence conference was spearheaded by Prof. Stefano U. Baldassarri, PhD (Director, ISI Florence) with the support of renowned Filipino-American artist Lolita Valderrama Savage, whose works have been exhibited in important international venues (including Florence) from the mid-1970s onwards. As a graduate of the University of Santo Tomas herself, she coincidentally shared a historical connection with Dom Vittorio Ricci, who had a role in its founding some 400 years ago, as noted above. It is also coincidental that a Filipino, the Reverend Gerard Francisco Timoner III, now heads the Dominican order; his message was read at the conference by another UST alumnus, Father Reynaldo Corsino, who currently serves as pastor to the Filipino community of St. Barnaba in Florence.

On a more personal note, I am happy to add that my visit coincided with two significant events in Florence: the outstanding Beato Angelico exhibit at Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo San Marco – which brought together paintings from diverse worldwide locations – and the Florence Biennale, featuring (among others) five Filipino artists. I found it fitting for Fra Angelico's masterpieces to be on display at the same time when Filipino religious iconography was made available at the Fortezza da Basso, where the Florence Biennale was held. Like Vittorio Ricci, Fra Angelico (1395-1455) was a Dominican; he also began his artistic career in Fiesole, where Ricci was born. That is why Beato Angelico is also known as "Giovanni da Fiesole," although his birthplace was a tiny village in the Mugello valley. Still regarding this spectacular exhibit, I was particularly impressed by a recent painting at the Santa Maria Novella Perfume Factory, made by Los Angeles-based British artist David Hockney. In that artwork, Hockney originally re-elaborates Fra Angelico's famous "Annunciation"; by using modern techniques, he reimagines that fifteenth-century painting through a contemporary eye. From a Filipino perspective, our everyday exposure to *retablos* in churches and the centuries-old familiarity we have with Christian imagery make us feel at home with Fra Angelico, whom Pope John Paul II beatified in 1982. It was thus not surprising to find religious imagery in the Filipino art displayed at the Florence Biennale. Among the Filipino artists who participated in the exhibit were Noli Principe Manalang, Marco Polo "Marpolo" Coria Cabrera, and Marjowyn Vito. One particularly striking work by Principe Manalang depicted a playing card with female images as Virgin/Prostitute and male ones as benevolent Christ/Tyrant.

I am also glad to report that during my stay in Florence, the local Filipino community (the Mindoreno Association) celebrated the tenth anniversary of its founding on October 18th. Among the participants were Pablo Alvarez, head of the Filipino Association of Florence, and Carlos Simbillo, current Head of the Knights of Rizal in Italy. Many of the Filipinos present at the gathering proudly recounted the professional success of their children, especially in fields such as medicine, graphic design,

and computer programming. Their fluency in Italian and the education they received in public schools propelled them into these new roles and positions. Their parents have wisely invested in their future retirement through real estate and island resorts managed as Airbnb facilities in Mindoro or La Union. As with any Filipino gathering, food, fun, and songs took center stage, with Mindoro Queens and Princesses crowned and honored. This reminded me of the *cofradias* in the Philippines, which are now embodied as a civic association in Florence by the Mindoro Association of Filipinos.

A visit to Italy – and, particularly, Florence – would not be complete without a foray into its famous cuisine. Among the many local culinary specialties are Florentine beefsteak, *crostini*, *ribollita*, and *cantucci*. *Bistecca alla Fiorentina* is a thick-cut, bone-in porterhouse or T-bone steak, traditionally from Chianina cattle, grilled rare over high heat. The steak must be grilled until a seared crust is formed, while the inside remains red and juicy. *Crostini* originated from the Roman tradition of using bread to gather oils and sauces from communal plates on which food was served. A well-known example is *bruschetta*, that is, toasted bread with seasoned diced tomatoes on top. *Ribollita* is a hearty soup made from stale bread that is soaked in water to soften it. It is cooked twice to make it firmer (hence the name) instead of being a simple soup made of bread, legumes and vegetables. A Florentine note is the presence of black bread and beans in the soup; in Italy, Florentines are known for loving beans. Finally, *Cantucci* from Prato are twice-baked oblong cookies (which is why they are known as “biscuits” in the United States) made of flour, sugar, eggs, and whole almonds. They are normally taken with a sweet wine like Florentine *Vin Santo* or Sicilian *Marsala*. They are similar in shape (and, arguably, in taste) to Filipino *lengua de gato*.

Florence would not be Florence were it not forward-looking and, paradoxically, futuristic as well. A trip to Bargino, outside of Florence, to the *Cantina Antinori nel Chianti Classico* brings us close to the Florentine soul and spirit. Here, in the verdant Tuscan countryside, is a magnificent building, property of the Antinori family. The *Cantina Antinori*

is at once a winery and a factory, provided with extensive vineyards, a sports resort, a museum and a restaurant for visitors. Designed in 2004 by the architectural firm Archea, under the direction of the renowned architect Marco Casamonti, the Bargino complex was finished in 2011. This monumental building, set in the verdant Tuscan hills between Florence and Siena, joins nature, science and industry. Its architectural references to the DNA double helix, the rich historical past of this region and the Antinori family (also highlighted by sections of old structures that were transferred to this location), the cathedral-like passages connecting the winery's various parts and the dark cellars where wines are ripened make the Bargino complex at once innovative and suggestive. The Antinori, one of the oldest and most important aristocratic families in Florence, produce exquisite wines, which tickle the palate and accompany the best Italian dishes to a T. Under the leadership of Piero Antinori, this family is also known for its art patronage. Not surprisingly, then, part of the Antinori art collection is exhibited inside the Bargino complex for the visitors' delectation. Finally, as I mentioned *cantucci*, I wish to point out that during the Bargino visit one can taste them with a glass of Antinori wine, thus indulging in an experience like the famous *madeleine* anecdote in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

# Medical Humanism

## Bridging Ethical Economy and Florence's Heritage

Spyridon S. Kogkas

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### Abstract

Medical humanism, rooted in the moral and philosophical traditions of care, offers a critical framework for rethinking the relationship between healthcare, economic structures, and professional education in the contemporary era. This article examines how the integration of ethical and economic principles (emphasizing equity, sustainability, and human dignity) can reshape modern medical practice and policy. Drawing on the intellectual and civic heritage of Renaissance Florence, it foregrounds the role of human dignity, civic responsibility, and holistic understanding as foundational elements of both clinical work and healthcare systems. Ultimately, medical humanism is presented as a unifying paradigm capable of aligning ethical economy and education to foster more just, empathetic, and resilient healthcare systems.

**Keywords:** Medical Humanism, Ethical Economy, Renaissance Florence, Medical Education, Health Equity.

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### Medical Humanism, Ethical Economy and Florence's Heritage

The rapid transformation of healthcare systems in the 21st century has introduced unprecedented challenges, including escalating costs, technological complexity, and persistent inequalities in access to care. While scientific advancement has significantly improved diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities, it has also contributed to the depersonalization of medicine. In this context, medical humanism emerges as a necessary corrective, reasserting the centrality of the human person in healthcare.

Medical humanism reflects a long-standing intellectual tradition rooted in classical philosophy and revitalized during the Renaissance, particularly in Florence. Renaissance humanism placed the human being at the center of inquiry, emphasizing dignity, rationality, and civic respon-

sibility. Thinkers such as Petrarch and later Florentine scholars advanced a vision of knowledge that integrated ethics, rhetoric, history, and public life, shaping what came to be known as civic humanism.

This humanistic paradigm challenges reductionist biomedical models by situating patients within broader social, cultural, and existential contexts. The patient is understood not merely as a clinical subject but as a moral agent embedded in relationships and communities. Consequently, clinical practice must engage with values, narratives, and lived experiences.

Within this framework, the concept of ethical economy becomes particularly salient. Contemporary healthcare systems operate under significant financial constraints, where cost-containment and efficiency frequently influence clinical and policy decisions. While economic rationality is indispensable, a purely market-driven logic risks undermining the ethical foundations of care.

An ethical economy, resonant with the civic ethos of Renaissance Florence and the modern civil economy tradition articulated by thinkers such as Luigino Bruni, Stefano Zamagni, and Antonio Genovesi, seeks to reconcile efficiency with justice. The civil economy emphasizes that markets operate most effectively when embedded in civic structures, moral norms, and shared responsibility. Economic activity, including healthcare investment, is thus conceived as a socially coordinated endeavor rather than a zero-sum competition.

Within healthcare, this vision encourages a coordinated investment philosophy that integrates multiple actors: public institutions, private enterprises, philanthropic organizations, and civil society. Such coordination allows for investments that are not solely profit-driven but oriented toward social value creation, long-term sustainability, and equitable access to care. By aligning investment strategies with ethical and civic objectives, the civil economy model fosters a culture of Humanomics, where human dignity, relationality, and societal well-being are central to economic decision-making.

Florence's historical experience offers a concrete illustration of this

synthesis. The interplay between civic institutions, guilds, charitable organizations, and emerging market structures created a socio-economic ecosystem in which economic activity was intertwined with social responsibility. Hospitals such as the Ospedale degli Innocenti, founded in the early 15th century under Medici patronage and designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, embodied a synthesis of architecture, charity, and civic duty. These institutions were not merely sites of medical care but expressions of collective ethical commitment to vulnerable populations, particularly abandoned children and the poor.

Florence's engagement with humanistic medicine was further enriched by the influx of Byzantine scholars and texts following the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Byzantine manuscripts, often preserved through Greek and Arabic intermediaries, included extensive commentaries on Galenic medicine, Hippocratic ethics, and Byzantine medical treatises that stressed the integration of physical, moral, and spiritual health. The arrival of these texts and scholars introduced new perspectives on anatomy, pharmacology, and the ethics of care, fostering an intellectual environment that valued both empirical knowledge and moral reflection.

Byzantine medicine was characterized by a strong integration of scientific observation and philosophical reasoning. Physicians such as Oribasius and Aëtius of Amida compiled encyclopedic works that combined practical therapeutics with ethical considerations, emphasizing the physician's moral responsibilities toward patients. These texts circulated in Florence through translations and the scholarly networks that connected the Mediterranean world.

The ethical dimensions of Byzantine medical practice (emphasizing compassion, patient dignity, and communal responsibility) resonated with the civic humanist ideals emerging in Florence. The Byzantine focus on the physician's virtue and ethical behavior provided a template for Florentine medical pedagogy, influencing curricula that integrated moral philosophy with clinical instruction. This convergence laid the groundwork for what would later be recognized as humanistic medi-

cine, wherein care is not solely a technical enterprise but a moral and civic practice.

The synthesis of Florentine and Byzantine medical traditions was facilitated by the translation movement and the circulation of manuscripts. Greek physicians and scholars migrated to Italian city-states, bringing with them not only medical knowledge but also philosophical insights from the Byzantine scholarly tradition. Florence became a locus where classical Greek, Latin, and Byzantine knowledge converged, allowing for the creation of a medical culture that was simultaneously scientific, ethical, and humanistic.

Through this cross-cultural exchange, Florentine humanistic medicine inherited a dual legacy: the rigorous empirical observation of the Byzantine medical corpus and the Renaissance emphasis on civic virtue and moral responsibility. This blend fostered a holistic approach to health, positioning the physician as both a technical expert and a moral agent embedded in the social fabric of the city.

Similarly, the broader network of Florentine charitable institutions reflected a social model in which healthcare, welfare, and moral responsibility were intertwined. Patronage by influential families such as the Medici supported not only artistic and intellectual flourishing but also public health initiatives and social care infrastructures. This historical context illustrates how economic power, when guided by ethical principles, can contribute to the development of humane and inclusive systems.

The Renaissance ideal of the *uomo universale* further reinforces this integrative vision. Knowledge across disciplines, including science, philosophy, and the arts, was considered essential for cultivating moral and civic competence. This ideal offers a compelling model for contemporary healthcare professionals, who must navigate complex intersections of clinical expertise, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility.

Florence's heritage thus provides both historical precedent and conceptual guidance for rethinking the ethical and economic dimensions of healthcare. It demonstrates that scientific rigor, economic organization, coordinated investment, and humanistic values can coexist within a co-

herent framework oriented toward human flourishing.

### Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions

The cultivation of medical humanism depends fundamentally on the structure and orientation of medical education. Educational institutions shape not only the technical competencies of healthcare professionals but also their ethical dispositions and professional identities. However, dominant biomedical curricula have often privileged scientific knowledge over humanistic understanding, resulting in a fragmented model of professional formation.

Drawing inspiration from Renaissance Florence, there is a compelling case for re-integrating the principles and the disciplines of the *studia humanitatis* (grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy) into contemporary medical education. These disciplines foster interpretive skills, ethical reflection, and communicative competence, all of which are essential for patient-centered care.

Pedagogical approaches such as narrative medicine, reflective writing, and ethics-based case analysis have demonstrated their capacity to cultivate empathy and moral awareness. By engaging with patient narratives and complex ethical scenarios, students develop the ability to interpret illness not only as a biological condition but also as a lived experience.

The theoretical contributions of Pellegrino (2002) underscore the centrality of virtue in medical professionalism, emphasizing that clinical excellence must be grounded in moral integrity. Complementarily, the capability approach articulated by Sen (1999) and elaborated by Nussbaum (2011) situates healthcare within a broader framework of human flourishing, highlighting the ethical imperative of enabling individuals to achieve agency and well-being.

Integrating ethical economy and civil economy principles into medical education is equally critical. Future healthcare professionals must be equipped to navigate complex systems, engage in socially coordinated investment strategies, and foster partnerships between public, private, and civil actors. Such training prepares students to contribute to health

systems that operationalize Humanomics, ensuring that market efficiency and social value are mutually reinforced.

The concept of a civil economy, as articulated by Bruni, Zamagni, and Genovesi, provides a conceptual framework for humanistic investment in healthcare. Civil economy emphasizes that markets are embedded in social and ethical structures, and that economic activity should serve the common good. Within healthcare, this perspective encourages collaboration between banks, investors, and civic organizations, fostering long-term investments that prioritize patient welfare, equitable access, and sustainable health outcomes.

Moreover, banking policies can be designed to incentivize projects that align with Humanomics, the paradigm that places human dignity, relationality, and well-being at the center of economic decision-making. For example, financing models could reward institutions that implement holistic patient care, preventive medicine programs, or community-oriented health initiatives. Risk assessment and return on investment metrics can incorporate social impact indicators, ensuring that ethical outcomes are valued alongside financial performance.

The strategic coordination of investments across public and private sectors further amplifies the effect of humanistic financial policies. Public banks, philanthropic foundations, and private financial institutions can pool resources for targeted initiatives, such as building primary care networks, funding medical education with humanistic curricula, or supporting research into socially critical health issues. This cooperative approach reflects the civic humanist ideals inherited from Renaissance Florence, translating them into contemporary financial and healthcare structures.

Real-world examples demonstrate the feasibility of this approach. In Italy, cooperative banks (*banche di credito cooperativo*) have supported local hospitals and community health programs, integrating ethical banking principles with healthcare development. Similarly, in Germany, social impact bonds and health-focused investment funds have been deployed to finance preventive health programs in underserved regions, combining market mechanisms with social objectives. In the United States, some

community development financial institutions (CDFIs) have partnered with hospitals and clinics to provide low-interest loans for medical infrastructure in economically disadvantaged areas. These examples illustrate how financial tools can support medical humanism, thus creating a measurable social return alongside traditional economic returns.

Furthermore, humanistic investment strategies encourage innovation in healthcare delivery that aligns with moral and civic priorities. Telemedicine platforms, mental health initiatives, and integrative care networks can be financed under frameworks that value patient dignity and equity. By evaluating both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, such as patient satisfaction, community engagement, and ethical adherence, investors can promote a healthcare system that is both efficient and socially responsible.

Ultimately, the integration of medical humanism into investment and banking policies represents a practical avenue for embedding ethical, civic, and human-centered principles into the economic structures that underpin modern medicine. By aligning financial mechanisms with social and moral objectives, healthcare systems can achieve a sustainable and equitable balance between efficiency, innovation, and human dignity, creating a model of health finance that reflects the historical legacy of civic humanism and the ethical imperatives of contemporary society.

Contemporary challenges further intensify the need for this integration. Escalating healthcare expenditures, demographic shifts toward aging populations, and persistent global health disparities demand responses that are both technically effective and ethically grounded. Moreover, emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and data-driven medicine, introduce new ethical dilemmas related to autonomy, privacy, and accountability.

A medical humanism-based investment and policy approach not only aligns financial decisions with ethical and civic values but also reinforces a decentralized, polycentric social economy. By structuring healthcare and economic initiatives around local governance and community participation, this model promotes a system in which resources, deci-

sion-making, and responsibility are distributed across multiple centers of action rather than concentrated in a single authority. Local municipalities, cooperative associations, and community networks thus become essential actors in shaping healthcare delivery, public health interventions, and social investment strategies.

Such decentralization enhances responsiveness and accountability. Local authorities and civic organizations are better positioned to understand the unique health needs, cultural contexts, and social dynamics of their communities. This proximity enables a form of medical humanism that prioritizes the human person, tailoring interventions to maximize benefit at the most immediate and personal level. Patients are not abstract statistical units but active participants in a healthcare ecosystem that values their dignity, preferences, and participation.

Moreover, this polycentric approach encourages the private sector to adopt ethical utilitarianism, a form of moral calculus in which business decisions are oriented toward maximizing human and social well-being alongside profit. Companies, healthcare providers, and investors operating under this ethos are incentivized to engage in projects that deliver measurable social benefits, support equitable access, and foster long-term communal health outcomes. By linking economic gain to moral responsibility, the model promotes sustainable business practices and strengthens civic trust.

Scientific and clinical activities also benefit from decentralization. Academic institutions, research centers, and clinical laboratories can operate across multiple locales, allowing for distributed innovation that is sensitive to local epidemiological realities and social determinants of health. Decentralized scientific networks encourage collaboration between centers, facilitate knowledge transfer, and support context-specific research. This structure ensures that medical advances and ethical practices remain closely tied to the lived experiences and needs of patients, achieving the greatest proximity between scientific expertise and human care.

In practice, a decentralized social economy in healthcare fosters multiple reinforcing effects: enhanced civic engagement, ethical orienta-

tion of private and public actors, distributed scientific innovation, and personalized patient care. The model embodies the principles of medical humanism by embedding moral reflection, community participation, and ethical investment into the very fabric of healthcare systems. By operationalizing these ideals, it becomes possible to create a healthcare ecosystem that is resilient, equitable, and deeply attuned to the dignity of the human person, reflecting the historical legacy of civic humanism while addressing contemporary social and medical challenges.

In this evolving landscape, medical humanism functions as a normative compass. It foregrounds principles such as dignity, justice, and compassion, guiding decision-making across clinical, institutional, and policy levels. A humanistic healthcare system, informed by the legacy of Florence and modern civil economy thought, integrates ethical reflection, civic engagement, and coordinated investment into all dimensions of practice, ensuring that innovation and efficiency do not come at the expense of humanity.

Ultimately, the integration of medical humanism, civil economy, and Humanomics expands the scope of healthcare beyond institutional boundaries. It situates care within a broader socio-economic ecosystem where ethical values, civic participation, and economic activity converge. By cultivating such a culture, modern healthcare systems can achieve greater sustainability, equity, and human-centeredness, consistent with both historical inspiration and contemporary needs.

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A circular opening in a textured wall looking down at a spiral staircase. The wall has a rough, pebbled texture. The staircase is made of concrete and spirals downwards. The lighting is dim, creating a moody atmosphere.

administrators

# Open Minds, Open Doors

Disability Awareness Conference – Florence, February 20, 2026

Serena Giorigi – Nina Peci

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ISI Florence had the honor of participating in the international symposium *“Open Minds, Open Doors – Disability Awareness Conference 2026”*, that took place at Gabinetto Vieusseux at Palazzo Strozzi.

Organized by Imagine Heritage, ISI Florence, SKEP - Σ.Κ.Ε.Π., Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario G.P. Vieusseux at Palazzo Strozzi and Fondazione Destination Florence, the conference was held under the prestigious auspices of the “Comune di Firenze” and the local UNESCO office.

## **Key Highlights of the Conference were:**

- Insightful keynotes and panel discussions from distinguished professionals in disability and inclusive education from across Europe.
- A global platform for sharing research, lived experiences, and best practices.
- Collaborative dialogue on fostering belonging, equity, and community engagement worldwide.
- Presentation of a proposal paper regarding the significance of a coherent, common EU policy on Disability Inclusivity in Education as a cultural, social, and civic necessity.

ISI Florence’s director Stefano U. Baldassarri opened the conference. At the end, his colleagues Serena Giorigi and Nina Peci presented the last session (titled “Florence Through New Eyes: Stories from an Inclusive Center”), spotlighting the ISI Florence Disabilities Practicum and its powerful educational impact. The session also featured a short video created by ISI Florence/Tulane University alumna Katie Ciulla, sharing how her practicum experience through our institute helped her build meaningful connections, while navigating and overcoming differences and barriers during her semester abroad almost four years ago (fall 2022).

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## Florence Through New Eyes: Stories from an Inclusive Center

**Serena Giorgi**

As the Coordinator of Community Engagement at ISI Florence, I work with students to organize volunteer activities and field experiences connected to practicum courses. Our institute offers many opportunities for experiential learning, including a practicum in Disability Studies that connects students directly with the community.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of building strong relationships with associations that employ adults and young adults with intellectual disabilities, as well as with centers where participants engage in many kinds of tasks. These places are not just work or activity centers; they are environments designed to enhance individual abilities, encourage socialization, and support personal growth.

What I deeply value about these organizations is their focus on education through interaction: how to relate to others, how to collaborate, and how to be present in a community. Ability is not treated as something fixed, but as something that can grow when the environment welcomes it.

In these associations, ISI Florence students complete the required number of field experience hours connected to their classes. One important aspect of their experience is minimal supervision by me. This might sound risky, at first; however, it turns out to be a great asset in the end. When supervision is limited, students learn to teach themselves through practice. They learn how to transfer skills from one environment to another — even very small skills, which often turn out to be the most meaningful.

I always say that students truly succeed when, without strong expectations, they move into a position of humility — when they shift from “I am here to help you” to “I need you more than you need me.”

A perfect example of this comes from a student who once told me that her experience changed when she reversed the relationship within the

association. There was a member who was deaf and communicated using sign language. The ISI Florence student did not know sign language. She said, “You speak sign language. I don’t. So please — teach me.” When we reverse the relationship in this way, something powerful happens: I am no longer imposing my vision, my methods, or my solutions. Instead, I ask. I observe. I learn. And from there, I can support and enhance skills rather than trying to “fix” a gap I think I see. This is what empowerment looks like.

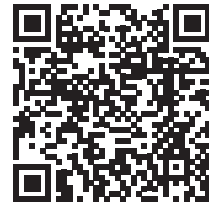
As educators, I believe our role is not to dominate the process, but to create the conditions for growth — a growth affecting both our students and the people they meet. When everyone involved is learning, that is where real success begins.

Another example I wish to offer is a reflection from Lucia. Lucia is a guest at *L.I.N.A.R.*, a day care center where people with intellectual disabilities spend their day supported by a dedicated professional staff that encourages learning, independence, and personal growth. It is also the center where our former student, Kate Ciulla, completed her field experience and shared her experience in the video you can access below (*see QRcode*)

Lucia: “First of all, it should be said that for several years now, L.I.N.A.R. has been welcoming students from all over the world. This is a wonderful thing, because for us to meet new people is just fabulous. It helps us and is good for us. Plus, we hope we can give something in exchange, too. It’s a great thing to collaborate with those who come from the United States. I may not understand them very well, but I want to learn English – their language. I want to learn Spanish, German ... and Indian, too!”

In conclusion, even when verbal communication is not perfect, the desire to learn is still there. Lucia wants to learn English, Spanish, German — even Indian languages. This curiosity, this openness, reminds us that inclusion is not charity: it is exchange. Inclusion works when we rec-

ognize that everyone brings knowledge, culture, skills, and curiosity to the table. This happens when we stop asking “How can I help you?” and start asking “What can I learn from you?” instead. That, to me, is the heart of community engagement, as well as the foundation of meaningful work in the field of disability.



Watch Katie Ciulla's testimony.

## The Vital Role of Education in Removing Barriers Related to Disability

Nina Peci

Katie Ciulla's thoughtful intervention and insight reminds us of the recurring theme throughout the *Open Minds, Open Doors* disability awareness conference, that is, the idea of connecting and how this is the first step in overcoming differences and barriers.

In my role as the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access Officer at ISI Florence, I work to ensure that all our study abroad students feel safe, supported, and included, regardless of their intersectional identities and abilities. However, Katie's observations about breaking down communication barriers bring me back to my past career in Design and Communications, when I used to teach a course in Visual Literacy at a higher education institute. To get students thinking about the various ways people process information, I had them describe their walk from their apartment to the school in three different ways. The first and most obvious was the usual “Walk down such and such street. Turn left at Main Street. When you get to number 5 you have arrived.” Basic verbal instructions which are the standard for most communication. I then had them describe the walk using only visual tools: pictures, drawings, landmarks, shops, signs, etc. No verbal instruction or names of streets were allowed. The third

description was to explain their walk without resorting to any verbal or visual tools; only smells, sounds, emotions, touch, etc. You couldn't say "turn left at the McDonald's" but rather, "when the air fills with the smell of French fries, and it triggers memories of your childhood when your mother wouldn't allow you any junk food, turn towards the sound of the ringing church bells." Or "when the texture of the warm bricks turns to cold glass, you've arrived at the door." While a bit more poetic, this is how many neurodivergent people might process their surroundings. This exercise was meant to have them think about inclusive communication and be aware that not everyone processes information the same way.

The Disability Practicum that my colleague Serena Giorgi developed and illustrated previously, also reminded me of some of the fundamental aspects of situation design. Usually, when we think of situation design, we imagine scenarios like IKEA and their purportedly elaborate labyrinths that prey on human impulses (especially those stimulated by our consumer society) to sell you more things. But in the Practicum's case, the situation design of combining a young study abroad student, completely out of her comfort zone and with limited local language skills, with a group of others impacted by disabilities, led to a deeper human connection that went beyond just words; basically, designing for a more inclusive society.

In conclusion, when I think of the Education field as a designer, I am always questioning how the act of teaching can be designed to be more inclusive and take into consideration how information is processed and how knowledge is assessed. The current trend of academic accommodations like extra time or isolated exam spaces, recalls another aspect of my field: Remedial design. Remedial design is when you must invent an "add-on" or a completely new object to make up for a design failure or shortcoming of the original product. For example, IKEA (not to pick on them again!) sells a vast range of plastic storage boxes with lids. Next to these boxes, is a bin full of little plastic clips for another €2 that serve to keep the lids in place. Great, problem solved! But why couldn't they have just designed a better lid in the first place — or even a better box?

The same applies to Education. Why give more time instead of just reinventing better exam methods that assess knowledge and understanding in a more inclusive way? Are time constraints or extensions inclusive and equitable or just another barrier?

I will leave the answers and solutions to the many experts of the Education field. I only hope the lens of design can be another tool in the room as you shape what comes next — because when design and pedagogy start asking questions together, that's when real inclusion becomes possible.

# When Discomfort Becomes Your Greatest Teacher

ISI Florence Alumni Tell Us Their Lasting Impacts of Study Abroad

Claire Chisholm

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## Abstract

Discomfort and cultural immersion during study abroad often become the foundation for lasting personal and professional transformation, alumni of ISI Florence and the Umbra Institute have found. Through their stories, this article examines how navigating unfamiliar cultures and high-context learning environments builds resilience, curiosity, and adaptability. These skills don't just help students succeed in the classroom; they shape careers, inspire new directions, and foster a deeper understanding of the world. From architecture students leveraging interpretive learning to professionals redefining their identities, the stories in this article underscore study abroad as a pivotal, life-altering experience. By synthesizing these voices, the article offers inspiration to current and future students, demonstrating that the true impact of international education begins where comfort ends.

**Keywords:** Study Abroad, Intercultural Competence, Academic Transformation, Career Development, Personal Growth.

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The beginning of any great adventure rarely looks like what you expected it to be. Before the semester abroad begins, all the necessary groundwork has been laid out, and everything on the list has been crossed off and completed; study abroad advisors have given clear guidance and instruction to students about the program, info-sessions have been attended, flights have been booked, bags have been packed, and visas have been filed carefully by the study abroad institution and are now ready to be picked up. Everything is going according to plan, and the stage is set

for the experience that lies ahead. But nothing could ever truly prepare students for the real adventure and transformation that awaits them on the other side of the arrival doors.

Since 2018, the International Studies Institute - Florence (ISI Florence) has been inviting alumni to contribute their voices and experiences to *Beyond*, our peer-reviewed journal on international education. Reading those contributions over the years has revealed something consistent and compelling: trends in resilience, personal growth, and skills gained that alumni carried far beyond the classroom and leveraged into opportunities. We explored the lasting effects that studying abroad has had on our alumni based on what they have shared and accomplished since leaving the program. We are offering their stories as inspiration to the students who will one day follow in their footsteps.

One of our earliest contributors, Dominique Brigham, who studied at ISI Florence during the 2011-2012 Academic Year, captured this feeling when she wrote in 2018:

Studying abroad is not like attending an ordinary university. It is not for the faint of heart. It is a hyper-charged period of time in which a student's mind is exposed to a multitude of viewpoints from a multitude of locations. There is the perception of limitlessness, an excitement that permeates the entire experience that comes with feeling joyfully out of place.<sup>1</sup>

Dominique's path shows the challenges and rewards of living in real life. After studying at ISI Florence, she returned to Italy to intern with our program. After her second experience in Italy, she moved to Spain to teach English; from there, she enrolled in and achieved her Master's degree in Amsterdam, where she still resides today. Her journey reveals that studying abroad isn't just a semester away from home but can be a transformative stage of development, shifting the trajectory of your life. The disruption of familiar routines encourages new ways of learning, interacting, and understanding oneself – changes that ripple outward from

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1. D. Brigham, *Abroad and Beyond*, in «Beyond: The ISI Florence & Umbra Institute Studies in International Education» (hereafter *Beyond*), 1, 2018, pp. 145-152: 145.

academic growth into personal development and professional direction long after the plane has landed back home.

### **Foundations Rebuilt: Academic Growth Abroad**

Studying abroad not only changes the location where students learn, but also changes how they are learning in comparison to what they were originally taught. American university students arrive abroad having been firmly shaped by low-context academic environments, where expectations are clearly stated by their professors, instructions are written out on the board, and feedback is direct and ‘sandwiched’ by compliments. These expectations change when they start their semesters in Florence and Perugia, which are instead shaped by high-context communication. When students step into a high-context academic culture, they must change their mindset, as meaning is implied and guidance is rarely handed to them, requiring an entirely different approach to engaging with knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Similar changes stand out among the ISI Florence architecture alumni, whose studio culture focuses on observation, discussion, and contextual interpretation, instead of direct instruction. This different setting encourages students to develop their own analytical voices rather than adhere to a predetermined method that was once spoon-fed to them. As Alex Hall (Spring 2019) describes it in a collective article by several alums, the experience was “untainted by textbook jargon and allowed each one of us to place our own judgments upon every space we stumbled across.”<sup>3</sup>

Alicia Moreira, who studied at ISI Florence in Spring 2018, describes her high-context academic shift in this way:

I was privileged to have experienced discomfort on so many occasions that semester, pulling myself whenever possible from routines and the culture I knew well [...]. Learning to look for un-

2. See E. Meyer, *The Culture Map: Decoding How People Think, Lead, and Get Things Done Across Cultures*. New York, PublicAffairs, (2014).

3. *Life after MARYStudio*, in *Beyond*, 3, 2020, pp. 85-93: 91-92.

comfortable experiences has made me a more aware, curious, and confident person.<sup>4</sup>

Alicia is a living example of academic success and skills gained through cultural curiosity and high-context teaching methods. After completing her Bachelor of Science in Architecture at the University of Maryland, she continued her studies and earned her Master's in Architecture at UC Berkeley, where she was also awarded the Branner and Beckerman Fellowship for her research. Today, she works as a successful architectural designer; in addition, she is a researcher and educator at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco.<sup>5</sup> Her trajectory is directly supported by data from the research on study abroad and academic outcomes, which shows that students who participate in study abroad are positively associated with higher GPAs and an increased likelihood of both degree attainment and transfer to advanced academic programs.<sup>6</sup> Once a student who embraced discomfort in Florence, she now thrives by helping others discover meaning in their own academic journeys.

Students from the Spring 2019 semester provided compelling examples of this change as well during their time abroad. After returning from their semester in Florence, University of Maryland architecture students participated in the Senior Intra-Studio Design Competition in the United States. This contest is focused on developing industry-specific practical work aimed at housing for the elderly. On that occasion, five of the six award-winning UMD students credited their skills to the time they spent studying abroad at ISI Florence. They believe that the interpretive and independent learning skills they developed while abroad directly contrib-

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4. *Ibidem*, p. 93.

5. See Alicia Moreira: *Architectural Designer, Researcher, and Educator* at <https://alicia-moreira.com/> (accessed 27 March 2026).

6. See M. Whatley – M. González Canché, *A robust estimation of the relationship between study abroad and academic outcomes among community college students*, in «Research in Higher Education», 63, 2022, pp. 271-308 (also available online at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-021-09647-7>).

uted to their academic success back home.<sup>7</sup>

This academic shift isn't restricted only to architecture students. Elsa Vellone (University of Rochester), who studied at ISI Florence in Spring 2023, describes a similar academic shift that had nothing to do with the structure of her classes but, instead, the perspectives inside them:

As an International Relations major, I gained valuable new understandings of European and Italian governance, law, and cultural dynamics, leading me to question assumptions I had previously taken for granted as someone who grew up within the American education system.<sup>8</sup>

For Elsa, this high-context shift happened not within the walls of the classroom but in the substance of what she was learning throughout Italy and Europe.

The academic growth students benefit from while abroad is just one part of a bigger transformation taking place during the whole semester. ISI Florence alumni have many similar experiences that taught them how to manage unfamiliar expectations. Likewise, those circumstances contributed to shape how they work, how they communicate across cultures, and – lastly – how they understand themselves overall. These are the building blocks that encourage personal and skill development, which directly strengthen the leadership potential that closely follows the students well into their careers.

### **Career Frameworks: Skills That Last**

As noted by Eric J. Leed, American author of *The Mind of the Traveler*, “Travel is the most common resource of metaphors to explain transformations and transitions of all kinds. The journey allows a rediscovery of our more ancestral impulses, often taking on the meaning of a sacred moment for its potential for transformation, rediscovery, and motivation for the

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7. See *Beyond*, 2020, pp. 84-93

8. Personal interview with Elsa Vellone conducted by Claire Chisholm (5 March 2026).

individual.”<sup>9</sup> ISI Florence alumni seldom keep that change to themselves. It stays close behind them, like a shadow of personal development and wisdom, as they journey into their professional careers.

The newly cultivated traits of self-confidence, adaptability, resilience, and intercultural awareness do not get thrown in the back of the closet like an old suitcase once students return home. These changes stay with the students as they begin moving forward in their professional lives. When Dominique (ISI Florence alumna from the class of 2011, as said above) reflected on what studying abroad opened for her personally and what it allowed her to do, she expressed it as follows: “You could make mistakes, have adventures, try new things, reimagine yourself if you wanted.”<sup>10</sup> The freedom to reimagine yourself turns out to be one of the most professionally significant things a semester or year abroad can offer a student. The constant risk-taking, quick adaptation to one’s study abroad home base, the countless travels, and cross-cultural communication skills being tested are not just temporary personality traits. They are exactly what employers look for, and study abroad students are usually the first to grab their attention when positions open. According to the IES Recent Graduates Survey, 94% of students who studied abroad reported that their experience helped them build the skills needed for their first job.<sup>11</sup>

Ben Ripley, who studied at ISI Florence in the Spring 2019 semester, reflects as follows on how the skills he built abroad showed up directly in his professional life:

The design studio was an especially unique and valuable experience for me, as we worked in pairs for the entirety of the semester [...]. This forced both my partner and me to work on our ability to communicate design ideas to each other at every stage of the project,

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9. E.J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*, New York, Basic Books. 1991, as cited by F. Passeri, *Study Abroad: The “Discomfort Zone”*, in *Beyond*, 3, 2020, p. 33-38: 33.

10. Brigham, *Abroad and Beyond*, cit., p. 146.

11. See Institute of International Education (2023). Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad on Recent College Graduates’ Careers. IIE (<https://www.iie.org/research-and-insights>).

which I've found to be an incredibly valuable skill to have.<sup>12</sup>

Students often describe how the group projects and rich contextual atmosphere helped them develop their individuality while designing and engaging in open discussion, rather than strictly following rigid guidelines. This was a specific and identifiable change that Ben experienced during his time abroad. For others, the impact was harder to pinpoint, but it was just as real an experience as Ben's. Carla Hill Galfano, who studied at ISI Florence in 2005, spent several years noticing how her study abroad experience manifested in her professional life in ways she never anticipated. The impact of her Florentine study abroad showed up consistently long after the semester ended. After her time at our institute, she went on to complete a business program in Northern Italy, where contextual examples of what she learned in Italian intercultural communication frequently appeared in meetings, conversations with Italian colleagues, and in the professional relationships she built. She credits her first time abroad as the foundation for everything she has accomplished during her second time in Italy.<sup>13</sup>

For Jessica Paholsky, an Umbra Institute alumna of the Spring 2012 semester, her study abroad experience did not just feed her curiosity, but instead, it created an unexpected life from scratch. Her career trajectory shifted entirely when she became inspired during her time at the Umbra Institute, thanks to her *History of Italian Food* class. Jessica, who arrived as a shy Fine Arts and Journalism student, left the program with a love of being behind the camera, a deep appreciation for international education, and a hunger to share her 'Italian foodie-isms' with the world. After the program, she went on to graduate and landed her first job in video production for international student travel programs.<sup>14</sup>

12. *Life after MARYStudio*, cit., p. 93.

13. See C. Hill Galfano, *Above and Beyond*, in *Beyond*, 1, 2018, pp. 153-162.

14. See J. Paholsky, *Once Upon a Pesto* at <https://www.onceuponapesto.com/> (accessed 27 March 2026).

When she last updated *Beyond*,<sup>15</sup> she told us that she was dreaming of publishing a book one day. We can proudly say that Jessica has published her own cookbook, *Once Upon a Pesto*, which is directly related to her time in Perugia, as it takes readers on a delicious journey through culinary flavors and interesting food history, inspired by many different recipes from around the world. This book includes 120 recipes and teaches readers about pesto as a process.<sup>16</sup> As she told me during the interview, “Looking back on my own journey, I understand now how studying abroad in Perugia, Italy, was the North Star that’s directed these past eleven years and will continue to do so in the years yet to come”.

Jessica’s path is not uncommon among study abroad program alumni. Research shows that 34% of study abroad alumni credit their experience with helping them determine their career direction entirely, and 84% of those working in internationally oriented fields trace that path directly to their time abroad.<sup>17</sup> Similar patterns can be seen in the developing career path of Elsa Vellone (mentioned above), but from a different angle. Currently residing in Italy, Elsa is producing a short documentary series about Italian culture with the residents of Caserta. After her time abroad in Florence, it is clear that her interests still lie in Italy, but her experience has also inspired her to pursue a Master’s degree in international public policy. Her study abroad experience directly shaped the professional direction she is now moving toward: “I became interested in European public policy and its global impact. I am particularly drawn to roles in international organizations, policy research, and development, where I hope to apply the cross-cultural skills I gained during my time abroad.”<sup>18</sup>

That path can look different for everyone, but the thread connecting each story is the same. The experience doesn’t end when the semester

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15. See J. Paholsky, *Mapping My Dominos: From Umbra Institute to Once Upon a Pesto*, in *Beyond*, 6, 2023, pp. 68-74.

16. Personal interview with Jessica Paholsky (10 March 2026) conducted by Claire Chisholm.

17. University of California, Merced. (2023). Statistics on Study Abroad. Retrieved from <https://studyabroad.ucmerced.edu/study-abroad-statistics/statistics-study-abroad>

18. Personal interview with Elsa Vellone conducted by Claire Chisholm (see note 8 above).

does; it's merely just the beginning. For some, it redirects them toward entirely different careers; for others, it builds intercultural skills that shape their work back home; and for many, it plants a curiosity that fuels new-found confidence and opportunities they wouldn't have found studying only at their home university.

### **From Departure to Lifelong Change**

All the alumni mentioned here are not exceptions; they are examples of how studying abroad can positively impact a student forever. As Elsa explained during the interview:

Studying abroad is not just about traveling. It is about making a conscious effort to integrate into a new culture: learning the language, local norms, forming relationships with locals, and experiencing everyday life to the best of your abilities. Taking full advantage of everything that the city and program have to offer (including interacting with staff, professors, and your local shop owners) will not only shape your academic path but will fundamentally influence your perspective of the world and your role within it.<sup>19</sup>

For every Elsa, Dominique, Alicia, Jessica, Carla, Alex, Ben, and so on, there are hundreds of other amazing students whose lives are currently being transformed by their profound changes at this very moment. Architecture students are in the studio, critiquing their final projects while navigating a cultural setting with which they are not familiar with. Meanwhile, others are using a foreign bus system to reach their practicum placement and help people in difficult situations. I have spoken to students whose biggest personal development was leaving home and who now have developed dreams of teaching English to women in the Middle East, to help give them the same access to education and opportunities that their parents gave them. The potential is endless for these young students, and I find it truly inspiring.

As we live in the present and look toward the future, we continue to

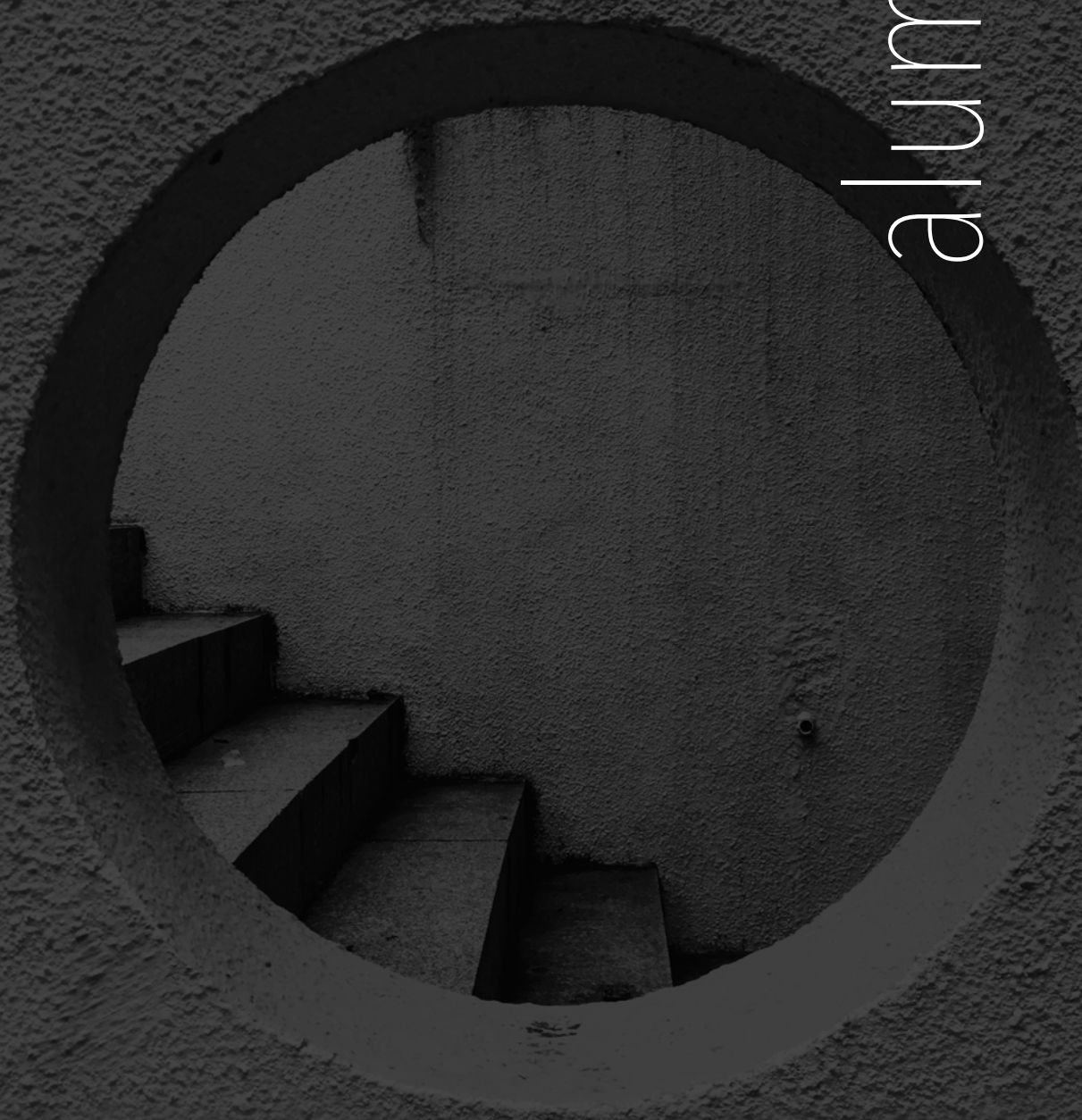
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19. Personal interview with Elsa Vellone conducted by Claire Chisholm (see note 8 above).

host bright and motivated students who are undertaking their own experience with ISI Abroad. We do not know yet what they will build, where they will go, or what unexpected events will set their lives in motion. What we do know is that every voice that has contributed their story to *Beyond* since 2018 shows that a semester abroad can be a student's greatest teacher.



alumni.



# Gains and Pains of Short-Chain

## Post COVID Reflections on Food Policy and Sustainability

Catherine Nardi

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### **Abstract**

Local food procurement in institutional settings has increasingly gained traction as a strategy to support food system resiliency and sustainability goals. This comparative case study examines the factors that influence food procurement via local short-food supply chains within school feeding programs (SFP) in Florence, Italy and Washington, DC. The data were analyzed using four primary themes– policy, health, economic, and environmental– aligned with the European Union’s pillars of sustainable development. The findings emphasize the role of policy in influencing food procurement within SFP, and offer insights to inform international public food procurement policy, investment in short-food supply chains, and food systems planning.

**Keywords:** Short-food Supply Chains, Food Policy, Environmental Impact, Food Procurement, School Food Programs.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had cascading implications for public health, the environment, and global economies. The crisis laid bare the fragilities and weaknesses inherent within international supply chains and the necessity of social safety nets. Food– a seemingly basic concept with tremendous nuance– has been systematically impacted by the shifts of the post-pandemic world. Many communities globally report higher rates of hunger and food insecurity now as compared to pre-2020 levels<sup>1</sup>. Climate change is ravaging agricultural outputs and stifling food econ-

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1. <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-07-2023-122-million-more-people-pushed-into-hunger-since-2019-due-to-multiple-crises--reveals-un-report>

omies<sup>2</sup>. The United Nations and European Union have since expanded investment in research and innovation efforts focused on adapting food production methods, improving food access strategies, and bolstering local foodways to meet the growing need.

Within the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, where I have worked in a variety of non-profit and government agencies over the past decade developing and leading food system programs and policies, nascent local and regional approaches are emerging to better connect healthy, locally produced food with market channels and consumers. While communities in this region have had longstanding access to locally produced foods through the typical farm-to-table pathways, like farmers markets and community-supported agriculture, family-owned local restaurants, and select (typically high-end or gourmet) retailers, the adoption of values-based institutional and public food procurement strategies has only recently taken hold. The integration of short-food supply chains in institutional food service operations like schools, hospitals, and universities, driven in part by newly introduced state and local policy, have demonstrated early success in supporting hyperlocal food security, reducing the environmental impact of the food system, and facilitating economic growth.

Short-food supply chains (SFSC) are those in which a limited number of intermediaries are involved in the processes between food production and consumption; this typically necessitates a local connection to ensure minimal pass-throughs.<sup>3</sup>

Having spent months living in and visiting Italy, I have long been familiar with the notion of SFSC. In fact, it is often much more likely than not that the proteins and produce found in an Italian market, on a restaurant menu, or at the corner “*alimentari*” (mini-market) are sourced directly from local or regional farms within a few hundred kilometers. I

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2. <https://www.undp.org/thailand/stories/how-does-climate-change-impact-agriculture>

3. <https://www.eufic.org/en/food-production/article/short-food-supply-chains-reconnecting-producers-and-consumers>

couldn't think of a better place to study the connection between short-food supply chains and institutional food procurement practices than Italy, where food sits at the heart of the nation's culture, policymaking, and day-to-day life.

With funding through the US Fulbright Program and support from Fulbright Italy and the University of Florence, I set out to independently conduct a comparative analysis examining the factors that influence food procurement via short-food supply chains in school food programs (SFP) in both Florence, Italy and Washington, DC. Tuscany is one of the top producers of food and beverage specialties in Italy, and therefore the Tuscan government has historically invested deeply in food and agriculture developments. Tuscany's capital, Florence, benefits from international political influences as a member of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), an agreement and framework for cities to take action towards more sustainable food systems. Washington, DC is one of few American cities that is also a member of the MUFPP. Since the early 2010s, the capital city has invested heavily in food systems innovation and advancement efforts, including through the establishment of a Food Policy Council with direct ties to the Mayor's office, and the creation of a Food Policy Director role within the DC Office of Planning.

## **The Process**

My Fulbright research spanned from October 2025 through February 2026, and included a variety of methods. The research process began with an extensive literature review, collecting data and relevant research from both Italian and American contexts. The literature review informed a policy landscape analysis used to identify the key legislative and policy mechanisms enacted over the last several decades that have impacted and influenced both school food procurement priorities and the development of short-food supply chains in Florence and in Washington.

Next, I met face-to-face with numerous school food program staff members in the Municipality of Florence and two surrounding jurisdictions— Scandicci and Bagno a Ripoli— as well as with the contracted ca-

terers that support Florence's SFP. I also interviewed various food system partners that have connections to students, families, and short-chain producers, including the local food bank, Slow Food Toscana volunteers, and agricultural organizers like the Rural Seeds Network. During many of these meetings, I had the opportunity to visit the kitchen facilities used to store, process, and prepare food for school meals; here, interviewees provided additional insights related to the receiving and processing of short-chain foods for meal services.

From Florence, I met virtually with stakeholders in Washington, including representatives of the DC Public Schools (DCPS) Department of Food and Nutrition Services, the three catering partners that serve DCPS students (Aramark, DC Central Kitchen, and Sodexo), the Mayor's Office, the DC Food Policy Council, and the DC Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE). I also engaged DCPS's community-based and local supply-chain partners like American University's Healthy Schools Healthy Communities program, The Common Market, and 4P Foods.

Each interview followed the same semi-structured format that included questions regarding the strengths and challenges associated with procurement of local and short-chain foods within the relevant municipality's SFP, discussion of the SFP's primary procurement priorities, opportunities to strengthen local food procurement practices, and threats that have or could impact short-chain food procurement in the local SFP. Following each interview, an anonymized questionnaire was sent to collect additional data and inform a more efficient, complete analysis of SFP procurement perspectives, as well as actual practices and priorities.

In total, 9 representatives from Florence were interviewed and 11 representatives from Washington, DC were interviewed. 4 responses were received to the questionnaire from Florentine participants and 5 questionnaire responses were recorded from DC-based participants. The responses were evaluated using deductive thematic analysis to consider influences and outcomes associated with policy, or with any of the European Union's three pillars of sustainability— social/health, economic, and environmental.

### **The Takeaways**

Due to the fact that school food programs are managed at the municipality-level in Italy, each program serves a smaller geographical area, and therefore a lesser number of schools and students as compared to the District of Columbia. As a result, the Italian SFP kitchens have capacity to scratch-make almost all elements of the meals in-house, except for bread that is typically purchased from and delivered daily by local bakers and dairy produced by local dairy farmers. For instance, two of the Italian municipalities that work with the caterer CIRFOOD described receiving local, flash-frozen fish from the Tyrrhenian Sea, which is ground onsite and formed into fish balls for a sustainable protein alternative to meatballs. In contrast, the caterers working with DC Public Schools consistently commented on their preference to receive ingredients from local suppliers and producers that have already undergone more extensive processing— such as par-cooked chicken drumsticks, or shelled frozen peas— so that they can be more easily incorporated into meals.

Despite these differences in scale, many of the identified factors that affect local, short-chain food procurement in the SFP were similar – including positive influences that facilitate short-chain relationships, and challenges that prevent or decrease the use of local foods.

### **Policy Influences**

The interview and questionnaire responses emphasize the importance of policy and legislation in influencing the procurement of local, short-chain foods for school feeding programs. Both national and local-level policies are implicated as primary drivers of local food procurement practices in the two locales. Italian interview participants consistently cited the Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM), established with mandatory compliance among food service providers at the national level in 2017, as a driving force behind food procurement decisions.

“The most important criteria are organic products – due to CAM.”  
(Municipality of Florence)

“In Italy, the Minimum Environmental Criteria are defined by law, which establish a minimum percentage of organic products that must be used in school canteens.” (Municipality of Bagno a Ripoli)

In DC, the local-level “Healthy Schools Act,” implemented in 2010, requires school food program operators serving DCPS to incorporate at least one “locally-sourced, unprocessed” component to each meal served<sup>4</sup>. This is the primary factor that has led DCPS SFP operators to seek purchasing relationships with local food vendors, and has been strengthened since the implementation of a partnership between DCPS and the Good Food Purchasing Program in 2019 to monitor and support sustainable food procurement. Additionally, contracts established directly between the local government entity and the school food program operator in both Florence and Washington help to set expectations for incorporating local food into the SFP.

“Specific regulations in DC help to offer guidelines for finding the right types of products.” (Sodexo)

“The contract with DCPS obligates DC Central Kitchen to purchase at least 25% of foods for the school food program locally.” (DC Central Kitchen)

## **Health Influences**

Research participants in both Florence and Washington repeatedly cited health and nutrition as factors that influence the procurement of foods and menu development for the SFP. The Municipality of Florence has developed a school meals mascot that provides nutrition and healthy eating guidance through social media, print materials, and online blog posts on a dedicated website. The Municipality of Scandicci has also cre-

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4. [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/Healthy%20Schools%20Act%20Informational%20Guide%2012.13.19.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Healthy%20Schools%20Act%20Informational%20Guide%2012.13.19.pdf)

ated an app that provides details to students and families regarding the nutritional components in each school meal. The Municipality of Scandicci cited a preference for sourcing organic food as a means to support “attention to health”.

In Washington, interview responses and questionnaire responses refer to the national dietary guidelines and nutrition standards as guiding forces for the development of school meals and menus. The connection between health and locally sourced food is made clear through the inclusion of several “Local Food” provisions in Washington’s “Healthy Schools Act”.

“[We are] ensuring exposure to kid-friendly healthy foods that offer an educational opportunity.” (DC Public Schools)

“Federal guidelines...make it easier for Sodexo to narrow down the choice of products that meet criteria.” (Sodexo)

### **Economic Influences**

The challenges faced in both jurisdictions are primarily characterized by a lack of sufficient local food supply to simultaneously meet the demand of the program and policy guidelines; budgetary constraints were also highlighted. Importantly, the participants from Florence did not frequently cite local or short-chain products as being more expensive than conventional ones, whereas several of the DC-based participants did indicate prices from local farms and purveyors as being typically higher.

“There’s difficulty in purchasing organic products through an intermediary to serve 18,000 children. Vegetables are difficult to find in short supply chains for 18,000 children.” (Municipality of Florence)

“[A weakness is] not having the supply we need if organic cannot always be guaranteed.” (Municipality of Scandicci)

“Small suppliers may have difficulty meeting the quantities ordered.” (Municipality of Bagno a Ripoli)

“One issue when sourcing from a local company in the past was consistency of being able to provide the food at the amounts needed.” (Sodexo)

“The dollar value of reimbursement for [locally sourced] meals as compared to rising food costs are not keeping pace. The reimbursement was already low prior to the pandemic. Some of the systems and policies are not built to purchase locally.” (DC Central Kitchen)

Comments also touched on the economic benefit to local farm partners when short-food supply chains were engaged in the SFP.

“Investing in local economies and local farms is something that most competitors aren’t doing. Working with 30-50 farms is a lot of work, to manage the relationships and contracts, but it is worth it for the return on investment.” (DC Central Kitchen)

## **Environmental Influences**

Compliance with the Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM) is among the primary priorities for SFPs in Italy, including the three school districts involved in this research. Additionally, policies at the national level such as the Italian Short Supply Chain Decree of 2022 have influenced a shift towards short-chain, local food procurement within each municipality. Interviewees also discussed the reduced emissions associated with the transportation of local and short-chain foods as a positive sustainability aspect.

From the American perspective, DC-based interviewees associated locally sourced foods with positive environmental impact. Numerous respondents noted a connection between climate change and unpredictable weather patterns with limited local and short-chain product availability.

“Overall environmental impact is a strong point– three items on any given lunch day might be locally sourced... we are looking to have a much shorter supply chain even when it costs extra.” (DC Central Kitchen)

“For fruit and vegetables, the weather has a huge influence.” (Municipality of Florence)

“Climate changes affect product availability.” (DC Public Schools)

“The companies are small, and harvests are subject to climatic variability; sometimes supplies are insufficient, and menu variations are necessary.” (Municipality of Bagno a Ripoli)

## Conclusion

The insights offered in this research can inform strategies in international contexts that leverage public food procurement policy to support investment in local and short-food supply chains, as well as aggregation and co-operative approaches that facilitate access to a greater aggregate supply of local products, reduce logistical/ administrative barriers, and encourage cost-savings while maintaining fair prices for local farm partners and businesses. The research findings will also be relevant to various global efforts—including the European Union’s Farm to Fork Strategy and the “Future-Foods” European Union partnership— that aim to revitalize and incentivize hyper-local food production and consumption as a means of supporting nutrition security, climate adaptation, and circular economies.

Bringing together school food program staff and food system partners from two different communities across the world has allowed for the exchange of ideas and best practices, as well as the formation of new networks that will surely inform school food and nutrition policy innovations at the local level in the US. This research process has illustrated the innumerable benefits of international study, and emphasized the value of

mutual, cross-cultural understanding... even (and perhaps especially) for something as basic as food.



**Upper left:** The table is set with locally made bread, placemats, and washable water cups and serveware for students at a school in the Municipality of Scandicci prior to lunch.

**Upper middle:** A staff member of CIRFOOD, the catering company that serves students in the Municipality of Florence and the Municipality of Scandicci, prepares pasta with olive oil for lunch service.

**Upper right:** Fish sourced from the Tyrrhenian Sea is ground onsite at the CIRFOOD central cooking facility in the Municipality of Scandicci before being used for fish meatballs.

**Lower left:** Organic pasta sourced from a producer within 300 km of Florence is used for the pasta dishes in the Municipality of Florence's school meal program.

**Lower right:** Local produce is delivered daily to the central cooking facility for the Municipality of Scandicci, including seasonally available items grown in the south of Italy, like oranges.

# Linda Falcone: The Storyteller of Florence

Dahria Charadnichenka

For over two decades, Linda Falcone has been working at the epicenter of a quiet revolution in the art world: the recovery, restoration and exhibition of women's art.

Falcone grew up in Northern California, later studying English and Italian literature. During her undergraduate years, she also studied at the University of Venice during her junior year, after spending a good part of her summers in Italy as a child. In her early thirties, Falcone managed *The Florentine* (a Florence-based English news magazine) for its first two years of operation, thus giving her a broad introduction to the city. Around 2005, Falcone met philanthropist Jane Fortune, who was asking the art world one simple question: where are the women artists?

This question became the foundation of Advancing Women Artists (AWA), which focused on bringing women artists and their works to the public's attention. The organization funded the restoration of 70 artworks by women during its 14-year lifespan. Falcone also co-authored several books on art restoration with Fortune while working at AWA. Her list of publications includes a fundamental text called *Invisible Women: Forgotten Artists of Florence*. As she told me during our meeting, "*Invisible Women*, which actually has an index in the back of all of the art by women we could find in the state museums, became a reference book for us in our work as well, and for the museums. It enabled us to say, 'From this list, what needs restoring?' It was a great tool for that."

AWA closed its doors in 2020, having, "lived its natural life," as Falcone put in in the interview. Its many activities in well over a decade significantly contributed to bringing women artists to the mainstream. "It was a wonderful experience and opportunity. It definitely sensitized a lot of people and raised awareness among many, regarding how much there was in the stores of museums that needed looking at, studying,

and exposure to the exhibition spotlight,” said Falcone. Shortly after the foundation’s closure, Falcone was approached by former board member Margie MacKinnon and Wayne McArdle, who expressed their interest in continuing to support the rediscovery of women’s achievements in other ways. “We began talking about the fact that there’s still a lot of work to do,” said Falcone with regards to women working in all disciplines, including artists, and the public’s awareness of them.

With this idea in mind, MacKinnon and McArdle founded Calliope Arts in 2021, which continues to work in Florence and London in art restoration, particularly highlighting women artists. Since then, Calliope Arts has organized a number of impactful exhibitions, such as *Women of the Skies* and *The Wulz Family Atelier* (in partnership with the Museo Galileo and the Alinari Foundation for Photography, respectively) and – most recently – *Girls in the Innocenti Archives*, in partnership with the Innocenti Institute and Museum.

The latter was a particularly interesting project. The Innocenti Institute holds a remarkable 40,000 identity tokens, which were left with abandoned infants over the course of six centuries. Many of the abandoned infants were girls, and these tokens (which could range from half of a medallion to scraps of fabric, or even a mix of metal, paper and cloth) were left with the infants in order to identify them. In addition to these tokens, the Institute also kept detailed records of each infant’s life through to adulthood. “All the children have their own pages in these amazing ledgers. It’s a really unique example of, well, children’s history and women’s history,” said Falcone. “The Innocenti is interesting because of its archive, which preserves one of the rarest examples of women’s history starting from birth, and social history, because not only do you get the history of the newborns, but you also get the history of the wet nurses, the unwed mothers, the whole female community that was living at the Innocenti over the course of several centuries.”

These detailed ledgers provide a rare glimpse into women’s social history, making this archive one of the most comprehensive in the world. “If a child survived for ten days, she has one page. If she survived until

adulthood and got married, we know where she was sent in Tuscany, which family she was with, what her destiny was, whether she was given back to the Innocenti, or if she was adopted by her foster family. It's quite an interesting story about a lot of foundlings."

Calliope Arts' project with the Innocenti focuses in particular on the 20th century, called the 'hidden' century in Florence. Much of the exhibition and conservation work done so far at the Innocenti has been focused on the 15th and 16th centuries, making this project one of the first of its kind.

Teamwork is also incredibly important to making the exhibition a reality. "It always begins, again with a conversation," said Falcone. "Restoring artwork is a team effort. You have a museum administrator, or executive, an art historian, and a restorer ... . You have a team of people. There's a huge dialogue that leads the restoration." Depending on the token preserved at the Innocenti, it may need a metal conservator, a textile conservator and a paper conservator, resulting in three people working on just the restoration stage!

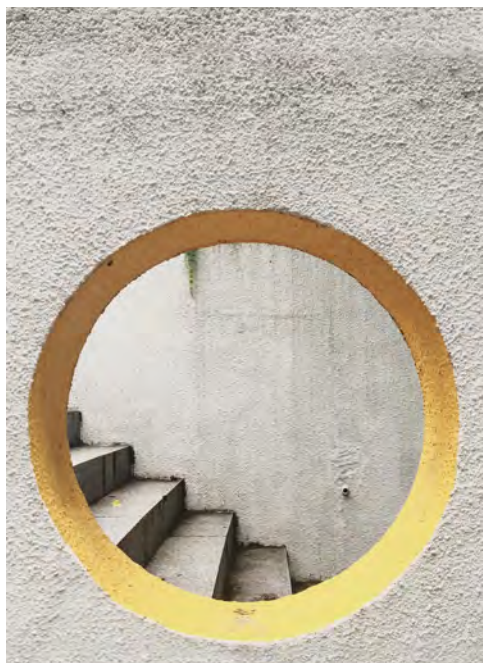
In describing the project, Falcone emphasized storytelling as a central element of this exhibit curated by Arabella Natalini: "I'm not a conservation scientist, I'm not a conservator, I am a storyteller." For curators, a show's story guides the curating aspects and selection process for tokens in the exhibition, with a major question being: "Which of these can tell the clearest story?" Taking into account the narrative clarity and how it fits into representing the collection as a whole, the result is a moving exhibition that educates the public on previously little-known histories.

The curation of the final selection, guided by the major question, is one of the less recognizable stages of exhibition production. Much of the work takes place before an exhibition opens, often involving years of planning. As Falcone put it at one point during the interview: "We have this idea that museums are these dead places, where certain things are on the wall, and that's that. Well, certain things are on the wall because somebody made a decision about them. Everything is intentional... . Museums are living places, and it depends very much on what the public wants to

see. But what the public wants to see depends on what they are familiar with. That is one of the really important awareness-raising missions of this foundation: to increase people's knowledge about women's contributions to multiple fields."

As a result of Falcone's tireless efforts in the art conservation field and with the Calliope Arts Foundation, women artists are gaining greater recognition both in Florence and on a broader scale. "What were women creating in terms of culture? And why were they creating these specific things? We think it's a really valid question", as Falcone remarked toward the end of our meeting. Through her work as a consultant, Falcone has been able to facilitate the exhibitions of hundreds of individual artworks and artifacts, while also bringing their stories to life in the public's eyes.





# Beyond

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## n.9

### Contributors

Stefano U. Baldassarri  
Dahria Charadnichenka  
Claire Chisholm  
Michael A. Di Giovine  
Bradley Flamm  
Serena Giorgi  
Spyridon S. Kogkas  
Catherine Nardi  
Nina Peci  
Virgilio A Reyes, Jr.  
Paul Sylvester  
Francesco Vossilla  
Zhang Zheng-Ying

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