

## Change at the top of Insubria. Porisini: “Thank you Varese, it’s been an honour”

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**After 12 years, he will no longer be Magnificent.** He will only be “**Professor**”, perhaps “**Dear Professor**”, one of many Italian lecturers. **From tomorrow, 1 November, Alberto Coen Porisini will no longer be at the head of Insubria University ([read his first interview as rector](#)).** The new Rector will be **Professor Angelo Tagliabue**, who will lead the university for the next 6 years.

### **How do you feel right now?**

Calm. On Monday, another page is turning. I’ll go back to being a lecturer, to working on my course and my department. There’s a lot of news in the pipeline. I’m very happy to start this new commitment.

### **How is the university in Italy?**

I’d say it’s quite well, despite everything. For years, academia has not received the attention it deserves from politicians. I don’t mean this government, in particular, as we’ve seen too little of it. But we’ve suffered cuts and interventions dictated by reasons that had nothing to do with culture and education. It’s a question of resources: in our country, we invest half as much as other countries do in education. And you see it.

### **How do you see it? Has the quality deteriorated?**

No. The quality remains high, but there is an explanation. The average age of academic lecturers is very high, because there’s no turnover. So our qualified students look for alternatives abroad. When this class

of lecturers retires, there'll be a vacuum. And it will be too late to fill it. If we don't open the doors of our universities to young people, and when I say young people, I mean aged 27/30, in a few years, the problem of university education will be dramatic. If we lose young people, we lose knowledge. At the age of 57, I'm still considered young, a new face in the academic world. But do we realise this?

**The University of Insubria has grown in recent years, but it has many courses with restricted numbers. Can't we increase them?**

Growth is an objective that we set ourselves and that we achieved. In the last six years, I've seen the number of new students increase from 2200 to 3600. The overall student population should reach 13,000 and we can still assume this will increase to 15,000. But you can't go any further. The growth of a university requires adequate spaces, sufficient laboratories, infrastructure and services. Insubria cannot think of becoming a large university, like the Universities of Pavia and Bologna. Our size must be equal to the size that the city can provide. Furthermore, at the moment, the university is suffering from a lack of staff: while the number of courses and of students is increasing, the number of employees has decreased. We've gone from 380 employees to 360, a considerable reduction that now, with no more constraints on turnover, we can think about reversing, but this won't happen immediately.

**Your predecessor, Renzo Dionigi, said, at the beginning of the life of this university, that a town needs at least 20 years to become a university town. In 2018, Insubria reached this age. Has Varese become a university town?**

We have to understand what we mean by "university town". In my opinion, a town can be defined as such if it starts to include its former students among its key citizen roles. If we consider this aspect, I believe Varese has become a university town, because its former students can now be found in a variety of sectors and roles. I repeat, Varese can't become like Pavia or Bologna, where the universities have century-old traditions; nevertheless, I think the level of integration achieved is satisfactory.

**In these years, you've worked hard to bring the university and town together, you've made Insubria an open institution.**

Yes. I come from the Polytechnic, a very pragmatic institution, whose relationship with the territory is fundamental. This is the vision I have, so I had no doubts when it came to sitting at the table and working together. Moreover, my generation is certainly less tied to the somewhat austere and closed culture of the academic world of the past. In this respect, I am indeed part of the new generation ...

**Is there anything you regret at the end of your term of office?**

No. I'd do everything I did again. In general, I'm not one who regrets.

**Which achievement has given you most satisfaction?**

**The campus in Bizzozero.** Seeing the university campus grow and opening it up to the town was the most rewarding moment. That is where my vision of an academic institution can be seen: it's a place where the world of culture meets civil society. That's how I see the future. And in Bizzozero, if and when we get more spaces in the former psychiatric hospital in Via Rossi, we'll continue to grow in that neighbourhood. That will be the natural place in which to continue to develop, with the creation of new services and other courses of study.

**How has the town treated you?**

If you mean the controversies surrounding the hospital, well, they certainly didn't concern me. They were related to a very limited context and model. I think I've received a lot from this town, and I'm glad to have been able to do my job with such enthusiasm and to have achieved the involvement of all of the institutions. I love Varese. It's my town. I returned here in 2001 and I have no intention of leaving it.

On Monday, Prof. Alberto Coen Porisini will return to his computer science class and resume work. And so, a new chapter begins.

di **Translated by Matteo Giagnolini (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)**

