Interview Questions

STEAM Journey: "Can you share your journey and what inspired you to pursue a career in STEAM? Were there any key moments or influential figures that directed you towards this path?"

I am a quite lucky person. I grew up in an openminded and supportive family, where women were used to study and work since my grandmother's generation. I was a very shy child, and I found my shelter in mathematics, where not so many words are needed. Then, I got stuck to it and, trained by my classical studies to look for beauty in the world, I discovered its elegance and hidden creativity.

Three figures were fundamental for my journey in STEAM: my Greek teacher at the high school who forced me to leave my comfort corner and speak in public; my degree thesis supervisor who suggested I could apply for the PhD program; an older colleague of mine at the University of Naples whose generosity in sharing her teaching skills shaped my approach with students.

STEAM Achievement: "What do you consider your most significant achievement or contribution to your field? How do you hope your work will impact the future of STEAM?"

My most significant contributions to my research field are the next ones.

After almost 30 years in academia, what I surely prefer is the chance to meet young people, contribute to their education and evolve with them. I hope that my involvement

in teaching and counselling will inspire young students to go into mathematics and pursue a career in it.

Challenges and Overcoming Them: "Throughout your career in STEAM, what were some of the significant challenges you faced both in your personal and professional life? How did you overcome them? How did these challenges shape your professional journey?"

Most women of my generation were raised with the idea that a man should be brilliant, bold, proud. On the contrary, a woman should be well-mannered, obliging, respectful. This difference is reflected in a dream gap, that I am afraid is still there. We often and unconsciously obstruct ourselves. We should stop thinking that women are not suitable for a professional journey in STEAM or that women need to work harder than men to have the same job opportunities and achieve the same goals. One of the most significant challenges in my personal and professional life has been managing this attitude. I hope that the new women generation will not need to question its role and capability.

Advice for Young Women: "What advice would you give to young girls who are interested in STEAM but might be hesitant to pursue it due to stereotypes or the fear of failure?"

To all the young girls who come to me and ask for suggestions I always recommend choosing what they like studying and neglecting stereotypes or society/family traditions. I was born and I have worked most of my life in the southern part of Italy. Here, the idea that career and family cannot weigh the same for a woman still survives. No one should ask us to choose between family and career and, at the same time, we should learn how to ask for a little help when we need it. Moreover, politics should help women and, in general, families with concrete actions.

On the other hand, a journey in STEAM is clearly hard, it needs dedication and sacrifice. But sciences are democratic, and between sciences mathematics is the most democratic: gender, religion, race play no role in it. And, in my experience, the more you study the more you want to. Sciences help people develop courage, try new paths, change perspectives and never give up: history tells us that any failure can lead to a new discovery.

Future of Women in STEAM: "Looking towards the future, how do you see the role of women evolving in STEAM fields? What changes do you think are necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in STEAM?"

I am optimistic, the number of girls who decide to study mathematics is increasing, but in Italy we do not have gender politics. It is not a case that the PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) funds have three strategic axes shared at a European level: digitization and innovation, ecological transition, and social inclusion. As I already said, we need to break down cultural and structural barriers.