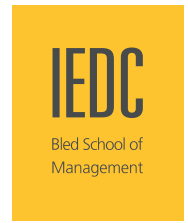


IEDC Faculty: Learning from the best



A School with a View

Date: 31.1.2014

Dr. Nina Bandelj

“PEOPLE ARE HARD TO CHANGE BUT ENVIROMENTS CHANGE QUICKLY”

When talking to Dr. Nina Bandelj - a lecturer, a research fellow and visiting Professor at IEDC-Bled School of Management since 1997 - you can immediately notice, that bringing up the topic of research methods makes her eyes sparkle. Her devotion to work has been acknowledged in different ways. Students find her very engaging and admire her interactive lectures that keep the class entertained, but are warning: her tests are difficult! Society for Comparative Research awarded her doctoral dissertation from Princeton University with the Seymour Martin Lipset Prize, she received grants from the American National Science Foundation, the European Union's Commission on Research, American Council of Learned Societies and MacArthur Foundation, among others.

Currently, she is Associate Professor and Graduate Director in the Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, and teaches the doctoral course on Research Design and Quantitative Methods in Social Sciences at IEDC. She lives between USA and Slovenia.

Complied by: Tonja Blatnik, Head of Corporate Communications, IEDC-Bled School of Management

You have a long history with IEDC-Bled School of Management. The whole story started when you were only 17 years old.

Yes. In the early 1990s, in the spring before I graduated from the International Baccalaureate Program in Ljubljana, I saw an advertisement by IEDC in a local newspaper, inviting open-minded, internationally oriented, university educated people to join their team of employees. I did not have a university degree, and was, in fact, just finishing high school. But the ad promised a rare international experience for young people in Slovenia just after independence, and despite my age, I wrote a letter of interest to the Director, Prof. Danica Purg. Also, I needed to earn some money to take

with me to study in the U.S. I was accepted to college with a scholarship but that did not cover all the expenses. The letter I wrote must have intrigued Professor Purg enough so she invited me for a conversation, and offered me a job during the summer to work as an intern. I suppose I answered phones and made copies well enough so I was asked to come again next summer, after my first undergraduate year. I still remember that summer when I worked as a program coordinator for an executive training course taught by Harvard Professor David Kuechle on managing negotiations at IEDC when it was still located at Brdo pri Kranju. In future years IEDC began offering summer school programs, now called the Young Managers and Discover

Management Programs, and I would work as the coordinator for those. When I started my Ph.D. studies at Princeton, I was promoted to Summer School Program Director and lecturer, and kept returning to IEDC, which moved to Bled, over summers for more than ten years in that capacity. When work demands at the University of California as Assistant Professor increased, I was no longer able to continue returning to the IEDC family over summer, but was delighted that the School started with the Master of Science and later the Executive Ph.D. programs. I have taught Research Design and Quantitative Methods in the Ph.D. program since its inception.

You were born in Slovenia, but you left for USA very soon, heading towards a rich educational path and academic career. What is the main advantage of it for you and your students?

I did leave just after I turned 18, packed my life in two suitcases, and embarked on an adventure. I hadn't thought very much at that point that I was leaving everything I knew behind and sort of trusted that things are going to work out. I keep having this attitude and try to relay it to my students. Despite all the challenges and demands of writing a Ph.D. dissertation, so different from any executive experience, the first step is to trust that you can venture into the unknown and know when and how to ask for help along the way. Given my work at IEDC for more than twenty years along the way, I have met a variety of professors, students, clients who shared insights about their work challenges and, many, from living the turbulent postsocialist transformations. These insights have certainly informed my research. Because of my long-term engagement with IEDC, this also means that I understand where IEDC Executive Ph.D. program participants come from, literally and figuratively, and convey the content of academic rigor of management research with this in mind.

The rise of globalization and the collapse of communism are two momentous changes that you examine very closely. What are main lessons that managers in CEE should learn out of it?

People are hard to change but environments change quickly. How can we be reflexive enough and open enough to let go of comfortable old routines and be ready to learn new things? This is much easier said than done. In most cases, a personal reaction is to go into a defensive and stick to the old ways. How can

inspirational leadership facilitate a reflexive and creative process that moments of change can stimulate? At the same time, individual actions and reactions do not simply depend on individuals as isolated decision-making units, but are shaped by connections between people, organizational forces and structures in the environment. How do we design structures, which facilitate both inspirational leadership and inspired individual actions? How do we do so while keeping in mind that people's actions are not only instrumentally rational but guided by emotions, cultural conceptions, and politics within and outside firms? I don't have all the answers but I believe these are some of the most important questions.



Name three reasons, why companies should invest in general employee talent development, despite the global recession?

People are the engine behind any organizational development and innovation. This is reason number one, number two, and number three for why we should put people first, and support and encourage their education and development. This will build human, social, and cultural capital, and as a famous French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu said, all these can be turned into economic capital.

What is your favorite memory from the class at IEDC?

It was when IEDC was still at Brdo and I met an architect, Marko Studen, who worked for IEDC. When Danica Purg introduced him to me, she said, this is the girl for you. Guess what? He is my husband now. I also have to say that coming to teach at IEDC is always rewarding because of the terrific staff that supports us. They really go beyond their call of duty to assist professors and be there for students, even if a lot of their work is hidden and behind the scenes. Some other memories include being completely mortified when I, as a novice intern at IEDC, interrupted a class with a phone call for the Professor, not knowing that only in cases of true emergency could the concentration

in classroom activity be interrupted. Or, when we went swimming in Bled lake in the late night hours with Young Managers Program participants in my final year as Summer School Director. And, of course, every once in a while, when I see how I help students make connections between pieces of knowledge and inspired imagination. Those, "I haven't really thought of that in this way," or "I realize what I need to do now", moments recharge my teaching batteries.

What are you passionate about?

Professionally: about trying to figure out why people do the things they do, which is at the core of what motivates my research; about helping students connect the pieces of their research design, and seeing their projects take shape into rigorous and meaningful research; and concretely in the class I teach at IEDC, about demystifying and dissipating the anxiety surrounding statistics classes. Personally: about laughing with my husband and son, and about a sweat-breaking hot vinyasa yoga practice. Now, the challenge is how to attend to all of these passions and not having the ability to change that the day only has 24 hours!

MEET NINA PERSONALLY

Finish the sentence:

There's nothing better in life than:

Looking around yourself at home, office, or class, and feeling happy.

The best advice I ever got is:

Talent is one third and hard work is two thirds of success.

The secret of career success and happy family life lies in:

Having an extremely supportive husband and letting go of perfectionism.

My long-term goal is:

To continue doing what I love doing, and making a difference in some people's lives along the way.

Of what in your career are you proudest?

I try to think about moments of pride in accomplishments, rather than rank them in order. One of these was the publication of my dissertation, which turned into my first book, *From Communists to Foreign Capitalists*, with the top economic sociology academic press. The other was being invited to serve as one of the editors of *Socio-Economic Review*, a premier interdisciplinary and international academic journal on the topics linking economic and social issues, as the first woman editor at this journal. It also meant a lot to me when I was elected as Chair of the Economic Sociology Group of the American Sociological Association, and was the most junior person ever to assume that position. But, of course, I am also very proud at defense of Ph.D. dissertations of my students, believing that at least a tiny bit of that tremendous personal accomplishment has to do with my influence and support.