

Beyond Sustainability

The modern English word sustainability comes from a late thirteenth-century verb *sustenen*, which came through French from the Latin verb *sustinere*, “to hold up.” Already in the early fourteenth century the English verb meant “to give support to; support physically, hold up or upright; give assistance to; keep going.”¹

In this issue of *Beyond*, the various contributors to the sixth edition reflect on various approaches to sustainability. Crucially, rather than fixate just on *ecological* sustainability—the kind we most often think of when we hear this word—the ISI Abroad professors, students, and alums consider other possible meanings, always in the context of international education.

The issue opens with a series of reflections by Thomas Brownlees (a professor at ISI Florence) on the benefits of teaching his course “Sustainability in Fashion” to students. Rather than just think about production or transportation, Brownlees’ students are forced to consider supply chain management, the impact of collection design, and how consumer (not only producer) behavior impacts the fashion industry. Another article in this section, Clive Woollard’s essay on the so-called circular economy, illustrates numerous ways that Tuscan businesses and not-for-profits have approached sustainability, both reducing their ecological footprint and creating commercial opportunities that will endure with time.

The segue from these two discussions to the third essay in the Academics section might not be obvious, but in Catia Santi’s interview of Claudio Manella, the reader can see the lightly drawn lines that link it with the other two. Manella, an ISI Florence instructor and a renowned author of textbooks and other works on the Italian language, recounts how he’s been able to keep up at a brisk pace of writing and how his

1. From <https://www.etymonline.com>, which draws principally on the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Barnhart’s Dictionary of Etymology*.

books have helped likely hundreds of thousands of people learn Italian.

Perhaps most interesting are the reflections offered by ISI Abroad students, both recent and from further back in time. In their article on the InVisibilities Project, the students interviewed by Nicolette Alexandra Brito-Cruz unconsciously channel one of the other meanings of to sustain, i.e., “to give support.” This series of interviews with people of color living in Florence (both residents and short-term visitors) is part of a project developed in Spring 2024, whose primary focus is to render more visible the underrepresented groups of people who reside in that Italian city.

Some students switched from non-fiction into historical fiction. In her essay “Listening For Inspiration,” Ashleigh Cohan gives assistance (yet another meaning of *sustain*) to Eleonora of Toledo’s sixteenth-century desire for a garden, for a space of her own. Cohan’s short story about Eleonora lets the reader re-imagine that history in a greener, freer way.

Finally, three other student alums (two from ISI Florence and one, Jessica Paholski, from The Umbra Institute), discuss how their in-class experience in Italy has intertwined with their post-study abroad lives. Rosemary Faircloth talks about her time in museums while abroad and how it affected her thinking; Catherine Nardi describes connecting her courses on food in Florence to her work back home with the Montgomery County Food Council; and – last but not least – Jessica Paholsky paints a decidedly green picture, tracing her current role as the “Princess of Pesto” back to her time in Perugia doing what was then called the Food Studies Program.

To sustain is, among other things, to keep going. I hope this edition of *Beyond* helps you keep going towards a more sustainable future!

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