

CARE ECONOMY

OUR COMPANIES ARE CHANGING THE WORLD

Anna, Elena, Silvia, Giulia, Laura and their colleagues are B Women — a new breed of ethical professionals. Their businesses — certified Benefit Corporations — create a positive impact on people and the environment at the same time they generate profit. Here, they tell their stories and share their values and results.

BY DIANA DE MARSANICH – PHOTOS BY SILVIA TENENTI

Creating something good for yourself and for others — something that improves life for the entire community. That's the aim of a Benefit Corporation, a type of company that invests part of their profits into projects that have positive impact on people and the environment. B Corps put human needs at the center of everything they do, viewing business as an opportunity to create a fairer, more inclusive society. Companies that wish to join the Benefit Corporation movement need to measure their environmental, social and economic impact by filling out the B Impact Assessment online (bimpactassessment.net). This free questionnaire is provided by B Lab, the certifying body, and makes it possible to calculate how sustainable a company is, what its strengths are and where it needs to improve. If a company reaches 80 points and complies with all the necessary requirements, it then pays a fee calculated on the basis of its annual revenue (starting from €1,000). This allows it to use the B Corp title, which shows that it has chosen to “be better” in order to benefit the world. Let's hear the stories of nine successful B Women. www.bcorporation.eu

From left: Anna Cogo, 44, senior consultant at Nativa, and Caterina Dentoni-Litta, 47. Working with Giulia Detomati, they founded B Women Italia.

ANNA COGO

I help companies adopt a more sustainable outlook and create green products

“I work for the first Benefit Corporation in Italy and promote the B Corp movement,” explains Nativa's Anna Cogo. “It brings together companies that opt to measure their social and environmental impact with the same level of detail as they measure their economic impact. Why? Because they believe that sustainability ultimately pays off and can help society and the planet regenerate. We offer consultancy services aimed at making companies more sustainable through ecological practices that focus on products, supply chains, logistics and staff training. And we help them innovate to ensure their negative impact keeps shrinking. For instance, our collaboration with Geox led to the launch of New-Do, a shoe whose entire life cycle is more environmentally friendly because of the vegetable tanning process used for the leather and a drastic reduction in pollutants involved. I teamed up with Caterina Dentoni Litta and Giulia Detomati from InVento Lab to found the B Women Italia movement, which brings together hundreds of entrepreneurs striving to bring about real change in two key areas: the climate emergency and gender equality. Together, we pursue the common good, rather than just profit.” **Info:** nativialab.com

ELENA RIVA

Every sandwich we produce is packed with goodness

Elena Riva, 44, from Cantù. Riva is the chairwoman and owner of Panino Giusto, the first Italian B Corp in the food service sector.

“In trendy Milan in the early 1980s, eating at Panino Giusto was seen as ‘cool’ and ‘fashionable,’” says Elena Riva. “Now, my husband, Antonio Civita, and I have taken the word ‘giusto’ [meaning right, correct] and built a concept of a sandwich that is good, balanced, fair and respectful to nature and people. My parents were entrepreneurs from Brianza. They taught me to feel a sense of responsibility toward the community and instilled strong business ethics in me. Ten years ago, when my husband and I bought Panino Giusto, we made the decision to strengthen the brand’s reputation in Italy and abroad as a champion of Italy’s skill and creativity — while also helping make the world fairer. We became a Benefit Corporation on 30 September 2019, a move that enshrined the pursuit of the common good within our company DNA. Then, a few months ago, we officially got our certification, becoming Italy’s first B Corp in the food service sector. Our sustainability philosophy encompasses a range of different fields, such as waste reduction (we make our sandwiches to order) and a staff training initiative that we’ve called Diversity Inclusion. The program promotes inclusion of refugees while also developing female talent to ensure that women can rise to the very top and occupy the most senior roles. In terms of the environment, we’ve decided to use all organic produce, purchase everything within an 80 km radius and make all our establishments plastic free. We’ve also created the Accademia del Panino Italiano [Italian Sandwich Academy], a cultural foundation whose aim is to promote excellence between two slices of bread.”

Info: www.paninogiusto.it

Giulia Detomati, 37, from Milan. Detomati set up InVento Lab, which organizes educational projects and consultancy services around environmental sustainability.

GIULIA DETOMATI

I train the green entrepreneurs of tomorrow

“In 2014, I set up InVento Lab, a B Corp that matches companies who want to take action in the field of environmental sustainability with the best talent from Italy’s schools and universities,” explains Giulia Detomati. “In practice, I help train the “change-makers” — the green entrepreneurs of tomorrow. I try to inspire and stimulate new generations so that they go on to make a difference and change the world. The companies, bodies and banking foundations that take part in our educational programs set environmental sustainability challenges linked to their own businesses. This could be something like making the business carbon neutral, creating a circular economy supply chain or reducing single-use plastic in the production cycle. Once the challenge has been locked down, InVento Lab circulates this around local schools and universities, where mentors work with students to help them come up with sustainable ideas and create proper start-ups designed to respond to the various environmental challenges. One of our biggest successes so far has been our Green Jobs projects with banking foundations, as well as B Corp School, a type of school internship at Benefit Corporations that aims to teach pupils about sustainable business practices.” •**Info:** inventolab.com

Silvia Mazzanti, 46, from Senigallia. Mazzanti is the Head of Sustainability at Save The Duck, Italy’s first B Corp in the fashion sector.

SILVIA MAZZANTI

My approach to fashion respects animals, the environment and people

“The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world,” explains Silvia Mazzanti. “But as the Head of Product and Sustainability at Save The Duck, an Italian brand that produces animal-friendly quilted jackets, I’m committed to creating fashion without the pollution. We recorded some important achievements in 2019, gaining B Corp certification and being named Company of the Year by PETA. Instead of goose feathers, our padding is made from Recycled Plumtech, which uses recycled fibers from certified supply chains. From our fabric suppliers right through to the manufacturers, we ensure that everyone involved in our supply chain works in the most ethical way possible. The challenge for the future is to use

more and more sustainable materials and train our employees and collaborators to ensure they adopt practices with less negative impact. Anyone who wears a Save The Duck product becomes an ambassador for our message: initially it was just about respecting animals, but now our garments embody wider green values. Our business is guided by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals — and for us that means offering customers a product that respects animals, the environment and people. On top of that, every year we donate 1% of our revenue to projects promoting environmental protection and the well-being of people.”
•Info: www.savtheduck.com

From left: Silvia Gava, 50, Quality Assurance Manager, Giulia Salmaso, 35, National Account Manager, and Sara Macchion, 39, Human Resources Manager at Abafoods.

GIULIA SALMASO

Alongside Silvia and Sara, I work for the first food multi-national with B Corp certification

“Abafoods processes raw ingredients such as rice, oats, millet and spelt and was one of the first companies in Italy to move into the market for plant-based drinks made from cereals and legumes as an alternative to traditional cow's milk,” says Giulia Salmaso, a national account manager with Abafoods. “We're part of the Dutch Wessanen Group, which was the first food multi-national in the world to obtain B Corp certification for its two plant-based milk brands, Isola Bio and Bjorg, as well as Clipper, a plastic-free British producer of organic tea and infusions made from fair-trade raw materials. As a B Woman, I promote organic plant-based foodstuffs and champion the values these products represent, in order to encourage healthy nutrition and sustainable practices. We practice what we preach, too: we use renewable energy and have invested in a purification system for the water used to wash our equipment, which means the water we give back to the environment is purer than when we took it in the first place. We make sure that our cereal production supply chain in Molise is green and organic too. Our challenge is to keep improving — and that's exactly why we work with local universities to find ways of repurposing production byproducts, which currently go into the animal husbandry sector. www.wessanen.com

Laura Gori, 54, from Monza. Gori is the founder and chairwoman of Way2Global, the first Benefit Corporation start-up in the world operating in the sector of localization.

LAURA GORI

I provide green translations

“I work in the translation and interpreting field and have 30 years' experience in the traditional business sector under my belt. But when I discovered this new way of running a company while taking care of the planet and society, it completely changed my life,” explains Gori. “In 2017, I decided to start again from zero and set up Way2Global, the first localization (translation) company in the world launched as a Benefit Corporation — and we now have official B Corp certification. The first step was to use technology as a lever for positive social impact and to reduce the digital divide. Many translators work on a freelance basis and are thus unable to access expensive technology around neural networks and quantum computing, so I brought in free training courses focusing on machine translation. In terms of the environment, I launched Green Translations to provide the first carbon-neutral, 100% green translation service in the world. How? By strengthening our circular economy practices and internal sustainability processes by eliminating overseas flights and prioritizing sustainable transport options such as train travel or carpooling and using two monitors to work on translations rather than printing out hard copies.” •Info: www.way2global.com