

ULI Fall Meeting, 5-8th October 2015, San Francisco

Vanessa Muscarà, Senior Research Analyst, M&G Real Estate

Post conference insights

As a recipient of the WLI scholarship based in London, I could not have been more fortunate to have been granted the opportunity to attend a ULI Meeting in San Francisco - a city at the forefront of tech innovation. Throughout the week, this unifying contextual topic and its impact on San Francisco's urban fabric, provided a sense of what is to follow throughout cities worldwide. The opportunity to learn about the fascinating developments being generated by tech companies based across the city's submarkets as well as Silicon Valley - from 3D printing, nano-technologies, bio-technologies, artificial intelligence, grafting for use in water desalination - provided thought-provoking discussions highlighting how all professions across the built environment must fast respond to the implicit challenges involved. These include jobs being replaced by apps, pressure on the healthcare sector to service longer life expectancies, climate change, urbanization, artificial intelligence surpassing human intelligence etc.

Besides future tech advancements, it was a relief to discover that despite the US being much further ahead in the global recovery, many of the structural challenges facing the real estate industry today, from the economic slowdown in China, limited availability of debt, e-commerce to generation-Y living and workplace requirements, represent common challenges on both sides of the Atlantic ocean. These topics were raised on countless occasions including General Sessions, Concurrent Sessions as well as Product Councils.

From a WLI perspective, the conference provided the opportunity both to learn about the current and aspirational representation of women in our industry, as well as the increasing emergence of corporate schemes committed to improve the share of female leaders through training and leadership programmes.

On departure day back to London, I wished I had spent more time with the WLI 2015 scholarship recipients as a group. Given that our schedule was structured around WLI related Committee Meetings, Networking lunches and Concurrent Sessions, I felt I had not spent enough time discussing how best to disseminate the WLI message back home. A bespoke breakfast or dinner for example, including our mentors, could have given us the opportunity to present and discuss the common challenges we face as women in our industry as well as brainstorm ideas about how to go about improving the current status-quo. To this end, I suggest setting up a means of keeping the scholarship recipients in touch in the form of a web-based social networking platform, that allows us to share knowledge of best practices in order to continue to voice the WLI message beyond the Fall Meeting. An example of a similar network comes to mind, based on a recent project I worked on - the Rockefeller foundation 100 Resilient Cities programme¹. This type of support I feel, would more efficiently advance the commendable objectives of the WLI on a global scale.

¹ For two years, 100 Chief Resilient Officers (CROs) across 14 time zones are being tasked with the responsibility of implementing a resilience strategy in their respective cities. The Rockefeller foundation provides support to the CROs throughout their two year placement, through a network that enables them to share initiative ideas in order to reach their common goal. http://www.100resilientcities.org/blog/entry/what-is-the-100rc-network#/_Yz46NDU6MidpPTEocz5j/