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The strategic implementation of Eco Management System in territorial areas

The global competitive market has had as immediate output the need for the individuals to become more and more aware of their own roots. In fact more the market spreads out more the individual needs to rediscover his own history, his own traditions. In other words he needs to have identifiable points of reference.

Furthermore, people are aware of how an incorrect use of the environment causes phenomena of environmental degradation which, in their turn, could cause social conflicts.

Therefore the economical progress of a territory can't be disconnected from policies of environmental management. And this is particularly valid for tourist resorts.

The work here presented reports two case-studies as examples of how in Italy these kind of themes have been faced, just trying to combine economical development, protection of the environment and protection of the cultural heritage.

In other words the principles of the environmental proactivity are applied through original forms of development.

A case study: "Bibione"

Bibione is one of the most popular Italian sea resorts, since it is visited by more than five million of presences per year.

The capability to take advantage from its environmental and cultural identity is both its strength and its main peculiarity: this makes Bibione more competitive and "more special" than other bathing and tourist resorts.

The common necessity to protect and properly exploit the Bibione area, the possibility to improve the quality of life of its citizens and of the tourists by taking environmental issues into consideration in the overall policy, induced public authorities and operators to apply an Environmental Management System in accordance with the EMAS Regulation.

The meaning is that it is unuseful to apply an Environmental Management System (EMS), as far as a tourist business is concerned, to a single organization if the surrounding area is not protected as well.

Bibione is the first example of application of an Environment Management System to a whole area: so Bibione is the starting point for a new model of organization in civil society and therefore a new model of life, which is more respectful to the environment.

The starting point of the project was some basic observations about the existence of a chaotic labelling system in the tourist sector (for example, there are, in the only Europe, more than 100 different environmental denominations), that causes confusion to the single tourist. These observations, along with the great capacity of co-operation between local private operators and public authorities, allowed to offer stakeholders a project which aims to both improve the environment as a whole and to receive official acknowledgement by a third part: monitoring and certification by public authorities guarantee transparency.

The EMAS Regulation was chosen because first of all it gave a chance to apply international standards in an area where people's expectations and interests are numerous and variegated (e.g. economic development, protected environment to spend one's holidays in, high quality tourist services, etc.) and then it guarantees an even higher quality than international standards, like ISO 14001, because the EMAS offers public and impartial monitoring.

The first step taken was the creation of one or more tools which enabled to:

- Inform all the parties concerned (citizens, operators, tourists, public officials) about the environmental actions to be taken.
- Encourage all tour operators to participate in the project by stressing the economic gains they could benefit from by taking part in it.
- Single out, though with some initial approximation, the environmental problems of Bibione.

The Environmental Quality Study Centre of the University of Padua, entrusted by the Municipality of San Michele al Tagliamento, devised a questionnaire called "Green Quality in Bibione", which was distributed in both the 1998 and the 1999 tourist seasons to two different target groups:

- Citizens and tourists (more than 12,000)
- Economic operators and local authorities (in 1999, involving 90 individuals).

Data were collected and awareness was raised through the Customer Satisfaction questionnaires and through meetings and direct contacts with the various related organisations. All this resulted in the belief that all the relevant parties in the area should reach a formal agreement regarding their co-operation in the project. With the help of the Italian EMAS Committee, on June 19th, 2000 a Protocol of Intentions, promoted by the Committee itself, was endorsed by all the parties concerned.

As the project was started, a feasibility study was carried out, in order to identify and assess its various phases. This study included a preliminary environmental analysis of the Bibione tourist area carried out by the Environmental Quality Study Centre at the University of Padua.

The feasibility study also shaped a very precise organisation in charge of implementing the Environment Management System. This structure, which has been left almost unaltered since then, resembles a pyramid in shape: the top is occupied by the Municipality of San Michele al Tagliamento, whereas economic operators are found at the bottom.

After the over mentioned actions the Initial Environmental Analysis has been carried out. After a deep analysis it enabled to identify all the environmental direct or indirect aspects linked to the activities taking place in the Bibione tourist resort. Those aspects were therefore judged to underline the critical environmental aspects of the area. The method applied is based on a multiple analysis considering various factors:

- Environmental data (as for example air, water, soil and subsoil sampling, consumption of energy and natural resources, emissions and wastes in several environmental sectors, etc...);
- Creation of specific indices to classify and subsequently monitor them;
- Stakeholders' awareness of the state of the environment
- Lines of the economic and city-planning development
- Classification of aspects and impacts

The results have revealed an area without the specific impact due to industry and manufacturing, whereas the typical impact of densely populated areas has been registered: waste management, waste waters in suitable receiving bodies, exploitation of sand, water consumption, and use of natural resources in general.

The peculiar nature of Bibione: its natural beauties, the particular tourist attractions and the unusual tourist typology convinced of the great importance to associate the EMAS not only to individual organisations, but also to the whole area, which all guests in Bibione visit because they know and appreciate it.

In fact the Environmental Management System specifically identified for Bibione required the creation of an articulated structure about the whole territory and about all the businesses and institutions of the area. A pyramidal structure has been created as far as information circulation and responsibility is concerned, the Municipality of San Michele al Tagliamento is on top (with a department assigned to environmental management and the assignment of new duties to the personnel of other departments, as for example the police) followed by professional associations and macro-organizations (waste collection, beach and thermal bath management etc...) and finally single business associations.. The two final levels, which are not less important than the previous, are represented by single business actors citizens and tourists.

Each association has appointed its own Person in Charge for the Environment and has adopted its own Environmental Policy which is coherent with the general policy of the Municipality for the tourist area of Bibione and has set goals and targets producing improvements. Specific procedures have been defined aiming at correctly manage, control and monitor environmentally relevant activities for the area and specific communication and information channels with all the stakeholders have been identified.

Finally as regards to the drafting of the Environmental Declaration, provided for by EMAS Regulation, we considered it as a document reporting not only information about the Bibione area environmental performances to give assurance to the general public but also as an essential training instrument. It is, in our opinion, an informative instrument aimed at involving all the interested parties and making them all feel responsible.

Following the lines of EMAS II regulation the whole Community of Bibione is now committed with enthusiasm involving citizens, tourists, operators and authorities; it is the starting point to give birth to a new model of organization in civil society and therefore a new model of life, which is more respectful to the environment.

The project is original and experimental not just because it applies the EMAS Regulations to a tourist resort (some famous cases of this kind already exist), but because it applies the Environment Management System to the whole area instead of limiting it to a single organisation.

And the methodology applied to other European areas will be easily transferred to it thanks to the community-oriented regulation. Further, it will be possible to meet two important targets included in the regulation: its spreading and its promotion.

A case-study: Asiago

From July 2000 to October 2001, the University of Padua developed a project of a territorial brand in the GAL 6 area, corresponding to the mountain area of the Vicenza province.

The project aim was the development of an area system of improvement and protection of the local products through the creation of a territorial agro-industrial brand.

The European Community recognized the project able to promote and to support the enterprises' development of that territory and, through them, the same territory. For this reason, it gave an important financing through the Structural Fund FEOGA within the Leader II Programme.

The project outcomes were a preliminary environmental analysis on the territory (aimed at identifying aspects and relevant impacts for the environmental protection and the consumers' health protection), the definition of a series of technical disciplinaries related to the agro-industrial production (potato, chestnut, wine, cheese, cherry, honey, speck) and the creation of a territorial brand for the identification, the communication and the promotion of the enterprises and the whole territory.

The project, entitled "Area system of improvement and protection of local products – the territorial brand", involved the two Consortiums of the Mountain Communities "Altopiano di Asiago Sette Comuni" and "Dall'Astico al Brenta".

The main project purpose was to create a structure able to promote on the territory the development of those enterprises sensitive to the quality principles, to the consumer's health protection, to the food chain transparency and above all to the environmental safeguard.

The promotion of the territory, of its resources and peculiarities is the final objective of the project "Territorial Brand for the GAL 6 area", while the environmental protection is considered, by Padua University and by the local administrations, the essential tool to pursue a development really sustainable.

The project will keep on, thanks to the engagement to the Consortiums of the Mountain Communities and to the European Union contribution within the Leader Plus Programme. For the future tools and methods helping institutions and private subjects to analyse and manage relevant impacts and aspects will be developed, in order to protect and improve environmental and landscape conditions on the territory, and in order to promote local peculiarities for a sustainable development of the tourist and agro - industrial activities in the territory.

The early phases of the project are characterized by the collection and elaboration of the geo-climatic, socio-economical and administrative data, referred to the whole GAL 6 territory. This

work permitted to draft the document “Environmental and Agro – Industrial Analysis of the GAL 6 territory”, that points out the found “environmental critical state”

After this preliminar study, propedeutical to the following environmental actions, it was possible to develop and spread out a “Quality – Environment Brand”, able to identify and to increase in importance the agro-industrial enterprises adequate to qualify the imagine of the GAL 6 territory.

In comparison with similar projects, diffused both in Italy and in Europe, providing for to issue brands or particular symbols in a manner often approximate, this one the “GAL 6 Quality – Environment Brand” intended to assure rigour and objectivity to the same activities of brand concession and to their subsequent overseeing, just for giving credibility to the whole system and to the same brand, and of course to be the starting point for a possible future EMAS Registration.

The conformity evaluation is directly carried out by the Consortiums of the Mountain Communities towards the agro-industrial enterprises that ask the “Quality – Environment Brand”, verifying the respect of the defined requisites. The requisites are set by proper technical disciplinaries, called “Integrated Quality – Environment Disciplinaries”, referred to agro – industrial products typical of the Asiago Altiplano (the Asiago cheese, the Torcolato wine, the Rotzo potato, the honey, the cherries, the chestnuts and the speck)

The conformity certification, then, is issued to those producers that prove to respect the requisites provided for the technical disciplinaries and to work within a quality and environmental management system.

It was also studied a graphic symbol (the “brand”) capable to encompass the concepts of belonging to a defined territory, of care towards the environment and of quality assurance. Thanks to a study carried out examining the signs or graffiti designed by our ancestors just in this territory (Valdassa), it was chosen the most representative logo.

The conformity certification, given by the Consortiums of the Mountain Communities, is a brand recognized by an Accredited Body on a national level.

The project fixed important and ambitious purposes, but on the other hand it could give undoubted marketing and tourist attractiveness advantages. Behind the brand “Quality – Environment” there is a whole territory, the Asiago Altiplano, moving in a coordinated and univocal way just to assure not only the products quality but also the quality of every life aspect in the Altiplano.