

The World Social Forum Tunis 2013

Mediterranean cities for the management of a social network of public goods and services

The Association of exemplary cities. Good environmental and social practices, common goods, public services, participation

by

Livio Martini

(deputy Mayor of Corchiano and Directors member of the virtuous cities Association)

Tunisi, 27th March 2013

– ABSTRACT –

EXEMPLARY CITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

The National Association of exemplary cities was founded on May 23, 2005 thanks to the Municipalities of Monsano, Colorno, Vezzano Ligure and Melpignano. Nowadays, it involves more than seventy cities.

The participating cities believe that defending the environment, improving the quality of life, providing public services, with or without economic significance, defending and promoting for the common good (water, territory, landscape, knowledge, memory) is not only possible, but above all a necessity.

Since today's challenge is moving from the mere statement of theoretical principles to good daily practice, the Association targets are:

- good territorial management dedicated to the principle of "no land shrinkage" thanks to the option "zero cement", the recovery of abandoned sites and living heritage, the projected and programmed design for a new "green" way of life;
- reducing the ecological system of cities through concrete measures and actions: energy efficiency, buying green and eating organically;
- reducing air pollution thanks to policies for sustainable mobility: car sharing, bike sharing, car pooling, integrated public transport, *pedibus*, choice of fuels that are alternative and less polluting than oil, in order to respect local agricultural production;
- promoting and introducing a proper waste management, seen not as a problem but as a resource, through door to door collection and the implementation of projects aimed

at reducing and recycling waste, and at recovering and reusing materials to arrive at "zero waste";

- promoting new lifestyles in communities through policies of social inclusion, cultural integration and participating in democracy; supporting projects to stimulate citizens to make daily sustainable choices: home-produce, short supply chain, organic and seasonal food; supporting the creation of buying groups, bio-districts, sustainable tourism and hospitality; promoting a culture of peace, cooperation and solidarity; spreading fair trade, to appreciate and promote local heritage for no financial gain.

Since their foundation, exemplary cities aim to get a development that is compatible with territorial vocations, spreading good practice in the name of "think global, act local". This practice includes: separate waste collection, composting, cooking oil collection for biofuel production, use of baskets for shopping, going direct to local water sources and dairies and so, eliminating the packaging process, renewable energy. In addition, policies to promote the territory and the landscape through the creation of natural parks and monuments and a real natural archaeological integrated systems. In fact, there are many large green areas that include biodiversity, ancient records, memories, cultivation and ways of production which are widespread and share knowledge. Thanks to the passion and the profound sense of responsibility of local administrators, some illegal quarries and landfills, filled with toxic and harmful substances, have been removed from speculation and illegality; then, they have been recovered and handed down to future generations.

The Association contributes to the foundation of the National Network of zero waste and the Italian Network of home composters. It is actively and directly involved in the Forum of public water. In particular, it aims to create a Coordination of local authorities in order to consider water for the common good and to obtain a public urban water management. Besides, together with Professor Riccardo Petrella and some public institutions of European countries, the administrations of Capannori and Corchiano, on behalf of the Association board, created on November 26, 2010 in Brussels, the European Network of cities and water for sustainability, the recovery of neighborhoods and living heritage and public management of water resources.

In collaboration with other public and associative authorities, the Association promotes and organizes events of high training and information on its issues (see www.comunivirtuosi.org and www.altramministrazione.it).

EXEMPLARY CITIES AND LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES: ZERO WASTE AND PUBLIC WATER

Local public services, with or without economic significance, include health care and social inclusion policies, education, public transport, collection and disposal of waste and water resources management. Considering the demographic and surface features of cities represented by the Association, services that most affect municipalities in terms of political action and economic resources are mainly related to the management of waste and water.

If there were no communities concerning the quality of life and wishing to influence choices and decisions, the development based on infinite growth and gross domestic product would give people very little hope for change. Luckily, the number of communities that make sustainable and deeply democratic decisions grows day by day in order to create a new society.

Waste is the tangible evidence of a self-destructive and unsustainable development. Its production exceeds the highest levels. According to the National policy, the most rational solution to end this cycle is the use of an incinerator, even though EU directives and common sense require or suggest alternative and more sustainable ways. In addition, Italy is the only country in Europe that associates incinerators to factories for the production of clean energy. Moreover, there is a waste emergency due to overflowing landfills and cities are unable to achieve the minimum targets for recycling as required by national and regional EU legislation.

According to the Association of exemplary cities, it would be sufficient to pass a law that provides ways of reducing the impact of the environment inclusive of air pollution, groundwater and the soil; the result would be great savings for both State and local governments; creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs (systematically separating rubbish and waste was throughout the nation would create about 250 thousand new jobs, without considering the armature, in particular the research and technological innovation); the improvement of the quality of life and environment; the removal of incinerators.

Nowadays, in Italy more than 1500 cities practice separating waste products by way of door to door collection. These cities are finally free from pungent bins. They are small and medium cities. The percentage of refuse collection is greater than the requests made for them. The case of Ponte nelle Alpi, a municipality of 8500 inhabitants in the province of Belluno, is an example of this: for the past two years, Legambiente has awarded it the title of “recycling city” for achieving 90% recycling of waste, with an annual production of waste per capita of 29 kg while the national average is 585 kg. We could continue by telling the stories of Capannori, Colorno, Berlingo, Monsano, Oriolo Romano, Camigliano, Corchiano, Melpignano, Mirabello Monferrato and many others, which are similar if not identical stories.

Two years after the referendum when twenty-seven million Italian citizens confirmed the principle of water as common good with no economic significance and promoted the public control of water services, we could return to manage the water resources through public-law companies, in order to restore, at least in the narrow confines of regions, as in Lazio, the respect for the law, the Constitution and the popular will.

Parliament has ignored the declaration so far as it has ignored several proposed laws of popular initiative, which are still locked in the drawers of the parliamentary committees, in defiance of Republican Constitution. Based on the respect for constitutional principles and the sense of civil obedience, the Mayors, the National Forum of public water and a large number of institutional and collective players work to carry out this initiative, even through the request of proactive regional referendums.

The region of Lazio and the municipality of Corchiano promoted the referendum for the protection, government and public management of the above. The proposal, which was declared admissible on December 12, 2012 by the Court of Appeal of Rome, opens the way for an overall redefinition of policies on the management of water services. The Regional Board has to discuss and approve the bill in a year. If twelve months pass in vain, the president of the region will hold the referendum and let the public approve the declaration.

After the case of Naples, an increasing number of cities, mayors, municipal councils and regional authorities wondered about public management or the proposal to give substance to the referendum. It really seems that the obstacles to a public, transparent and participating

management of the integrated water services are finally disappearing. News coming from the North and the South of the country, from cities like Piacenza, Reggio Emilia and Palermo, just to name a few, strengthen the efforts of men and women, activists for the common good, local administrators and politicians who want to live in a society based on democracy, social justice and legality.