

## The Experience of the Coordination Body of Italian Local Agendas 21

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## The Birth of the Coordination

The Italian Coordination of Local Agenda 21 is a non-profit association that was officially established in 2000 to galvanize social solidarity through activities that promote environmental conservation and sustainability. More specifically, the association advocates an integrated approach to economic, social and environmental development in Italy under the framework of Local Agenda 21, which is the strategy and action programme for implementing sustainable development at a local level, in accordance with the Charters of Aalborg, Goteborg and Ferrara, the agenda's founding documents. I will not talk at length about Agenda 21, the Forum of Rio de Janeiro or the above mentioned Charters, as I suppose these have been discussed previously or are already familiar. Instead, I will focus primarily on the Italian experience in coordinating Agenda 21 and on case studies that could stimulate further discussion on Bethlehem 21.

The Italian Coordination was established in 2000, when there were over 5,000 active Agendas 21. By 2001, the associate bodies numbered over 150, and today, this constant growth trend has reached more than 370 Provinces, Town Councils, Mountain Communities, Parks Authorities, etc.

The idea for this Association was first posed unofficially by Italians who participated in the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Sustainable Cities held in Seville in 1999. Those present agreed to establish a national Coordination Body of the newly born Italian local Agenda 21. During the spring of that year, two meetings were held, one in Modena and another in Ferrara, in order to formulate a framework that would facilitate cooperation among Italy's various Local Administrations. In a meeting held in Ferrara on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1999, which was attended by over 130 representatives from nearly 70 Local Authorities, the Charter of Ferrara was approved, which defined the objectives and strategies to promote the Local Agendas 21 in Italy and to establish a COORDINATION BODY OF THE ITALIAN LOCAL AGENDAS 21.

## The Members

There are two different kinds of membership in the Coordination Body:

- **MEMBERS** are all the town councils, mountain communities, parks authorities, provinces and regions that have promoted, implemented or wish to adopt an Action Plan for Local Agenda 21. In order to become a member of the Coordination Body of the Local Agenda 21 the authorities must subscribe to the *Charters of Aalborg and the Charter of Ferrara*.
- **SUPPORTER MEMBERS** are the associations, agencies, firms and individuals that are engaged in or intend to pursue these social objectives.

## The Social Composition

By December 2005, the total number of members adhering to the Coordination Body of Italian Local Agendas 21 was 379, which breaks down as 258 Town Councils, 41 Provinces, 6 Regions, 25 Mountain Communities and Consortia of Local Authorities and Parks Authorities, and 49 individual supporters. There are presently 46 new subscribers.

## The Aims of the Association

The main aims of the association are:

- To be a place for meetings, where members can exchange information and good practices;
- To facilitate the spread of information regarding projects, events and member activities;

- To organize events on topics such as sustainability and Agenda 21;
- To form links between members, non-members, organizations and official bodies in order to develop new proposals; and
- To promote technical-operational initiatives through the creation of basic themes working groups and project implementation involving members and supporters.

## The Organization

The main bodies of the association are:

- the Assembly, composed of all members;
- the President;
- the Executive Council; and
- the Group 21 committee of guarantors of the association formed by people with distinct national and international reputations, owed to their engagement in the field of sustainable development and Agenda 21.

The Executive Council, upon request from the members, can set up **Basic Thematic Working Groups** to discuss topics of particular interest. Members of the Coordination Body, who have a strong interest in the topic/theme, also engage in the Working Groups. A leading entity (a Local Authority) takes the responsibility of organizing these working group meetings.

## The Mission

The mission of the Coordination Body, its constituent purposes, principal objectives and activities can be described with the following eight points:

- To promote the principals, the practice and instruments for sustainable development and Local Agenda 21;
- To encourage and develop information exchange regarding topics related to Local Agenda 21 between Local Authorities and other operators;
- To monitor, collect and disseminate studies, research, good practices, experiences of sustainable development and ongoing Local Agendas 21 at the local and territorial levels, along with promoting valorisation within national and international authorities;
- To promote and develop research activities, confrontation and in-depth studies in collaboration with the most qualified public or private institutions and universities;
- To encourage the twinning between different authorities engaged in Agenda 21 processes;
- To stimulate the participation of the Association and the members to national and international projects and initiatives;
- To define the agreements and cooperation with the European Union, Italian Government, the European Campaign of Sustainable Cities and Towns, and other networks at the national and international levels; and
- To manage the Association according to the criteria of good governance and social, economical and institutional sustainability.

## Objectives for the Next Future

The Aalborg Commitments, which were presented at the international Aalborg+10 Conference in 2004, have delineated the precise commitments that are required by Local Authorities active in Local Agenda 21, where each authority follows priorities that are consistent with its own reality. In this way the process develops ever more concrete actions that will further characterise Local

Agenda 21. However, it is now time to translate these principles and actions into concrete and efficient projects. Therefore, in addition to awareness raising and promotion of actions, the objective of the Coordination Body is to support members in the realisation of concrete actions, circulate and exchange best practices and to actively participate in the realization of projects funded by the European Commission. The Aalborg Commitments had a central role in the most recent National Assembly, and achieved great prominence through the publicity efforts of the Coordination Body (through its website, newsletter, etc.). Today, many members are engaged in realising and adopting the Aalborg+10 Commitments, which are tailored to fit local exigencies through formal political steps (decisions, agendas discussed in the Municipalities' Councils, etc.).

A further objective of the Coordination Body will be to continue developing relationships with the other Local Authorities national networks engaged in the European Local Agenda 21 (Comité 21, Xarxa), and extra-European (ABM, UN-Habitat), with the aim of finding synergies, realising common projects and promoting twin efforts in the framework of the decentralised international cooperation. The Coordination Body's engagement with Bethlehem 21 is further proof that it is extremely interested in cooperating, providing support, promoting networks and projects shared with Agenda 21 at the international level.

One of the main objectives of the Coordination Body, and one of the basic principles of sustainable development, is the strengthening of networks for exchange of experiences and consolidation of planning capabilities, through the building of partnerships among members and national and international partners. Within 2005 the Coordination Body of Italian Local Agendas 21 became a member of the *Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD)*, the consultative body for the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), for the definition of the Mediterranean Area development strategy. This important collaboration entails the participation to different activities of the Commission and the Working Groups, operating with MAP support, which aim to examine specific issues related to sustainable development with a particular interest in the Mediterranean Area. The basic themes which will be tackled by the Working Groups in the MCSD in the period 2006-2007 are:

- Water resources
- Energy and climatic changes
- Marine pollution from boats
- Integrated management of the coastal areas
- Quality agriculture and sustainable rural development

Moreover, the Coordination Body has signed Memoranda of Understanding and Conventions, which are operational tools useful as a basis for the realisation of the shared activities, with other associations including:

- ANCI (National Association of the Italian Municipalities)
- UPI (Union of the Italian Provinces)
- COMITE' 21 (France, Local Authorities, Enterprises, Associations)
- COMMITTEE FOR THE ECOLABEL AND THE ECOAUDIT (Environmental certification)
- WWF (Environmental Association)
- ICLEI EUROPE (ICLEI is a worldwide organisation of Local Authorities for sustainable development that promotes campaigns, programmes, and projects for the improvement of global sustainability with a particular focus on environmental conditions. ICLEI Europe includes more than 180 members, Local Authorities and Associations). The agreement with ICLEI sanctions the collaboration for the promotion of Environmental Management Systems

for local and regional governments in Italy as a mean to implement the environmental accountancy, with a special focus on CLEAR and EcoBudget methodologies.

Additionally, there are tens of Italian and European global associations, networks, bodies with which the Coordination Body maintains collaboration relationships at different levels and exchanges practices and experiences.

We express the desire that, with Bethlehem 21, or with future networks that it could lead, the Coordination Body could define a Memorandum of Understanding, twinning or another tool that may be useful to the growth of both entities, in a parity relationship based on reciprocity.

## **The Members Activities**

### ***Information and Communication***

Among the activities directed to the members, particular importance is given to the information and communication activity, either the “internal” (that is directed to all members with information on social realities, i.e. best practices, events, etc.) or the one “open to all”, that is directed to the external of the Coordination, either to Local Authorities or to stakeholders and to citizens interested in the themes of sustainability. The main tools are:

- **CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION:** weekly newsletter sent by e-mail containing information on events, congresses, seminars, workshops and publications.
- **NEWSLETTER** hardcopy.
- **WEBSITE:** daily contacting tool that has a very high number of visitors besides 350 registered users who can take advantage of services and publish news.

### ***Working Groups***

The Coordination Body working groups, which are established by the Coordination Executive Council according to the recommendations of the Assembly and in consideration of the members’ proposals, represent an efficient mean for the in depth comparison on topics of interest for the members. Their activities are regularly published and updated in the Coordination website.

Every working group has a coordinator, normally a Local Authority that organizes meetings, sets agendas and coordinates activities, which are in turn summarised for the Executive Council. There are 12 working groups:

- Sustainable cities
- A21 in the small and medium towns
- GPPnet, the network of the solidarity purchases
- TANDEM (application EMAS – environmental certification)
- Sustainable Tourism
- Local Agenda 21 and International Cooperation
- Network CLEAR (environmental accountability, Environmental Balance, CLEAR methodology)
- Sustainable mountains
- Offices-bicycles
- Objectives of recycling of the packaging in the Local Agenda 21
- Education to Sustainable Development – the CEA (Centres for Environmental Education)
- OSIMOS (indicators for the Sustainable Mobility)

### ***Campaign “Fair-Solidarity Cities”***

In 2005, the Coordination Body together with FairTrade TransFair Italy and with the Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights National Coordination Body, promoted the campaign Fair-solidarity Cities. The campaign, directed to Local Authorities, intends to raise the awareness of Public Administrations with respect to the purchase of sustainable products, either under the environmental profile or under one of the working conditions (fair retribution of workers, absence of exploitation of juvenile work). It also intends to make use of the experience of the GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT and proposes to connect it to an idea of SOCIAL PUBLIC PROCUREMENT, where the commitment to environmental sustainability and social sustainability are mutually recognised to complement one another. The Local Authorities willing to adhere to these agendas are urged to approve a motion that requires the continued use of fair products and public awareness raising on fair trade.

### ***Publications***

In 2004, the Coordination Body published four initiatives relating to Agenda 21 and in particular to the Aalborg Commitments. Other additional publications or awareness raising materials are produced by the members and sponsored by the Coordination body. In 2005, the Coordination body promoted two initiatives in occasion of two important events: the World Environmental Day (June 5<sup>th</sup>) and the Week of the Sustainable Mobility (September 16<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>).

### ***Training Courses***

The Coordination Body actively collaborates to implement training courses on sustainability and provides both technical support and personnel to these workshops.

### ***The Indicators***

Certain parameters and indicators have been developed to describe the conditions and activities of the Coordination Body. These indicators are related to the status of the association, and must not be connected to the European indicators or other indicators related to sustainability. They are:

- number of members
- % of new members
- dissemination of information
- active working groups
- number of website monthly visitors
- publications

## **Aalborg Commitments**

Granting our members support in the implementation of the Aalborg Commitments, each according to the modalities and specificities of their respective territory, is the most important objective of this phase. To this has been mostly dedicated the recent National Assembly during which has been organised an international convention for the exchange of experiences. It is worth here to remind the Aalborg Commitments.

### ***I. GOVERNANCE***

We are committed to energising our decision-making processes through increased participatory democracy. We will therefore work to:

1. Further develop a commonly shared long-term vision for a sustainable city or a town.
2. Build participation and sustainable development capacity in the local community and municipal administration.
3. Invite all sectors of local society to participate effectively in decision-making.

4. Make our decisions open, accountable and transparent.
5. Cooperate effectively and in partnership with adjoining municipalities, other cities and towns, and other spheres of government.

## **2. LOCAL MANAGEMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY**

We are committed to implementing effective management cycles, from formulation through implementation to evaluation. We will therefore work to:

1. Strengthen Local Agenda 21 or other local sustainability processes and mainstream them into the heart of local government.
2. Deliver integrated management towards sustainability, based on the precautionary principle and with regard to the forthcoming EU Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment.
3. Set targets and time schemes in the framework of the Aalborg Commitments and create and follow the Aalborg Commitments monitoring review.
4. Ensure that sustainability issues are central to urban decision-making processes and that resource allocation is based on strong and broad sustainability criteria.
5. Cooperate with the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign and its networks to monitor and evaluate our progress towards meeting our sustainability targets.

## **3. NATURAL COMMON GOODS**

We are committed to fully assuming our responsibility to protect, to preserve, and to ensure equitable access to natural common goods. We will therefore work, throughout our community, to:

1. Reduce primary energy consumption, and increase the share of renewable energies.
2. Improve water quality, save water, and use water more efficiently.
3. Promote and increase biodiversity, and extend and care for designated nature areas and green spaces.
4. Improve soil quality, preserve ecologically productive land and promote sustainable agriculture and forestry.
5. Improve air quality.

## **4. RESPONSIBLE CONSUME AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES**

We are committed to adopting and facilitating the prudent and efficient use of resources and to encouraging sustainable consumption and production. We will therefore work, throughout our community, to:

1. Avoid and reduce waste, and increase re-use and recycling.
2. Manage and treat waste in accordance with best practice standards.
3. Avoid unnecessary energy consumption, and improve end-use energy efficiency.
4. Undertake sustainable procurement.
5. Actively promote sustainable production and consumption, in particular of eco-labelled, organic, ethical and fair trade products.

## **5. PLANNING AND DESIGN**

We are committed to a strategic role for urban planning and design in addressing environmental, social, economic, health and cultural issues for the benefit of all. We will therefore work to:

1. Re-use and regenerate derelict or disadvantaged areas.
2. Avoid urban sprawl by achieving appropriate urban densities and prioritising Brownfield site over Greenfield site development.
3. Ensure the mixed use of buildings and developments with a good balance of jobs, housing and services, giving priority to residential use in city centres.
4. Ensure appropriate conservation, renovation and use/re-use of our urban cultural heritage.
5. Apply requirements for sustainable design and construction and promote high quality architecture and building technologies.

## **6. BETTER MOBILITY, LESS TRAFFIC**

We recognise the interdependence of transport, health and environment and are committed to strongly promoting sustainable mobility choices. We will therefore work to:

1. Reduce the necessity for private motorised transport and promote attractive alternatives accessible to all.
2. Increase the share of journeys made by public transport, on foot and by bicycle.
3. Encourage transition to low-emission vehicles.
4. Develop an integrated and sustainable urban mobility plan.
5. Reduce the impact of transport on the environment and public health.

## **7. LOCAL ACTION FOR HEALTH**

We are committed to protecting and promoting the health and wellbeing of our citizens. We will therefore work to:

1. Raise awareness and take action on the wider determinants of health, most of which lie outside the health sector.
2. Promote city health development planning, which provides our cities with a means to build and maintain strategic partnerships for health.
3. Reduce inequalities in health and address poverty, which will require regular reporting on progress towards reducing the gaps.
4. Promote health impact assessment as a means for all sectors to focus their work on health and the quality of life.
5. Mobilise urban planners to integrate health considerations in their planning strategies and initiatives.

## **8. VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ECONOMY**

We are committed to creating and ensuring a vibrant local economy that gives access to employment without damaging the environment. We will therefore work to:

1. Adopt measures that stimulate and support local employment and business start-ups.
2. Cooperate with local businesses to promote and implement good corporate practice.
3. Develop and implement sustainability principles for the location of businesses.
4. Encourage markets for high quality local and regional produce.
5. Promote sustainable local tourism.

## **9. SOCIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE**

We are committed to securing inclusive and supportive communities. We will therefore work to:

1. Develop and implement programmes to prevent and alleviate poverty.
2. Ensure equitable access to public services, education, employment opportunities, training, information, and cultural activities.
3. Foster social inclusion and gender equality.
4. Improve community safety and security.
5. Secure good quality and socially integrated housing and living conditions.

## **10. LOCAL TO GLOBAL**

We are committed to assuming our global responsibility for peace, justice, equity, sustainable development and climate protection. We will therefore work to:

1. Develop and follow a strategic and integrated approach to mitigate climate change, and work towards a sustainable level of greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Mainstream climate protection policy into our policies in the areas of energy, transport, procurement, waste, agriculture, and forestry.



3. Raise awareness of the causes and probable impacts of climate change, and integrate preventive actions into our climate change policy.
4. Reduce our impact on the global environment and promote the principle of environmental justice.
5. Strengthen the international cooperation of towns and cities and develop local responses to global problems in partnership with local governments, communities and relevant stakeholders.

## **INQUIRY 2006 ON THE STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENDA 21 IN ITALY**

I will list hereunder, in synthetic manner and with the hope to broaden ideas during the intervention to the Forum, some data, elements, discussion points that emerged from the last inquiry on the state of implementation of Agenda 21 in Italy, carried out by the Coordination Body through a voluntary questionnaire-interview.

- 87 % of the bodies that answered the inquiry have adopted technical instruments in support to their process of Local Agenda 21, such as the Report on the Status of the Environment, and the Environmental Management Systems in tandem with A21. Agenda 21 is more and more interpreted as a process that reinforces the planning capacities of Local Authorities, through an operation of transparency and sharing that activates collaborations and reaches levels of consensus.
- One of the most common critiques that emerged from the inquiry was the low attendance at the meetings. This is source of concern as Agenda 21 is hoped to serve as a participative tool for citizens. Such low attendance can be due to many reasons and it is certainly useful to understand its causes.
- Another critical factor is the scarcity of funds due to the lack of proposals by the Ministry and the Regional Authorities. This might be due to the Local Authorities' lack of understanding that Agenda 21 can be a strategic benefit if included within the normal activities funded from the municipal or provincial budget.
- A substantial improvement is re-ordered with a more advanced state of realization of the process. Many Action Plans have been already approved and many of the developed Local Agendas 21 are in the process of implementation and monitoring.
- Although political and administrative responsibilities normally lie with the Councillorships of the Environment, the idea of Agenda 21 as a project of not only environmental matters, but also of social and economic concerns is increasing. Therefore, Agendas 21 working groups are increasingly gaining a social character or are succeeding in integrating the environmental spheres with the economic and social ones. An example is constituted by the increasing interest towards the lifestyle and consumption fields, the solidarity economy networks, etc.
- In the diagnostic analysis that precedes the activation of the Forums, mobility and waste management are the two topics that are most frequently tackled. The water issue has been met with strong awareness, but in a geographically discontinuous way. In contrast to previous years (such as 2004) many groups have been activated on the energy issue (saving, alternative sources, etc).
- Congresses, events and advertising material (pamphlets, flyers) are the most common means of promotion. 94% of Local Agendas 21 use "facilitators" to carry out the Working Groups, 24% of which are conducted by Local Authority personnel while the rest is composed of professionals and consultants external to the Local Authority.
- More than 2/3 of the Local Authorities that have already approved Action Plans, did not procure sufficient resources to bring them to full realisation. This often hinders the implementation of the Plans, or makes them only partially realised. It is very important to foresee sure commitments, political and financial, for the realisation of the Plans, and to avoid frustrations among the participants who have invested their voluntary time and energy.

- Even among the stakeholders, the Local Authority has a protagonist role. It is important, in the spirit of Agenda 21, that all stakeholders are involved the realisation of objectives. For this reason it is possible to activate operational tools, such as partnerships, voluntary agreements and memoranda of understanding. 42% of the Agendas 21 in the post-approval phase of Plan have activated tools to involve stakeholders in the realisation of projects.
- A true monitoring action is ongoing only in 14% of the cases.