

## **AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS ABOUT RESPONSIBLE WATER CONSUMPTION IN NORTHERN ITALY.**

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Abstract:

As cities continue to expand, the growing demand for water increases the strain on local supply sources. The traditional response to this demand is to increase water availability by developing new surface and groundwater abstractions, constructing or expanding storage reservoirs and transferring bulk supplies from regions where water is less scarce. However, this approach is increasingly being questioned as natural limitations, environmental concerns and the impacts of climate change reduce the availability of existing resources and prevent the development of new ones to match the demand of growing populations.

Rather than increasing supply to meet demand, an alternative way of addressing water scarcity is to manage consumption. It is widely documented that humanity is now consuming more resources than our planet is able to produce and regenerate.

Specifically, the Italian situation shows an ecological footprint of approximately 3.3 hectares per capita and a biological available area of approximately 1.3 hectares per capita: therefore it is needed almost "three Italys" to ensure the livelihood of the population with current lifestyles. The widespread use of mineral water (Italy is the third country in the world per capita consumption of that product), result of misinformation and ingrained habits produces thousands of tons of plastic waste despite the excellent quality of water distributed in the province of Milan. Interventions are needed not just to inform and raise awareness about the environmental consequences of our consumption behavior but to generate concrete actions that will result in more sustainable living and consumption styles.

Awareness raising campaigns are widely diffused in sustainability actions worldwide. Nevertheless their tangible outcomes in terms of environmental benefits from behavior changes could be difficult to be assessed.

A case study in Italy is here presented, as the issues of protection and management of water resources in Italy have grown in the last few years within the Italian civil society. This is due mainly because of the dramatic effects of environmental episodes such as drought and floods that affect the most productive areas of the country, and secondly, for the recent attempts of liberalization and privatization of integrated water services and facilities.

In relation to that, citizens and civil society's organizations started to become active parts in developing and promoting a better knowledge of the resource and in implementing individual or collective strategies of water saving, water quality control and awareness raising campaigns.

Indeed the issue of participation in the management and protection of water resources that took Italians also to vote for a referendum against privatization of water services is

one of the most interesting aspects to monitor. That will allow a better evaluation of the impact of the campaigns in order to achieve concrete changes in behavior related to the usage of water at all levels.

In this study, we present the case study of a project aimed at improving sustainable consumption of water among the citizens of one of the biggest municipalities nearby Milan (Sesto San Giovanni), Northern Italy, through the use of different strategies such as: educational labs in schools (primary and secondary), organizations of cultural events for adults and the collection of data with the use of questionnaires.

The research is structured upon two main issues: the use of participatory methodologies (e.g. survey to citizens and workshops) and the monitoring methods to track changes in consumption patterns (e.g. measure of the quantity of water distributed by public distributors of water in substitution of bottled water before and after the campaign). This method enable researchers and policy makers to quantify the environmental benefit gained through the awareness campaign and to identify consumer' patterns (and reasons behind them) among the citizens. Thus, the analysis and discussion of the result of the questionnaires is extremely relevant for defining tailored policies for resource efficiency at local scale. Additionally, the study aims to point out some aspects of citizens' perceptions on: tap water quality, habits on consumption of bottled water or tap water, knowledge of local service providers and other local authorities responsible for water services and the satisfaction on the water service provided.

As expected results we intend to present the outcomes of the survey and give a first quantification of the environmental benefits obtained with the campaign.