



ECCELSA Project

Environmental Compliance based on Cluster Experiences and Local SME-oriented Approaches



circular economy

reducing environment
impact

environmental
sustainability

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The **ECCELSA** project aimed to consolidate the so-called "Cluster Approach" based on strengthening the relationships and sharing resources present in a territory, in order to improve compliance with the environmental regulations of SMEs located in Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Lazio, Liguria and Lombardy. SMEs are often not aware of the environmental repercussions of their activities and of the environmental legislation applicable to them. This cognitive gap is essentially due to a lack of awareness of the generated environmental impacts, to the not sufficient knowledge of the environmental legislation requirements and to limited human and technical capital what makes it difficult to effectively comply with the legislation.



OBJECTIVES

The objective is to foster and facilitate the implementation of the ECAP (Environmental Compliance Action Plan) as defined by the European Commission (communication COM (2007) 379). The project had also the goal of improving capacity of local policies to influence the environmental performance of small businesses through collaboration between the **public and private sectors** and the implementation of specific **activities aimed at networking** in specific production areas. The ECCELSA project is based on the recognition that SMEs, not individually but considered as a whole, have a strong impact on the environment. It is important to underline that, from the perspective of the ECAP and of the proposed cluster approach, the concept of regulatory compliance does not represent only a constraint with which companies must comply - and whose respect has a cost in terms of economic and human resources, especially for SMEs - but it also has a significant strategic value. The set of regulatory obligations, if understood as an element to stimulate innovation in production processes and products, represents an opportunity for companies also with a view to overcoming the legislation itself, in order to anticipate future developments.

PROJECT PHASES

In this context, the use of the cluster approach proposed by ECCELSA has made it possible to strengthen the skills at the local level with a consequent improvement in environmental performance both within individual SMEs and in the entire production area. For the application of the "cluster approach" a specific methodology has been defined in 10 territorial areas spread in the 5 regions of the project area. The cooperative strategy has contributed to creating a breeding ground for the dissemination of innovations.

The main actions and related achievements were:



- **cluster approach:** through this action the methodological approach was defined based on the construction of **networks among SMEs**, sharing of resources, development of innovation and exchange of knowledge. The practice was aimed at increasing environmental skills at the local level and at producing better "green" performances both in individual companies and at the level of territorial production;
- **pilot group and orientation map:** this intervention allowed to identify the **environmental policy priorities, the key players and the guiding principles** to develop the approach in the 10 clusters previously selected to participate in the project. The **Pilot Group**, set up in each cluster, has expressed the local, public and private, priority interests, and has coordinated the implementation of the cluster approach ensuring the achievement of the objectives. 42% of the members of the 10 pilot groups consisted of Local Authorities, 39% of intermediate organizations (eg trade associations), 14% of SMEs and 5% of civil society organizations (eg environmental associations). The **orientation map**, a criticality survey model was also produced to identify the sectors with regulatory non-compliance or environmental performance criticalities, and to provide strategic guidelines for the development of enhancement actions in the cluster.

Waste management represented the most problematic sector for **80%** of clusters, followed by **water drains and rainwater management** for 60%, **emissions into the atmosphere** for 40%, and **water and energy consumption** for 30%. From the 10 orientation maps it emerged that the greatest difficulties encountered by companies in complying with environmental legislation were related to the not thorough knowledge of the sector's regulations and obligations applicable to their company (reported in 70% of clusters), the expenses for their execution (50%) and the preparation of the required complicated documents and communications (40%);

- **hot spot:** the action was aimed at identifying the cluster's hot spots, which emerge from an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses. In each territorial area an analysis was carried out which revealed the main environmental criticalities of the territory, and on this basis the Pilot Group identified the **"focal points"** for the environmental performance's and compliance's improvement. Sectoral analyzes were also carried out in six clusters to assess the environmental impact compared to the production;
- **route plan and actions:** this action consisted in the elaboration, in each territorial area, of an environmental action plan, the *Route plan*, for the identification of specific territorial improvement objectives based on which the "compliance actions" were defined. These actions, aimed at improving the policy priorities of each cluster, have been identified by the pilot groups and included in the action plans that represent, therefore, the practical instruments of intervention;

dashboard: a framework of indicators has been developed to monitor environmental performance and regulatory compliance of SMEs operating within each cluster. These parameters have been identified by the pilot groups that have also defined a procedure for their implementation. Based on the identified criteria, the **efficiency and effectiveness** of the cooperative approach was evaluated in terms of cost-benefits, social cohesion, competitiveness and synergies between all the players of the cluster, as well as the effectiveness of the cluster approach.

PROJECT RESULTS

ECCELSA has strengthened environmental competences at the local level and determined the improvement of the environmental performance both of the individual SMEs involved and of the entire production area. The activities carried out in the framework of the *Route Plan and actions* were particularly intense, and specific additional interventions were implemented (besides the training actions, list of simplifications, list of technologies and regulatory audits foreseen by the project), that involved a high number of local stakeholders and gave a strong input to the development of actions aimed at the environmental improvement. The main achieved results were:

- **operational involvement of the 10 clusters** that implemented the project on their territories;
- **development of the [Database of Cluster Approach](#)**, a methodological document to test and implement in the field the new strategic approach for achieving the environmental compliance of the SMEs cluster;
- **preparation of a cd-rom on how to perform a self-diagnosis of the applicable environmental legislation** and which are the related administrative requirements. Results were then used by the cluster companies for updating themselves on the environmental legislation and identifying the aspects to comply with within the related deadlines;
- **construction of 1 waste management plan and 1 software for managing the environmental aspects** of the SPIP production area (a production facilities company located in Parma);
- **an Agreement to start a program on extra virgin olive oil's environmental qualification process in Val di Conia**, signed, in November 2011 between Municipalities, the Val di Conia Parks Authority and trade associations. This territorial governance tool has allowed agricultural companies in the area to increase their competitiveness by promoting the environmental characteristics of the produced oil;
- **creation of the [Green metal](#) brand** in the cluster of the Brescia Valleys, for companies that want to engage in a path to achieve full compliance with the environmental legislation. The cluster companies that have obtained the brand, were then involved in a network that guarantees continuous training and information on all environmental issues and an ongoing



dialogue with the main local institutions;

- **guidelines on the application of ECAP-oriented Cluster Approach;**
- the cluster companies were offered the possibility to carry out a "check-up" of their degree of compliance with **environmental regulations**. Each of the **59 companies** that underwent the audit have received a report identifying its non-compliances. The project has also made available to the 10 production areas a document which identifies, for each of the characterizing sectors, the main technological innovations that companies can implement to reduce their environmental impact and consumption of raw materials.

In addition, **20 training initiatives** were implemented that involved over 120 subjects, including companies, representatives of institutions and trade organizations. In these occasions also numerous regulatory simplification proposals were raised by the partners to local organizations and their own regions.



Acronym
ECCELSA

Number of reference
LIFE07 ENV/IT/000515

Reference Programme
[LIFE](#)

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EU contribution
798.874,00

Call Year
2007

Start Year
2009

End Year
2011

Beneficiary headquarters

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Region
Toscana

Description

L'intervento è stato realizzato tra Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardia, Toscana