



Eco-Cluster Project

Environmental COoperation model for Cluster



circular economy

environmental
sustainability

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In Europe, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent a considerable part of the economic and productive system. Due to their widespread diffusion, they are increasingly directed towards the adoption of new sustainable production and consumption models with a lower environmental impact. Compared to large companies, SMEs rarely use environmental management systems (EMS) and tools, due both to such systems' complexity and the required financial resources.

The Eco-Cluster project wanted to deal with this situation by developing an Environmental Management System (EMS) model for *clusters*, established in territorial areas with the presence of SMEs of similar size and belonging to the same production field. The companies of a cluster are very often independent and in competition with each other but are geographically concentrated in the same or in some neighboring regions and specialized in a sector or together make up a specific production chain. The model was developed based on existing environmental management and certification tools (EMAS, Ecolabel), using the most suitable features from time to time in order to develop a versatile management system, specifically designed to meet the needs of SMEs. With this approach it was encouraged the adoption, by organizations belonging to a cluster (SMEs and public bodies), of the voluntary environmental management tools. The requirements of the ECO-Cluster standard are applicable to any group of independent companies or entities associated in a cluster with the aim of promoting and pursuing common and shared environmental objectives. The Eco-Cluster model is an example of management that stimulates a territory to take control of the overall environmental performance, also with a view to competitiveness, through the joint commitment of a cluster's organizations.



OBJECTIVES

Main objectives of the project were to:

- **develop and put in place an environmental management model** for the implementation of the [ECAP Programme's](#) Action Plan in the *Cerreto Laghi* cluster. The area of the Cerreto Cluster is characterized by a strong naturalistic value and touristic vocation and is entirely incorporated in the territory of the National Park of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines.
- **create a sound public-private partnership to develop an integrated environmental policy for the cluster:** a fundamental requirement is the involvement of public institutions facilitating the creation of consensus between the players who have a role in managing the cluster and the definition of the general objectives to be pursued, and ensuring a commitment in terms of resources that the single institutions make available to the cluster.
- **improve the awareness of SMEs**, belonging to the *Cerreto Laghi* cluster, of the importance to comply with environmental regulations and implement specific audits.
- **improve the environmental performance of the "Cerreto Laghi" tourist cluster**, as a long-term goal.



The starting point was a census and classification of a sample of 50 Italian and 50 European clusters belonging to different economic macro-sectors (agriculture, industry, services, tourism). The model, and consequently the developed standard, allow to organize, manage and monitor the environmental impacts of the cluster in terms of: energy efficiency, water quality, waste production, biodiversity, atmospheric emissions, transport and mobility.

PROJECT PHASES

The following actions were implemented within the project:

1. Signing of a Convention between the beneficiaries.
2. Development of the cluster's management model.
3. Identification and classification of a sample of Italian and foreign clusters.
4. Implementation of the ECO-Cluster management model and establishment of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster Management Committee;
5. Initial environmental analysis of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster and evaluation of the significance of the environmental aspects;
6. Survey on environmental regulatory compliance of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster.
7. Definition of the environmental program of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster.
8. Definition of the environmental management system of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster.
9. Communication of the environmental results of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster.
10. Development of local environmental skills.
11. Activation of environmental certification paths and increase in the share of green purchases.
12. Definition of an "ECO-CLUSTER" standard for the cluster management model and development of a guideline for the standard's application.
13. Approval of the ECO-CLUSTER management model.
14. Evaluation and validation, by the monitoring group, of the obtained environmental results.

The developed model was tested in the "Cerreto Laghi" tourist cluster, involving tour operators and public and private entities operating in the area through a management committee. Based on the ECO-Cluster model's experience, an Environmental Management Standard and related application guidelines have been elaborated. Subsequently, it was verified the compliance of the "Cerreto Laghi" cluster's management system with the ECO-Cluster Standard. The elaboration and implementation of the model and the standard was followed and validated by a Monitoring Group made up of experts of the sector.

The specificity of the model was that of being adapted, from time to time, to the specific needs of the companies in order to offer an accessible and versatile management system, completely in line with the needs of the cluster's SMEs. Furthermore, during the project an intense networking activity was carried out to test the developed model. In fact, tour operators participated personally in the implementation of the project through their involvement in the Management Committee.

PROJECT RESULTS

The environmental management model was structured in a way to encourage all the organizations of the cluster (SMEs and public bodies) to adopt the existing environmental management and certification tools (e.g.: EMAS, Ecolabel). The tools developed in this way were:

- diversified, because the compliance with the policy and environmental regulations can be ensured both by one of the management schemes envisaged by the European Union or by a combination of them;
- customized, in order to respond to the sectoral characteristics and to overcome the complexity of individual organizations in improving the environmental quality of the cluster.

The model was implemented also with the aim of encouraging efficiency and energy savings in order to contribute to achieving the goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.



The main results achieved with the project were:

- Elaboration and test of the ECO- CLUSTER MODEL, and development of the methodology document: "ECO- CLUSTER model guidelines", composed of:
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: characterization of the cluster.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: requirements for the cluster's management committee.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: requirements for the Agreement on the cluster's management programme.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: initial environmental analysis of the cluster.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: register on fulfillment of the environmental requirements by the cluster.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: methodology for the evaluation of the environmental aspects' significance in the cluster.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: requirements for the cluster's environmental programme](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: requirements for the cluster's Environmental Management System.](#)
 - [ECO-Cluster environmental management model guideline: the communication tools of the cluster.](#)
- Setup of a **Database of approx. 100 European clusters** in different fields of activities.
- Preparation of the '[Agreement for the environmental qualification of the Cerreto Laghi Cluster](#) including also a document related to the **Environmental policy of the Cluster**. Through this Agreement, signed by the Park, the neighboring local authorities, the Chamber of Commerce of Reggio Emilia, the Municipality of Collagna, IREN Rinnovabili, Turismo Appennino SpA and GAL Antico Frignano and Cerreto Laghi So. Coop, the "Cerreto Cluster Management Committee" was established.
- Development of the [Initial environmental analysis of the Cerreto Laghi cluster](#).
- Setup of the [Register on fulfillment of the environmental requirements by the Cerreto Laghi cluster](#), keeping track of the compliance with the environmental requirements by the cluster's members.
- Development of the [Environmental programme of the Cerreto Laghi cluster](#) which defines the environmental goals and responsibilities of each member.
- Elaboration of the [Report on the Cerreto Laghi cluster](#).
- Elaboration of the ECO-CLUSTER certification standard.
- Elaboration of the **[Cost-benefit analysis of the ECO-CLUSTER environmental management model](#)**.
- [Documentation of the Environmental Management System of the Cerreto cluster](#), a summary document of the management and operational procedures aimed at allowing a homogeneous environmental management of the cluster and a significant simplification for those organizations that want to improve their environmental performance or equip themselves with an own environmental management system.

For a greater diffusion of the results and in order to favor the replicability of the model also in other territories, an "[online information desk](#)" was also set up where both Cerreto cluster companies and public and private organizations from other clusters could request information about the project, the ECO-CLUSTER model and the experience in general.



Acronym

Eco- Cluster

Number of reference

LIFE 09 ENV/IT/000188

Reference Programme

[LIFE](#)

Beneficiary Coordinator

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EU contribution

466.358,00

Call Year

2009

Start Year

2010

End Year

2014

Beneficiary headquarters

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Region

Emilia-Romagna

Description

Emilia Romagna e Toscana