

CASE STUDY

Urban Renewal

Case 38 Varese Ligure, Italy: Rural Infrastructure Upgrading

Problem to resolve

Like many mountain villages in Europe, conventional agriculture can not be economically compete in Italy with large scale farm production and particularly the younger population is moving toward the bigger towns. The door is poen for moral and phsical decay of the community.



Varese Ligure: Village core¹



Varese Ligure: facades²



The Italian municipality Varese Figure^{3 4} is small but the lessons it can teach the world are very exciting. At the end of the 1980s, the municipality's population had diminished from 6,000 to 2,250 citizens, due to a lack of jobs, no industry, decaying properties, and a lack of essential services. The municipality was geographically isolated, it had a lack of modern industry, and the farming practices were antiquated. Then the new mayor at the time, Maurizio Caranza, refused to give up and drew up a recovery plan which, with the active support of the residents, was then put into practice from 1990 onwards.

Since the municipality was falling apart, an agreement was reached between the municipality and the citizens. The municipality was to organize funding for upgrading the urban infrastructure, partly with EU assistance, and the community would take care of renovating their own old houses. The deal worked out and became the base for future production initiatives – basically relying on organic farming and renewable energies. **→Tool URR 2**



Varese autonomous energy supply⁵



Organic Food Festival in Varese⁶

Since 1996, an Environmental Education Center (CEA) educates the local young generation about organic agriculture, renewable energy, and sustainability. Also courses are provided about energy consumption and climate change. Organic farming practices were taught to the local farmers, who can't afford chemical fertilizers anyway: in practice they were already organic, but they weren't officially certified. With EU grants for organic farms, they became interested in certifying the farms as organic. Today there are 108 organic farms that supply 98% of the municipality's produce, including organic porcini mushrooms, chestnuts, cheeses, honey, fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy products. Good restaurants opened. Artists and craftspeople arrived. The Vara valley is now known as the "Organic Valley", and in 1999 it became Europe's first valley to be certified for environmental management under ISO 14001.

To supply the municipality with renewable electricity, four wind turbines were installed on a ridge 1,100 meters above sea level. These turbines generate 8 million kWh of electricity per year: three times the amount needed by the municipality; the surplus is fed into the local grid. The municipality hall and the secondary school roofs are covered by solar photovoltaic panels, which supply 98% and 62% of their electricity needs, respectively. This output is complemented by a number of small-scale hydropower generators – and the municipal piscine is directly heated through solar collectors. The shift to renewable energy has added 140 jobs and added an additional \$514,000 USD in annual tax revenues for the municipality. Last but not least, the success of this village development, together with the UN-HABITAT awarded in 2014, helped to increase the number of visiting tourists by 500% since the late 1990s, many coming just to see the renewable energy achievements.



Varese Ligure villaage setting⁷

Bioloical agricultural products⁸

Credentials

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References

- ¹ Source: <http://www.leduepoiane.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/download-2.jpg>
- ² Source: http://metaefficient.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/varese_ligure.jpg
- ³ <http://www.dac.dk/en/dac-cities/sustainable-cities/all-cases/master-plan/small-italian-municipality-sets-an-example-for-the-worlds-cities/> seen 8/1/2015
- ⁴ <http://www.renewableenergyworld.com/articles/2007/12/renewable-energy-powers-italian-town-and-its-economy-50863.html> seen 8/2/2015
- ⁵ Source: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_HFeJw58JbFs/TAN_tnO7hSI/AAAAAAAAA1A/nqb8-wRwVvU/s1600/wind+power.jpg
- ⁶ Source: http://www.animalieanimali.it/rubriche/31538_a_varese_ligure_arriva_il_primo_festival_del_bio
- ⁷ <https://www.giannellachannel.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/03-varese-ligure-val-vara-ph.vgiannella.jpg>
- ⁸ http://laspezia.cronaca4.it/photogallery_new/images/2016/05/varese-ligure-58771.jpg