

#SAVIOLATALKS:

The challenge between environmental responsibility and economic efficiency

The waste sector has undertaken an important role both at the social and productive level, in fact, it represents not only an essential public service for urban waste, by virtue of the immediate repercussions on the environment and the health of urban contexts, but also one of the constant sources of supply of (secondary) materials and energy production, a real sector in continuous growth in the recovery and, therefore, production of raw materials from waste for industry.

This transformation is also accompanied by a structural change in management systems, which from the mere organisation of services must become industrial systems capable of managing a complex of integrated activities aimed at maximising the recovery of matter and energy. Sustainability for Italian companies is changing from an ethical choice to a real distinctive lever for business development capable of increasing prestige, turnover and competitiveness on the market. A commitment that represents a clear choice of field for companies that have accepted the challenge of combining environmental responsibility and economic efficiency, even in a very difficult economic context, which would push anyone to give up ambitious but demanding objectives, such as those relating to sustainability, to turn only towards the search for immediate results or, worse still, very short-term expedients.

Waste management today is an activity that requires organisational effectiveness of the cycle and the ability to build and manage plants with increasingly complex and efficient technological characteristics. It is, therefore, crucial to develop an effective and efficient integrated management system, enabling companies to take initiatives following the reduction of waste production, where recycling and energy recovery are complementary elements, in order to achieve the objective of minimising the use of landfills.

Despite this evidence, waste management in Italy continues to remain in a critical and contradictory phase: on the one hand, it is based on increasingly ambitious environmental and quality objectives, driven by the new European directives and with a complicated regulatory framework and uncertain in its application and interpretation, on the other hand it consists of an underdimensioned industrial sector made fragile by the absence of essential conditions to implement necessary investments, given a generalised hostile climate of public opinion towards any type of intervention.

The European policy guidelines place the circular economy and the enhancement of the recovery and regeneration of products and materials at the centre of the agenda for the efficient exploitation of resources, established as part of the European Strategy 2020 for sustainable and



growth, in order to respond to the increasingly scarce availability of raw materials. The implementation of the circular economy in the waste sector and the rational and efficient use of materials would thus enable Italy to be emancipated from the import of raw materials. This could be achieved by making the recycling industry strong and competitive, ensuring the enhancement and recovery of materials and production residues, as well as defining cross-sectoral development paths based on new business models.

Making circular economy means having waste management facilities with adequate capacity and size to the demand (we think of macro-areas) and above all guaranteeing market outlets for the recovered materials. The lack of adequate plant infrastructure for the management and, above all, for the enhancement of waste, in support of the circular economy, is causing damage to the system of companies, as well as to the country in general. Businesses, as well as citizens and communities afflicted by periodic environmental emergencies, suffer. This plant deficit has led our country in the past to resort massively to exports, an activity that in this emergency phase and blocking of borders has been very complicated and has forced the Legislator to resort to an expansion of storage and even temporary storage.

Acknowledging this context makes the need for a modern environmental policy even more evident. This will take the form of the adoption of appropriate sector legislation that lays the foundations for a serious industrial development policy for the sector's activities and critical areas on a firm and stable basis, preparatory to the creation of conditions for investment, including private investment, and employment in the sector.

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