



Interview with Ivan Stomeo - President Associazione Borghi Autentici d'Italia

1) Why a partnership between Borghi Autentici d'Italia and the Pesticide Free Towns Network?

By signing the Manifesto of Borghi Autentici d'Italia, our Municipalities undertake to develop, together with our Association, concrete actions in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of their territories and to improve the quality of life of their citizens, also from an environmental and public health point of view. The agreement with the European Pesticide Free Towns Network, therefore, is fully coherent with all the actions promoted by us and helps our municipalities in improving the quality of life of their local communities.

2) You are both the President of the Association and the Mayor of the Municipality of Melpignano, a small village in Apulia and one of the most active villages in terms of environmental policy. What are the most important initiatives undertaken in this regard?

In my Municipality environmental policies have always been a priority, that's why we have developed various activities: since 2011 we use renewable energy sources (photovoltaic rooftops), since 2015 we grantee land to unemployed and young people for the management of gardens, where the use of chemical pesticide is totally banned. Furthermore they must plant at least one indigenous variety, in order to reintroduce and improve our biodiversity. Besides, we are the first in Italy to use a municipality composting system combined with a worm farming system.

3) What are the alternative methods your Municipality uses for the sustainable management of green areas?

In Melpignano we have launched two environmental projects, "The redemption of the donkey" and "Let's integrate with Geo". The first allows us to use a donkey, called Geo, who performs the role of "mower" for all the public green areas of our town. Geo helps us to save the biodiversity and to reduce the use of pesticides. The second project was realized thanks to the collaboration of the Sprar (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), which involved two migrants living in Melpignano, Asif and YeroBa, in helping local operators and taking care of our friend Geo.

4) What are the main problems to face in the sustainable management of public green areas?

Some studies show that using pesticides is cheaper than the use of sustainable alternative methods. The additional costs, in the short term, are mainly due to the need to invest in training for staff and in the purchase of new machineries. That's why first of all we need to decide how and when to start the transition. The key for being able to keep the same costs depends on when you start; clearly, the sooner it starts the more the maintenance costs of the invasive herbs will be contained and, in the long run, you will reach important, even economic, results for the community, in terms of environmental sustainability and public health.

5) What are, in your opinion, the most effective ways to involve citizens in the environmental policies of their Municipality?

To involve citizens it's necessary to make them feel part of the project, that's why the most important thing is to inform them about the risk related to the use of chemical pesticides. According to my experience, it is also important to involve schools and students, because education has a main relevance in changing life styles.

6) In Europe, the issue of the use of chemical pesticides is constantly at the center of the political agenda. What could be done more, both at national and at European level?

At national level, we surely need to better apply the existing National Plans. However, it's necessary to plan the transition, to group some stakeholders for a discussion, make an inventory of all the sites, proceeding step by step. At European level networks like Pesticide Free Towns play a key role in making different geographical and economic realities work together.