

Plastic addiction Campaign against single use and disposable plastics

The Commission on Globalization and Environment launches a campaign to combat the use of disposable plastics and substitutes within the framework of the Eco-communities network project.

This action is part of the general theme of the use of resources, which for Christians are God's creation, and at the same time a concrete example of the need to activate real upstream reconversion actions. This means eliminating their production and stopping the proliferation of substitutes that do not displace the problem of correcting needs induced by consumerism. The delegation entrusted to the consciences of individuals of downstream gestures can do little compared to the pressure of productive behaviors harmful to the collective health of life on Earth.

The factor that motivated this initiative are the behaviors of greater aggression to the environment justified by the 'covid emergency'.

The campaign has two sides: one that concerns lifestyles and one that concerns the pressure on politics and production which, as we can see, oppose resistance also by developing lateral strategies.

The proposal of the campaign: abolish disposables

The health emergency is aggravating the climate emergency. This is not blaming covid but it has become the excuse for socially and environmentally negative behaviors contrary to life on the planet.

The reaction to covid with respect to single-dose consumption has similarities with that which occurred when in 1986 it was discovered that the water that came out of the taps of much of Italy was contaminated by atrazine (a possible carcinogenic herbicide and certainly acts on the hormonal system) and other chemical substances. This occurred because the wells from which the aqueducts were fed were shown to be polluted by pesticides. Incidentally, we recall that the then Minister of Health Donat Cattin raised the tolerability limits in drinking water by ten times, making it drinkable by law.

The bottled water market has exploded since then, even in situations where tap water is good and even if bottled water has a number of contraindications for health and the environment. Regardless of the possible scams, the market finds solutions that have no impact verification if not in the profit of a few.

The purpose of the campaign is to join those who believe that:

- plastic is a material made to last, which one cannot dispose, and therefore is wasted on disposable consumption
- such consumption constitutes a use of scarce resources and is not only irrational but also legitimizes the conviction of a violent and extractive right to domination which is ultimately responsible for climate change; throwaway is bad education and also a cultural reality
- recycling is a post-consumption action and therefore is a practice in itself that consumes energy and materials; how often is this possible and what are the consequences?
- the disposable logic must be eradicated and not maintained with substitutes, as the integration of plastics with corn or other vegetables presupposes; like bio fuel, this aggravates soil consumption for non-food purposes; the sanitation systems adopted so far are insufficient and do not justify the multiplication of disposable waste; for take-away food reusable containers must be possible; regarding delivery of food and drinks in churches, washable containers brought from home are ideal
- for the churches a theological argument can be made that "use and throw" shows contempt for God's creation.

The trigger: the covid alibi

According to the United Nations conference on trade and development (Unctad), coronavirus lockdowns imposed around the world in July 2020 led to a 5% drop in greenhouse gas emissions, but the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in pollution due to disposable plastic masks, gloves and bottles of hand sanitizers and food packaging.

According to the business consulting agency Grand View Research, worldwide the sale of disposable face masks increased sale from 800 million dollars in 2019 to 166 billion dollars in 2020. But Unctad warns that this is only of a part of the story. "Social distancing has also resulted in an influx of home-delivered products daily - packed in a plethora of packaging - as people turn to online shopping and takeout services. The resulting plastic waste is enormous".

According to data collected by Unctad, about 75% of the plastics of products related to the management of the coronavirus risk becomes garbage that floods landfills and ends up adrift in our seas. The costs are staggering. For example, for the United Nations environment program (Unep) the negative impact of plastic waste on fishing, tourism and navigation amounts to about 40 billion dollars a year.

There are limits to what a country can accomplish on its own. The 164 developing and developed economies that make up the WTO would have the capacity to elaborate multilateral trade rules that could more effectively address the fundamental issues related to the world economy of plastics .

In addition to regulating the production and consumption of plastics, Unctad urges governments and businesses to identify substitutes for plastics among materials that do not originate in fossil fuels: "The list of non-toxic, biodegradable or easily recyclable materials that could replace the plastic includes many known materials such as glass, ceramic, natural fibers, paper, cardboard, rice husk, natural rubber and animal proteins."

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it can be assumed that any object or surface in public space - reusable or disposable - could be contaminated with the virus. Single-use plastic is not inherently safer than reusable products, and it also causes additional public health problems once it is discarded.

Best practices for handling reusable products in the retail space

1. Comply with food safety / health codes. In retail and catering, the use of reusable plates, cutlery, cups and napkins is regulated by strict state food safety procedures outlined in health codes. Washing dishes at high temperatures with additional sanitizing procedures is industry standard and provides more than adequate protection against the transmission of viruses.
2. Use additional hygiene practices for the covid. The bottom line is that reusable items are safe to use when cleaned with soap and water, and there are no substitutes for complete hygiene. Retail food stores should follow the Food and Drug Administration guidelines regarding covid-19 retail and safety practices.
3. Use contactless systems for customers' personal bags and cups. Systems where there is no contact between the customer's reusable cup, container or bag and surface areas can protect workers and provide a precautionary approach to transmitting covid-19. For example, the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration recommends that "when customers carry their bags, employees should be instructed to:
 - Do not touch or place shopping in bags carried by customers
 - Ask customers to leave their bags in the shopping cart
 - Ask customers to shop for themselves.
4. Ensure the protection of workers. In addition to investing in safe and affordable reusable products, other measures retailers can take to protect workers include providing PPE, providing paid sick leave, and requiring customers to wear masks and adopt distancing. Customers should handle their reusable items when they go to stores.

Disposable plastics should have been banned in Italy from January 2021 as foreseen by the EU directive 2019/904 which also requires the recycling of at least 77% of plastic bottles in 2025 and 90% in 2029, plus the use of materials 30% recycled in 2030 in conjunction with the Plastic Tax, already included in the 2020 Budget Law, suspended "pro-tempore" due to the Covid-19 emergency. The latter measure, which the government plans to postpone for another six months, to July 2021, after the second wave of infections.

We continue to hurt and hurt ourselves 'for convenience'.

Framing of the theme

The impact of plastic pollution, which has been the object of attention since the 1970s of environmentalists and subsequent green parties, particularly from northern Europe, is still stubbornly ignored in Italy by producers, consumers, legislators, except recently to find some hint of a favor that so far mobilizes some more awareness, but is far from producing a critical mass of persons.

For example, Greenpeace dedicates a campaign to plastics. Every minute the equivalent of a truck full of plastic ends up in the oceans, killing turtles, birds, fish, whales and dolphins, all the way to our plates! Disposable plastic that floats visibly and settles in the seabed, together with invisible microplastics contained in detergents, cosmetics, paints have invaded the marine environment and contaminated every corner of the Earth. But the sea is not a landfill!

WWF denounces that today 396 million tons of plastic are produced per year and over 150 million tons of plastic are present in the seas. The Mediterranean Sea is an almost closed basin where currents return 80% of plastic waste to the coasts with the result that for every kilometer of coastline, more than 5 kg of it accumulates per day. The worst pollution from plastic is the invisible one: microplastics. On the seabed, levels of microplastics of up to 1.9 million fragments have been detected over an area of just one square meter. *Mare nostrum* has only 1% of the world's waters, but it contains 7% of marine microplastics. Microplastics are transported long distances through atmospheric and ocean currents and therefore are also in rain and snow.

Since 2016, Legambiente thanks to the collaboration with ENEA (the National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development), in the context of water monitoring also searches for microplastics, i.e. plastic particles with a size less than 5 millimeters. Microplastics are increasingly present in marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It is a pollution of difficult quantification and impossible to remove totally. Therefore the study of the presence and identification of these micro particles is necessary for the knowledge of the phenomenon of diffusion in the environment. In fact, many studies have been conducted on the presence and dispersion of microplastics in the marine environment (since the '70s) and in recent years there is a growing awareness that even freshwaters are not immune from this problem and that, transported by waterways and drains, macro and microplastics are increasingly present in lakes.

According to the UN environmental report of March 2021, plastic pollution disproportionately affects marginalized groups. Vulnerable communities disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental degradation caused by plastic pollution, and urgent action is needed to address the issue and restore access to human rights, health and Welfare.

Churches are among the long-standing actors. GLAM talked about plastics in various Dossier of the Time of Creation, including that of 2020 dedicated to the oceans. In 2009 the commission launched a network of eco communities. *Protestantesimo* (the religious television program broadcast by a national television network) has dedicated more services to the subject over the years.

On the legislative level, among the recent acts, on 29 October 2020 the Senate approved the draft a law which contains the provisions of legislative delegations necessary for the transposition of the directives and other acts of the European Union within the Italian legal system. The act, which is waiting to be examined by the Chamber, provides for environmental measures - from energy communities to electric cars - and regulates the use of biodegradable and compostable plastics instead of plastic for disposable containers, including glasses. Member states will have to transpose the directive by 3 July 2021, a deadline obviously accompanied by exceptions.

The objectives are summarized:

- guarantee a lasting reduction in the consumption of single-use plastic products through a gradual decrease in their placing on the market,
- encourage the use of sustainable and reusable products for materials in contact with food,
- introduce new penalties for violations of the prohibitions on the use of plastic.

Considering that an EU member state can choose to move an article from one list to another, the transposition approved by the Senate has not limited itself to applying the European Union directive but has implemented changes under pressure from the sector lobbies: this concerns biodegradable and compostable plastics, and the displacement of plastic cups (according to Legambiente 49% of the waste for the consumption and take-away of food and drinks monitored on Italian beaches is made up of disposable plastic cups) from Annex B (the list of prohibited articles in 2021) in Annex A (consumption reduction).

Asso bioplastics states, "This does not mean in any way, mind you, marrying the logic of the 1: 1 replacement of plastics with bioplastics - reads the memorandum filed with the Senate - All disposable products, including those in bioplastic, must be significantly reduced (as already happened with the shoppers in which said reduction was about 50%)."

Starting from 2021 and without an experimental period, to use up to 100% recycled PET (rPET) in plastic bottles, thus exceeding the 50% limit currently in force.

A sign of greater sensitivity on the issue of abandonment are some single-issue initiatives.

- The Plastic Free Association (born on 29 July 2019 to inform and raise awareness)
- From the weekly newspaper Riforma (March 26, 2021 No. 12), we learn that the European Outdoor Conserved on Association (EOCA) has recently funded the Stop Alpe decoding Plastic Mountains project created by the European Resecarci Institute in Turin in collaboration with four mountain huts in the Piedmontese Alps.
- The Puglia Region in 2019 tried to prevent the consumption of single-use plastic in bathing establishments and also found itself against the trade unions of the managers of the clubs.

In conclusion, also in this sector we see the prevailing tactic of Italian policy of not governing and of Italian entrepreneurship of 'scraping the bottom of the barrel'. This is largely represented by the automotive and energy sectors for a consolidated aversion to innovation and to social responsibility, which pushes the country further down the chain of added value.