

Evolution of Environmental Sustainability in an Italian University

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Extended Abstract

Promoted by CRUI (The Conference of Italian University Rectors) since July 2016, the Italian Network of Universities for Sustainable Development (RUS) marks the first experience of information sharing and coordination among Italian Universities on the topic of environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Its existence allowed the starting of virtuous pathways in each university aimed to issue Plans like the environmental sustainability ones thanks to the networking activities. In some cases, cross collaborations allowed to co-author scientific articles on specific topics like the environmental sustainability ranking [1][2]. In other cases, the availability of a sequence of environmental sustainability Plans for a single University opens to the analysis of what has changed in less than one decade.

To this concern, the present work analyses the structure and the content of the Plans of an Italian University whose environmental sustainability Plans are easily accessible since the first edition. This is the case of the University of Trento where the environmental Sustainability Plan has reached the fourth edition. We have: years 2016-2018 for the first edition, years 2020-2021 for the second edition, year 2024 for the third edition (as a restart after the pandemic), years 2025-2027 for the fourth edition. A comparative analysis of the Plans allowed to point out what follows.

The introduction of such a document is always dedicated to an overview of the performances in terms of indicators of consumption (referred to natural gas, electricity, waste supply, waste production); that comes from a request of the network RUS as also annual environmental sustainability reports must be issued, reporting those data. What emerges at a first glance is a clear decrease in the consumption of natural gas with important benefits in term of reduction of CO₂ emissions.

The structure of the Plan remained based on 4 pillars: 1) Emissions, energy and natural resources; 2) Buildings and procedures; 3) Communication and culture of sustainability; 4) Health and well-being. What changed is the articulation of the areas of intervention of each pillar, with an increasing attention to decarbonisation and with the introduction of new topics like food.

The structure supporting the activities of the Plan changed with the introduction (since 2024) of a board of discussion (Green Office) and its working groups. In this case the names of the Working Groups are similar to the ones of RUS.

In parallel with this local activity, RUS promotes also the interaction between Universities with similar characteristics: this is the case of Trento and Insubria, showing a similar number of students, a similar location (the Alps), similar mobility issues, etc.

Future developments are expected also from the change of RUS coordinator, since the beginning of 2025, as the University in charge for that changes every three years.

References

- [1] M. Ragazzi, F. Ghidini, "Environmental sustainability of universities: Critical analysis of a green ranking" *Energy Procedia*, vol.119, pp. 111-120, 2017
- [2] R. Boiocchi, M. Ragazzi, V. Torretta, E.C.Rada, "Critical Analysis of the GreenMetric World University Ranking System: the Issue of Comparability" *Sustainability*, vol.15, 2, n. 1343, 2023