

Abstracts

Promotion and diffusion of the Ecolabel: a "network" model application in the EU

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IEFE (Institute for Environment and Energy Economics) - Bocconi University, in partnership with CEEEM (Centre for Environmental Economics and Environmental Management)-University of Gent, recently carried out a project to promote and diffuse the EU Ecolabel in Italy and Benelux (The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg).

As a result of the project, the promoters have defined a general strategy which aims at stimulating and supporting companies to adopt the Ecolabel. The strategy focuses on actors and factors that can motivate a company to apply for participation in the scheme and can provide it with an adequate support in all the different steps the company should take in order to achieve successful results with the Ecolabel.

The experience gained during our project, by co-operating "in-field" with interested companies, proves that the application of the Ecolabel is a gradual process. This process may lead a company to the adoption of the label and to its fruitful utilisation "on the shelves", but this is only the final result of many other steps: information collection on the Ecolabel, technical and economic feasibility study, market opportunities assessment, application procedures and effective marketing activities for the ecolabelled products.

The most important suggestion emerging from the project experience is that companies need support to fill the lack of information and of human, technical and economic resources which prevent them from overcoming the barriers and difficulties they face in carrying out the adoption process described above.

Within their pilot project IEFE and CEEEM, therefore, focused on the possible contributions that some external actors (institutions, NGOs, trade associations, other companies, etc.) could give to companies. They designed and started up "in-field" some networks, by identifying and involving actors capable and willing to support companies. The networks can provide their "focal" companies with incentives, competitive stimuli, resources, competence and information and, consequently, enable them to successfully overcome all the steps leading to the Ecolabel. Creating networks of interested actors, and promoting co-operation among them, is the most effective way of helping companies in tackling the difficulties they face in adopting the Ecolabel.

Network promotion can effectively favour the development of the EU Ecolabel, insofar as it stimulates the interest of many actors for the success of the scheme and it facilitates mutual support between them.

Few networks (or part of networks) did spontaneously originate in Italy and Benelux before the project, arising from the "natural" availability of actors to cooperate for developing Ecolabel-oriented strategies. This is the reason why Ecolabel is experiencing a difficult "take-off" in these countries.

Some relevant networking actions were experimented in Italy and Benelux within IEFE pilot project by conducting in-field activities for supporting companies interested in Ecolabel and co-ordinating their interactions with external key-actors. The experience of the project demonstrates that, within specific national contexts, a networking approach produces positive results in terms of Ecolabel promotion and diffusion. Further analysis and "in-field" experimentation are needed to prove that the network model is usefully applicable in other countries.

The paper reports some of the most relevant results of the project in terms of networking as a policy instrument to promote and develop ecolabelling schemes.