TOGETHER, a story of climbing still under progress

As in any climb, there is a **rope leader** who leads his or her companions, gives rhythm, motivates during stops along the ledge and encourages minds in the face of **dangers and difficulties** that **may lay ahead**, whether unexpectedly or predictably, along each pitch, all the way to the **top**, and then, again during the **descent**.

In our story of climbing, the leader is the Province of Treviso, a local body which has proposed to 7 other local bodies, as well as universities and agencies from the energy sector a project that aims to develop and implement solutions for increasing energy efficiency in **85 pilot public buildings**, **located in Central Europe**.

A relevant part of them belongs to other authorities engaged in the project as local beneficiaries, for which the climbing companions serve as high-altitude mountain carriers and guides.

Three years ago we decided to join our forces, competences and passion for the theme of Energy efficiency in order to favour - within the framework of European Territorial Cooperation - a process of convergence of knowledge and of practices for managing public buildings.

We all firmly believe that the **Cooperation** can produce better results in much more cost-effective ways compared to individual efforts. Individual efforts often lead to partial and fragmented results that, on the contrary, can find a sense of union and sharing within processes based on dialogue and cooperation, where experiences go over the borders of single organizations and are made available to a wider community. We all believe that cooperation is a **crucial ingredient** to speed up the achievement of goals of improvement of organizational and management systems of the public administration, particularly within the field of energy.

Sometimes, **the Cooperation represents a "pretext"** to speed up processes of learning and updating of the political agenda in a specific territory and, in addition, it allows to test practices and solutions - also technological ones - that can hardly be introduced without economic resources and budget cover.

Just like a mountain **climbing kit** consists of several **technical instruments** such as ropes, harnesses, pitons and carabiners, ... our project too includes tangible and

intangible **tools** used by our companions from the beginning and made available to each other to create the most homogeneous possible starting conditions.

Each partner has a different background of experience in the energy sector and, in particular, the management of energy demand and the **involvement of different players determining it: owners, managers and end users.**

In fact, the **top goal** we have set out to conquer is to acquire, test and consolidate a multi-channel and multi-actor approach in energy management systems, overcoming isolated and unilateral approaches focused mainly on technological interventions.

Technological investments naturally make it possible to reach **"high-hanging fruits"** in a short time, but reduce their performance capacity over time if they are not associated with alternative and **"low-cost" measures**, such as work **aimed to modify the consumption modes** of end users and increase the spatial-temporal organizational capacity of the managing/owning body.

Moreover, physical investments require resources that are not available in the coffers of owners or require the knowledge of very complex contractual and financial instruments that are generally poorly known and, therefore, hardly used by local authorities.

If, on the one hand, **behavioural and organizational measures** are considered measures that allow reaching **"low-hanging fruits"**, on the other, they can also give their constant if not increasing contribution, if they are activated in a concerted and renewed way among different building stakeholders.

The f**ormula** proposed by the International Energy Agency claims that (i.e *result= potential*acceptance*) result (of energy reduction) is equal to the potential for acceptance and if mathematics is not an opinion, **every number multiplied by zero gives zero**.

Therefore, our project moves along **two drivers: technology and behaviour** that together renew the way to conceptualize an energy management system.

Without also accepting that human behaviour can also be made more efficient with the goal of reducing consumption, such reduction will always be lower than its potential.

Our endeavour began almost two years ago and our climb consists of several pitches, with each pitch marking the path between two belay points. To date, we completed the following:

1. Acquisition of **new knowledge** introduced through international and local materials and training courses on integrated energy efficiency
2. **Energy analysis** of all buildings involved, according to the provisions set forth by the relevant European and national legislation
3. **Installation of sensors for the automatic measurement** of electrical and heat consumption in most of the pilot buildings, considering that some of these are already equipped with similar devices or have been voluntarily excluded from the installation for comparative purposes
4. Preparation of **manuals** and **guidelines** that support the setting up of the various existing and/or available project tools in the definition of an energy efficiency path, based mainly on the introduction of low-cost measures that leverage real data provided by the consumption monitoring system and intervention on behavioural levers
5. **Involvement at a territorial level of the building's actors**, so that they team up in reducing the energy consumption of their public buildings, activating low-cost improvement activities to associate with technological and financial interventions, if possible on the basis of a risk and maturity leve

Every passage, every single step has been the result of **team work**, and sometimes of mediation, so that different approaches, heads and languages converged in the development of a product that, in the end, all partners must feel as their own, reflecting in it their identity and creation.

Along the pitches completed to date, some partners had to face **greater difficultie**s, due in part to their inexperience in dealing with **complex public procedures**, such as those implemented for the supply and installation of sensors.
The greatest difficulties were faced by Polish and Slovak partners, which work experimentally in buildings that belong to a total of 7 different local partners with whom to coordinate every single movement undertaken during the climb. As a result, our climb had to decrease its tempo.

The slowdown along the most difficult and **insidious stretches** of the climb has necessarily created a domino effect on complementary, yet equally important activities, as the efforts of these two partners mainly materialize in overcoming **major pitfalls**, even in financial terms.

After almost two years of activities, and counting, we can say that the project is close to the summit. Completion will be achieved when all partners will have concretely developed their pilot actions and begun to reap the first fruits, namely **reduce consumption**.

The challenge that we set ourselves from the start of the last twelve months of the project is to tackle the **descen**t, which is notoriously the **most difficult part of a climb**. Our descent represents the ability to create conditions by which **knowledge** and **practice**s tested experimentally can **take root** and grow in territories directly involved, so that they can be adopted and capitalized also in other contexts and geographical areas, even after the end of the project and the companions' return to their homes.

The path is still long and we know that **several mistakes** have been made during each pitch of the journey: from the initial underestimation of some difficulties, to the occasional **poor programming skills**, **scarce communication** and the long deferment of a **request for help**.

However, we believe that the conditions for improvement are there and, who knows, someday ... we will tackle another peak .. *together*.