



## LOBBY AND ADVOCACY 12<sup>th</sup> Thematic Seminar Forlì, 25-26 January 2012

### The Cesenatico “affair”

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Good morning and welcome to everybody. Well, I have been asked to recall the events connected to the vast plan of altering and setting the watercourse rate of flow in the territory of Cesenatico.

As you already know our entire district, particularly the area of Cesenatico, in 1996 suffered from overflowing; after various days of heavy rains some kind of “water bombs” hit the territory, and to coincide with the highest tides water could not flow into the sea. The result was that more than one meter of water flooded many areas of the town.

For ages all the water from the territory behind Cesenatico, and between Cesenatico and Cervia, had been channelled into Cesenatico canal harbour; this happened in the past centuries in order to protect the salt works of Cervia as well as towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early '900 to eliminate the marshy areas and gain new land for agriculture. Therefore all the reclamation drains and the water coming from the plain around Cesena ended up into this canal harbour.

Why??? The flowing of water masses from the hinterland towards the sea was used to contain the silting up of the canal harbour; in fact this is subject to silting up due to the usual tide alternating. Furthermore, from time the canal harbour was overflowing the town centre during high tide because of the subsidence.

It was thus decided to get down to a big plan, the one you already know: gates on the canal harbour (*named after Leonardo da Vinci because of his plans about the harbour*) and a barrage upstream, plus a new canal flowing into the sea. Exactly the point which made the troubles burst... I'd say this case is an advocacy case. Some inhabitants of Cesenatico had formed a so-called “Town Centre Committee” years before, demanding to stop the overflowing; clashing with them was another committee, formed by hotelkeepers, bathing establishment owners and dealers of Zadina (*the area affected by the plan*) who fiercely opposed such plan. There was but a sentence on which they all agreed: “We want no more water from the hills and the hinterland flowing down in our canals”!

**Well, in Italy we got an old saying: “Money can make water flowing upwards”, but obviously this was not the case: too much money needed...**



It must be pointed out that the beach is for us and for Cesenatico a huge business centre: hotels, bathing establishments, restaurants and so on; thousands and thousands of jobs, and wealth. So the town centre committee was claiming: *ahead with the plan!* Whilst the Zadina committee was shouting: *you must be crazy, stop it!* The latter launched an impressive mass media campaign, both on the press and on television, calling meetings and hiring hydraulic engineers to contest our planners' estimates and issues. **In other words, one plus one was no longer two.**

Moreover they were raising another problem: the flowing of polluted water from the hinterland would expose bathing to a risk. It was useless to point out that the new canal would become operative only in case of overflowing risks, which meant in autumn when season was over. It was really a hard job to hold constructive meetings with the Zadina committee because at the beginning they totally refused to face the problem in a rational way; we encountered the same difficulties with our own technicians who wouldn't accept their issues and their plan being denied. Another hypothesis was formulated: instead of building a new canal a small existing one would be enlarged; the answer was: "You do as you like but keep in mind that we do not guarantee any public safety in case of events like the ones occurred in October 1996".

When finally a reasonable and sensitive dialogue was established the Zadina committee agreed with the enlargement of the existing canal; yet this enlargement was the half of what had been planned: 90 cubic metres instead of 180. To balance this cut some flood containment areas were determined in the inland in order to reduce the flow of the waters and extend the time they need to reach the sea. I'd say that a good result was achieved both as far as consent was concerned and for the aim of making safe the territory. I reasonably believe that the confrontation ended with positive results; the initial positions had to take into account real and material aspects both from the technical and social, economic, environmental point of view. I'd call this a case of good procedures, though participation and confrontation should have been stimulated from the very beginning and not recovered afterwards.

To conclude I'm adding that according to a number of experts such occurrences as the ones of October 1996: highest tide, heavy rain for many days, "water bombs", will only occur every 200 years.

Only those living at that time will know whether the decisions taken were right; however it will be difficult to throw them in our face ...!

For sure a certain assistance from Heaven will help.

Thanks for your attention.