



Why are we not so effective: reflections on air pollution and climate change policies

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In the past there were several environmental success stories, among which we can remember the Montreal Protocol against stratospheric ozone depletion, the reduction of carbon monoxide and benzene outdoor air pollution, the reduction of acid rain pollution. . . In spite of these success stories, it seems that today the capability to develop effective environmental policies might have been severely reduced even if not lost.

A reflection on the current apparent incapability, as well as on the past apparent effectiveness, is useful to obtain hints and caveats for the improvement of our policy development capability.

The first reflection is that environmental success stories are those which are heavily based on a technological support, then where the solution is mainly related to a technological improvement that requires just a marginal change in social habits or in social decisions.

The second reflection is that environmental success stories usually do not have explicit trade-offs, i.e. there is not the need to weight the strength given to the pinpointed actions. In other words, the widest is the actions application, the widest is the general environmental improvement obtained without unwanted negative environmental effects.

According to the above mentioned reflections, if we want to improve our effectiveness in the development of current air pollution as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, we have to dedicate more attention and efforts on the social aspects of actions and to the social response to the action. In particular the mechanisms of “social evidence”, “lost refusal” and “asymmetry of benefits” have to be taken into account to avoid the wreck of potentially successful policies.

Moreover, more attention as to be given to the trade-offs in policies, to avoid destructive interference between actions as happened for the use of biomasses or Diesel engines, that are positive for climate change mitigation, but negative for air quality.

In general, a more inter-cultural approach is considered to be fundamental for the development of effective and efficient environmental policies, including the contribution given by anthropologists and social behavior experts. Part of this work is carried out in the frame of the LIFE programme’s PREPAIR project.