



CONSIDERATIONS ON THE COMPARATIVE LCA STUDY ON TABLEWARE FOR ALIMENTARY USE BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PRO.MO GROUP

As part of its many activities, Pro.Mo, the Unionplast member group that brings together a large majority of Italy's single-use plastic tableware manufacturers, supports research in a variety of fields, with an ambitious aim: supplying objective information to help the many players interested in food packaging related themes "see beyond the appearance".

Among such themes, environmental issues are of special interest, nowadays, and Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) is a valuable approach to study them: in 2012 Pro.Mo asked the Engineering Department of the University of Trento to conduct a study along these lines, to provide valuable indications on such matters.

From the assessment of the indications supplied by that initial investigation and our intention to take a closer look at the problem comes this comparative study of the life cycle of different types of tableware, conducted with the technical support of consulting company QuotaSette. We believe this comparative analysis to be highly significant from the technical standpoint and to be innovative for the entire single-use tableware and food packaging sector, as it analyses products associated with present-day European consumption habits and it explores current and possible utilisation and end-of-life scenarios.

On account of the originality and thoroughness of the analysis, the multiplicity of scenarios envisaged, the commitment to the quality of the data, the delicate nature and the uncertainty associated with the results, this study carries significant scientific "weight", a weight that has been recognised and evaluated favourably by SGS, a global leader in testing and certification services, which followed the process of approval for conformity to ISO 14044.

We believe that this study can also be of use to policy decision makers and public administration officers who deal with environmental issues, and it can be a starting point for further studies and assessments, in which LCA continues to be the most effective tool.

We find that this method for the assessment of a product's environmental impact is so effective and the results obtained in this particular case are so significant, to the point of subverting prior assumptions and preconceptions, that we are already considering further studies and new developments of this line of research, and not only with a view to improving the environmental performance of our products.

For Pro.Mo this will be an ongoing commitment, also in terms of financial resources, but we are persuaded it is worth pursuing, in order to contribute to the collection of objective, meaningful information and make sure that our practice steers clear of greenwashing.

We do not delve into the more technical details of the study, which we invite you to read in its unabridged version (you can find it in our website <http://www.pro-mo.it>). A short version ("Executive summary") is attached hereto.



A few considerations come to mind at once upon reading the findings of the study.

- The study shows how any method used to quantify the environmental impact of a product will necessarily be complex and will often lead to unexpected conclusions. Its findings cannot be doctored but mostly cannot either be ascribed an absolute value: **products, scenarios, life cycle stages that seem to have minimal impacts at first glance may turn out to be of decisive importance, and vice versa.**
- Indubitably, the study confirms a general belief, i.e., that the environmental performance of “traditional” glass and ceramic tableware is better, on the whole, and yet even this statement lends itself to a come criticism. For instance, in some areas, glass and ceramic products have a larger environmental impact than some types of disposable tableware, including those made of traditional plastics.
- It is apparent that the choice between “traditional” multiuse tableware and dispensable tableware – at least in the field of out-of-home food consumption/ catering – hinges on many other variables, such as access to dishwashing facilities, functionality, costs, safety and hygiene considerations...
Needless to say, measuring and evaluating such variables does not fall within the scope of this study, but it should be noted that they often favour the “single-use” option and fully contribute to the attainment of that overall product sustainability that companies, users, consumers and all the other stakeholders should take into due account.
- **The main conclusion to be drawn is that this study provides no elements in terms of their environmental impact that may validate the need to ban any of the product types considered, and this applies in particular to the Polypropylene (PP) and Polystyrene (PS) single-use tableware, whose image in terms of environmental impact, often cast in a negative light, is fully rehabilitated in the light of the findings of this study.**
- More importantly: if the environmental impact of a product has to be a decisive consideration in environmental policy decisions, then **the notion of introducing a tax or taking any other action on CONAI contributions to discourage the use of PP and PS tableware in favour of other types of single-use products appears objectionable; this also applies to bioplastic dishes, which – it should be underscored – according to this study have a larger environmental impact than plastic tableware.**