

Hypermarket takes on local staff

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Next Tuesday, 15 June, the Bennet shopping centre will be inaugurated in Vanzaghello, along the “Bustese” state highway No. 527, very close to Magnago; it will be open to the public on Wednesday, the 16th. And so, there is going to be another large retail outlet (14,000 m², with a hypermarket and 35 shops) in this very tempting area, which is now beginning to feel the pressure of development. There is one important detail, however: in accordance with the agreements signed by the Regional administration, in the presence of all of the organisations involved, including shop owners’ representatives, 25% of the shopping centre’s staff will be people from Vanzaghello, and another 25% will be from the surrounding towns and villages (Lonate Pozzolo, Castano Primo, Magnago, Samarate). This is one positive condition of the relationship between large chains and small towns, as we will see.

The mayor, Gianbattista Gualdoni, points out that, “In times of crisis, while manufacturing companies are unfortunately closing, the retail sector is still one that provides employment.” And, according to the mayor, over 150 people have already been taken on. The Vanzaghello agreement is a formal document. “Commercial authorisation at this level is a matter for the Region,” says Gualdoni. “A commitment to local employment was adopted as the programme was being agreed by the Region. Everything started moving after 2005, under our first administration. Incidentally, this was the first time that an operation of this kind was given unanimous approval by all of the parties involved.”

Vanzaghello is small, but all the same, there are over five thousand people living there. Of course, the forty or so “guaranteed” new jobs are not the only advantage for the town. “Leaving the burdens of urbanisation aside, we are going to receive €1,250,000,” the mayor explains, “which we are going to use to build a nursery school and a crèche.” This is a classic case of *quid pro quo*, in the time of large-scale retail organisations, which are anxious to find spaces in more rural areas, which are feeling the pressure urban sprawl.

The “small” town of Vanzaghello, which is at the centre of the present and future plans for infrastructure (the Malpensa-Boffalora bypass, the future alteration to the “Gallaratese” state highway No. 341, and the duplication of the “Sempione” road, if it is ever made), clearly cannot be separated from the geographical context. The sector of shopping centres is often subject to criticism, when the politicians are not against it; nearby Busto Arsizio, which has an aversion to the large-scale retail sector, is now surrounded by shopping centres ... but of other towns.

The “Bustese” state highway provides a snapshot of how the area is evolving, and in nearby Lonate Pozzolo, the opposition, which is curiously of the same political persuasion as the administration in Vanzaghello (Centre-Left), has already renamed the “Bustese” highway “Sofficino Road”. This is because of the new plans to expand production and commerce, with two separate projects on both sides of the road to Busto Arsizio, only a few hundred metres from the new Bennet in Vanzaghello. The danger is that there will be a large number of medium-sized and large shopping centres, within a distance of five-six kilometres. The leader of the Centre-Left group in Lonate, Nadia Rosa, explains, “We worry about the fact that as they continue to build, our main road will become blocked. Even the road studies we’ve managed to see contained aspects that didn’t make sense to us.” This is all happening in a town which, on one side, shields itself against Malpensa Airport, and on the other side, is growing. While manufacturing is falling, retail is on the increase. “We see that there’s an overall lack of planning, several interventions have produced a road of retail outlets, all standing so close to each other.”

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