

President Alfonso Kratter presents Inox Veneta, an Inox Valley company

I am Alfonso Kratter, president of Inox Veneta S.p.A. based in Vittorio Veneto (province of Treviso), a company that I would define as an historical one, in the context of the so-called 'Inox Valley', since we have now more than 50 years of history. We specialise in stainless steel processing technology and support companies both in the region and around the world. We have two plants here in Vittorio Veneto, we have about 100 employees, and the most important part of our business is the engineering and production process that has to do with the transformation of stainless steel. We are the bearer of a technology that I would say is exclusive in Europe, that of hydroforming, which consists of forming the stainless steel sheet and tubes through the force of water. This technology is used in various fields: naturally the automotive industry, where it originated, but we have also applied it to more traditional sectors in our territory.

The attractiveness of the Inox Valley supply chain

I have been asked to bear witness to the reality of our area, which specialises in stainless steel. Here, in fact, there is a high concentration of companies whose history originates between the Piave and Livenza rivers, with the experiences started in the household appliance sector with the 2 historical companies, namely Zoppas and Zanussi, which both merged into the Electrolux group in the 1980s. From these 2 historic companies, by twinning, many other companies have sprung up involving various sectors, that of large and small household appliances, that of large kitchens, that of food machinery and finally that of the entire network of smaller companies working to support the companies involved in these sectors.

As far as large kitchens are concerned, I feel I can say that in this part of the world there is the highest concentration of companies working in this sector, starting with the largest ones, such as Electrolux Professional, and ending with smaller companies.

I don't want to take the place of sector studies or statistics, for which I refer you to the study offices, but I am the bearer of what is a panorama of companies that I know and with which I come into contact in various ways, both as a supplier and sometimes as a customer. Over the last 15 years or so, despite repeated crises, the companies have become much stronger and one characteristic that I would define as fundamental is that of resilience, in the sense that these are companies that on the whole, at least the overview that I have at hand, have behaved rather well, they have generally overcome difficulties and moments of crisis well, over time they have become much stronger both from a production and organisational point of view and in terms of international market penetration.

The companies in our region have always been export-oriented, but let's say that in recent years, in addition to the typical and traditional market, which has always been Germany, they have branched out a bit all over the world.

One of the strengths of this way of doing business has always been that of being organised in an industrial district, i.e. a district made up of a plurality of companies each with a degree of specialisation either in the supply chain or in the product. This territorial continuity is undoubtedly a strong point, in fact the company that comes to operate in our territory finds at its fingertips a series of suppliers not only of physical products but also of services.

It is true that in the age of digitalisation, physical continuity may be something less important than it was 20 years ago, but even now the fact of having so many suppliers, so many services, and above all so much expertise at hand is undoubtedly a strength and a big advantage for companies that come to operate in this area. If we look at it from a knowledge society perspective, the fact of having a whole range of skills in stainless steel-related businesses is undoubtedly a very strong competitive advantage that companies setting up in this area can easily achieve.

The tourism economy and the Inox Valley:

Part of our industry and the Inox Valley district has undoubtedly benefited from being located in an area with a high vocation for tourism, and this has been the case for decades. The large kitchens were born, or rather, have also developed to meet the catering needs of the large tourist centres that have developed both in Venice and on the Adriatic coast and in the mountains; therefore, part of our company has also lived off this proximity market, that of tourism, which has been developing since the post-war period.

The food machinery industry itself, such as those initially linked to the winemaking process but later extended to other food machinery sectors, developed precisely to develop what were the needs of local production. Therefore, what we see today as UNESCO sites and as the development of food and wine tourism, we must see from a perspective that starts from afar. However, we should not see it as a point of arrival but as a starting point these, before experiences, vocations of our territory, in meeting the needs of all those who come to visit us and enjoy the beauty of the places where we were born and where we are lucky enough to live.

Export and the Inox Valley

The people of Veneto have always been travellers and traders, from the time of the Venetian Republic. I think we somehow carry this tradition with us. I realised this, for example, in the large kitchens sector, when comparing the attitudes of our companies with those of foreign companies, especially in Europe. For historical reasons too, I have noticed that competitors from other countries, even though they are important companies and part of multinational groups, have a much lower propensity to foreign markets than companies from our region. Over the years of my experience I have seen that the European market, for example, for Italian companies in the North-East is now considered a domestic market, no longer a foreign market. This depends a bit on many things, but I think it also depends on this DNA, this historical propensity we have always had to take our products around the world and also enrich ourselves with the experiences of neighbouring or not-so-neighbouring peoples. Our geographic position certainly makes it easier for us, we are contiguous to a very large market that is the European market and the largest continental market that is Germany, and we are contiguous to the countries of the East that are no longer emerging but consolidated realities. All this leads our territory to an opening that can only be good for the growth of our companies from various points of view.