

GEO Certified® Independent Verification Report



Golf Facility: Gardagolf Country Club

Prepared by: Paolo Croce

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Executive Summary

Gardagolf Country Club is located in a very beautiful context (Garda Lake). Experts consider the club one of the finest golf courses built in the past 30 years. Spread over 110 hectares, the 27-hole golf course was designed by British architects Cotton, Penninck, Steel & Partners. Opened in 1984, the course is nestled between the Rocca di Manerba, Soiano Castle and the Valtenesi Hills, offering an extraordinarily beautiful panorama. Cypresses, olive trees, holm oaks and pines complete the setting. G.C. Gardagolf hosted the Italian Open in 1997 and 2003. This year, the club will host the 75th edition of the Italian Open.

Generally speaking, the course is well appreciated by players. The buildings are restored farmsteads typical of the area although they are not ancient. Restoration of the maintenance facility is well done and its working structures (i.e. washing platform, fertilizers, tools and equipment, workers room, etc.) are perfectly integrated in the landscape. A hedge surrounds the buildings and several house martin and barn swallow nests are preserved in the location.

The area's geomorphology is linked to past glacial and interglacial periods, the soil is basically constituted by moraine debris, some of the paving contains shells fossils.

The climate is linked to the mitigation role of Garda Lake, with olive trees growing in the territory. In terms of resources, the club can be classified at high Italian levels for its annual budget. Most of the income derives from memberships, but there are significant earnings from daily green fees of tourists.

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Nature

The site, located in a prestigious and very touristic scenery, Garda Lake, can be compared to a public park with a variety of beautiful tree species, some bushes, ponds (some of those with reeds) and narrow water courses. There are a few areas preserving nature (only small uncultivated areas). The species survey was done by the head greenkeeper, and no experts have been involved yet, so there is an opportunity to develop collaborations with specialist individuals and organisations.

The vegetation survey includes native and non-native species. The lakes are surrounded by reeds, but almost all has been cut because of the preparation of the course to host the Italian Open at the end of May 2018, so the only natural areas remain along the hedges and there are some grassland patches. The club has committed to resuming site-naturalisation projects after the tournament, including the reed vegetation and water boundaries. The site is not very suitable for high biodiversity but can play a naturalistic role as it is a sport facility, so hunting is not allowed under Italian legislation, and the vegetation can host some species like hares, birds and amphibians in the small vegetated streams. The course is not fenced allowing wild animals to enter and exit. Noteworthy is the colony of house martins and barn swallows nesting inside the maintenance facility. They should place artificial platform nests for wildfowl.

Despite the area's mild climate (due to the presence of Garda Lake), the turfgrass is characterised by cool-season species: on the greens *Agrostis stolonifera* with a strong presence of *Poa annua* (40%); same composition on the tees the traditional *Agrostis stolonifera*; on the fairways (circa 35%) has been gradually infested by *Lolium perenne*, *Poa annua*, *Trifolium repens*, and other invasive species, including mainly Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*); on the rough strong presence of Bermuda grass, *Lolium perenne*, *Festuca arundinacea* and other perennial weeds.

The area is currently subject to intensive maintenance for the 27 holes corresponding to approximately 66 ha, of which 45 ha is irrigated.

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Turfgrass maintenance is performed with good availability of soil data (analysis done every two years) and nutrition is mainly based on the clipping analysis to determine the actual quantity of nutrients absorbed.

An annual maintenance plan is available and is updated regularly according to weather conditions, the condition of the turfgrass and the competition calendar.



The golf course boasts the “pesticides free” denomination for the past year, as the management board has decided to refrain from using pesticides and has adopted a protocol favouring the use of agronomic and mechanical operations to control adverse conditions and pathogens. Verticutting is done at specific intervals to control broadleaf weeds. The average quantity of N, P, K fertilisers is in line with the needs of the established species. However, no organic natural fertilisers are used. The frequency of topdressing on greens, tees and fairways is sufficient, but can be increased.

Buffer zones (no spray areas) (essentially related to fertilisers, as no pesticides have been used on the course for one year) are generally adopted all over the golf course near water bodies. The management board takes into consideration the importance of preventing pollution from polluting agents and adopts necessary provisions for this reason.

Near the maintenance centre, “sensitive” and potentially dangerous products (fertilisers, lubricants and fuel, but also batteries, filters and exhausted oils) are stored and then disposed of in accordance with the regulation in force. The equipment washing platform complies with the law. Staff from an external company are well prepared to manage emergencies and attended specific training classes.

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Resources

The water is supplied primarily by wells. The most recent record of consumption equals 153,000 m³, in line with yearly climatic conditions and the type of cool-season turfgrass species present. Drinking water consumption for the clubhouse and the maintenance facility is around 8,000 m³. There are no available data from previous years (and of the relative rainfalls) to make comparisons and therefore there are no useful indications in terms of water savings. The irrigation plant was recently re-built according to the most recent irrigation techniques allowing water conservation. For example, three-row planning has reduced water consumption on the semi rough. The irrigation system is checked regularly and potential technical problems repaired immediately.

No chemical tests have been done recently on natural water courses coming from outside. For this reason, the club should check water flow entering from the neighbouring agricultural field to avoid pollutants in the course lake and use the water coming from the nearby spring. Water analysis should be done at course inlet and outlet to check the potential filtering role unless water comes from the natural spring and should be pure.

No photovoltaic systems and/or solar panels can be installed for reasons related to territorial legislation (and thus beyond the club's control). The club's management board has commissioned a study to assess the possibility of adopting these systems, but local authorities don't allow their use due to the alleged significant environmental and landscape impact. Until now, no attention has been paid to the use of electricity from producers using alternative energy sources. From the energy point of view, the club has recorded consumption data of the last three years. In general, no kwh reduction was recorded, but the prolonged drought of 2017 led to higher energy consumption of the pumping station. Potential improvements can be made in the clubhouse such as light sensors in the rooms (already present, but their turn-off times are long) and water-saving fittings (which are not installed in all bathrooms). The management board deems that uncultivated surfaces and low-maintenance areas can be increased to reduce the energy resources devoted to them.

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The club does not have any real ethical/environmental code in terms of purchasing/procurement, but has adopted a basic policy template housed with OnCourse.

As concerns the food & beverage, the manager of the bar/restaurant tends to favour local cuisine and therefore relies on a small number of local suppliers for materials and ingredients. There is also a general trend aiming to reduce product packaging in favour of bulk materials.

Course maintenance is done by an external company so the club has less control over the purchasing of those products. In some cases, internal reuse is preferred, such as compost, clippings and woodchips.

The rubbish dump on the course should be eliminated and managed properly to avoid wind dispersion of plastic bags and avoid storing materials that remain abandoned in the grass for long time. Actions were taken prior to the Italian Open. In the clubhouse and maintenance facility, all waste is disposed of as required by law

Community

The club is private and open to tourism for daily green fees. Until now, openings to the outside and the surrounding community have not been numerous or constant over time, but lately there are important signals showing greater awareness on this topic. The management board has undertaken many actions to provide greater value to the community. These include ways to make the landscape and facilities more accessible to non-golfers (meeting/seminar rooms available for community meetings or workshops), extension of local partnerships, volunteering and hosting charity events. The course is also used for jogging and the course provide trollies for golfers.

There is a display space for local products; golf is promoted at local facilities such as community centres, libraries, and day centres; representatives from community groups, youth associations, etc. are invited to visit the club; and children and their families are encouraged to use the course.



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They integrate sustainability into internal and external communications to raise awareness and to encourage other businesses and families to get involved.



For golfer safety, monitors show clearance of blind greens and fairways. The course is open to students for internships.

Conclusion

Gardagolf has recently made the widely shared choice in terms of maintenance to abolish the use of pesticides. However, it is still too soon to determine whether the adoption of a commercial protocol can produce the intended results, both as regards the control of pathogens / weeds and the actual environmental aspect. It might be worth evaluating through a careful analysis of the conditions (soil, microclimate, shading), whether Gardagolf should also focus on adopting warm-season turfgrass species. This choice could further help the to achieve its commendable objective of becoming “Pesticide free”.

On the course, special attention is devoted to the landscape, but more in aesthetic terms of the landscaping than of the habitat. The surface resembles a charming, well-kept garden and features extremely interesting plant elements. However, under a naturalistic profile more work needs to be done to re-naturalise the areas that are not directly reserved for play – this work was partly started and then temporarily suspended for the Italian Open. This project – that management intends to pursue – will certainly also have positive effects in terms of biodiversity. At the time of the visit, the project was understandably suspended due to the impact of the infrastructures under construction for the Italian Open (Galleries, Hospitality Village, TV Tower, Shopping Village, etc.).

Additionally, care of the tree heritage should be more concentrated towards requalification of the tree species and their context, rather than on an aesthetic function and obstacle. Other noteworthy activities and practices include:

- Surfaces devoted to uncultivated and/or low-maintenance areas could be encouraged and increased. After the Italian Open, a project called “Operation Pollinator” will be

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carried out to colonise the surfaces devoted to the Open infrastructures (galleries, villages, etc.) with a mix of plant species that attract pollinator insects.

- The club has recently progressively evolved towards a “pesticide-free” maintenance system by adopting a protocol limiting the presence of pathogens and/or weeds through the use of fertilisers and auxiliary agents and the intensification of agronomic operations (e.g. verticutting to control broad-leaf weeds).
- Since the club is frequented by foreign tourists (in particular Austrian and German), the Management Board has decided to invest in promotional and marketing activities on commercial and touristic aspects, as well as the competitive sector (Italian Open) and the development of the golf movement (US Kids).
- Although the club is private, it is open to the neighbouring community through availability of areas and rooms for conferences, meetings, seminars, etc.
- In recent years, the irrigation system on the golf course was completely renovated and now uses the most modern technologies of the sector.
- The use of energy resources is widely monitored.
- Communication to its members is widespread and well done. The updated use and good command of main media (website, Facebook, Twitter, notice board) enable excellent opening towards the outside world and facilitate knowledge of the projects, interventions and promotions that the club deems to be able to develop. The charity activity is very important and is pursued by the club through the organisation of fundraising events and competitions.