

INTERVIEW  
WITH MARCO  
SQUINZI, THE  
MAPEI GROUP'S  
R&D DIRECTOR



# Innovation and research to be more competitive

*"Research is the brains behind Mapei's growth". That is how Marco Squinzi, the head of Mapei Group's Research & Development, summed up the central importance of research to a Group that operates on global markets and is fully committed to its operations in this specific field.*

**Let's begin with some facts and figures: can you describe the company's current research operations and how they have changed over the last few years?**

In 2015 Mapei could count on 18 research laboratories, but that number has now risen to 31, six of which in Italy and four in North America. The guidelines for research are coordinated from our central laboratories in Milan that employ 170 staff, but we have a network of laboratories in all those nations where Mapei operates. In addition to this network, there are also the research centres in other companies belonging to the Group: Polyglass, Vinavil, Rasco, Sopro.

**What are the aims and goals of Research and Development?**

Our work must always be focused on carrying out research aimed at specific goals. For example, being close to the market, because this allows high-speed operating and the possibility of making any necessary alterations to products with short life cycles. Another key consideration is knowing the rules and regulations of different countries, which influence the decisions we make. Only people working out in the field know the best way to meet the requirements of architects, designers and, more generally speaking, the end users of our products.

**Sustainability is another key factor.**

It is, in fact, a priority for Mapei. The goal of transparency means informing the market not just about the performance ratings of each individual product but also the materials used for creating them and their environmental impact. In other words, choosing the most high-performing materials and opting for less hazardous raw materials for designing products that give off very low level of volatile organic compounds. But that is not all. Plant location is also vital for reducing trans-

port costs and the environmental impact of transporting raw materials and finished products. By last January, 172 of our products had received an EPD (Environmental Product Declaration) but that figure has now reached 344, covering almost the entire range of products for ceramics. Mapei focuses the utmost attention on these parameters starting from the design phase. The market is not always willing to pay a little bit more for that something extra required to get products with these distinctive traits. However, I truly believe that manufacturers who have not moved in this direction have ultimately paid the price in terms of a drop in their market share.

**What about "targeted" strategies for the ceramics industry?**

For some time now, our strategies have been developed in a couple of directions: sustainability, about which we have already spoken, and durability, which, partly overlaps with sustainability. The aim is to create products which are, first and foremost, easy to apply, because this is the most effective way of reducing waste. However, to make the most of the distinctive traits of ceramics, an extremely long-lasting material, we must ensure the materials we choose perform uniformly for an adequate period of time. Requirements are also changing gradually; for example, there has been a transition from standard formats to the kind of large formats that are currently so popular with markets. We must be flexible, meet the specific needs of markets, and keep ahead of trends by constantly offering more and more innovation, an assortment of products and systems ranging from screeds to materials for installing ceramic tiles, mosaics, stone- and wood-effect coverings.

**Another feature of Mapei's research is its ongoing relations with universities**

We are now working more closely than ever with universities. At our central laboratories in Milan, we keep on hiring and training young people, and I must say that our graduates can certainly compete with even the best students from foreign universities. Indeed, in terms of flexibility and problem-solving, Italy can boast profiles of the very highest standard that are not always easy to find abroad.