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MOBILE PAYMENTS AND CONTACTLESS TECHNOLOGY ARE NOT THAT FAR FROM BECOMING A REALITY. WHAT IS THE SHORT-MEDIUM TERM SCENARIO?

For some time now Mobile Payment has been talked about as the new frontier in the world of payment systems, a development that could eventually trigger off a massive about turn in the wide use of cash in Italy, and succeed in an objective that has to date eluded credit cards, considering that, according to a survey conducted by Doxa, 60% of Italians do not leave home without at least 65 Euros in their pocket. Indeed, transforming a mobile phone into an electronic wallet offers interesting opportunities, thanks to the immediacy and convenience of a tool "that we all carry about with us that is always on". However, unfortunately the market in Italy at the moment still seems to be unsure of itself. Notwithstanding the fact that consumers in Italy have very high expectations, especially if you look at the demand for Native Mobile apps that are so widely used by those young adults who grew up with mobile phones, and despite a high penetration index of advanced mobile devices such as smartphones (1 of 3 Italians has a smartphone), the number of Mobile Payment services offered in our country is still limited compared with the international scenario. There are many reasons for this. First of all, there is an extreme fragmentation of solutions and operating modes due to the diversity of the stakeholders (telcos, device manufacturers, OS developers), the lack of a shared strategy between solution providers and the decision making market players (public bodies, local authorities, banks, retailers), but also the lack of recognized technology standards. Responding to the expectations of consumers is however a must. We must provide the consumer with innovative services that meet their needs, with services that are easy to use and, above all, secure. Indeed, this latter aspect is not to be underestimated as research often reveals that alongside the consumer's **favourable attitude** toward Mobile Payment services, there is a certain degree of reticence and a persistent sense of doubt in relation to aspects related to security and privacy. Much as there may not be a wide range of services available yet, we are now on the way towards the introduction of Mobile Payment and we will certainly get there "the day after tomorrow". Auriga has already gone down this route with innovative solutions for managing current accounts and payments using mobile **apps such as SimplyMobile and Plain Pay**, the latest product development for Mobile Proximity Payments.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECTS THAT MUST NOW BE NECESSARILY MULTICOUNTRY AND CROSS-BORDER?

As we said earlier, there are various critical issues related to a successful introduction of Mobile Payments or contactless payment cards and these must be identified in various contexts. Potentially Italy could be one of the first countries to develop projects for the development and diffusion of mobile payment systems due to the high level of penetration of these devices among the population, and also because it would appear that 38% of Italians (compared with a European average of 26%) are in favour of using such instruments of payment, but this is not the case. The international economic crisis and the continuing decline of the IT market in Italy, which according to Assinform registered a loss of 1.4% in 2010, have led to a significant reduction of investment in innovative projects with a huge impact on the community.

But, in my opinion, a significant factor is also the inability to identify a strong player who can promote development by involving as many stakeholders as possible among businesses, local authorities and operators, in order to generate a widely shared virtuous cycle that could even cross national borders once it is established.

Of course we must also take into account the huge initial investments that need to be made in the case of contactless cards or payment systems that use NFC, whether it is for issuing new contactless cards and to install new contactless POS stations, or for NFC enabled mobile phones and the associated equipment for reading them. In both cases the costs are really massive. It is for this reason that, while we are still investing in research that can lead to many directions, we have developed solutions like PlainPay that bypass the problem of initial investment and offer a chance for everyone to use a Mobile Proximity Payment system immediately without the need for special devices and with the possibility of exporting the solution abroad quite easily. This does not mean that global manufacturers of **NFC enabled** phones will not succeed in growing their market share sooner or later, or that their competitors, like Google and Apple, will not come up with software solutions for payments that will do away with sim cards, but it will take a long time before anything of the sort happens, in the meantime we must make a start.