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STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF PROCEDURAL SOUNDNESS AND RELIABILITY

Vincenzo Torretta^{1*}, Andrea G. Capodaglio²

¹*University of Insubria, Department of Theoretical and Applied Sciences, via G.B. Vico 46, I-21100 Varese, Italy*

²*University of Pavia, Department of Civil Engineering & Architecture, Via Ferrata, I-27100 Pavia, Italy*

Abstract

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is both a technical and administrative procedure with (mandatory) extensive application throughout Europe, holding a primary role in sustainable territorial development. Objectives of the SEA process are to: provide a high level of protection for the environment, and promote sustainability of development by contributing to the integration of appropriate environmental considerations in the adoption and implementation of specific plans and programs. In general, results of SEA application are quite positive, but some aspects may still be subject to a constructive critique, with considerable space for procedural improvement. Purpose of this work is to analyze a few case studies, which refer to the situation in Italy and, specifically, in the Lombardy Region, after a significantly extended period of SEA application, and evaluate their outcomes, suggesting possible ameliorations. Lombardy makes a good benchmark for examination, being a complex territory, characterized by the highest concentrations of population, industrial activities, and economic interests in Italy. Case studies' evaluation reveals some critical issues that may have a negative influence on the correct application of the SEA process (and not just in Italy, as these considerations can be extended at the international level), and consequently on the resulting governance of the territory, and on the determination of foreseen effects related to development goals. Among critical issues, frequent oversight of important aspects concerning sustainability, incorrect definition of players and stakeholders, variations and differences of the applied techniques, debatable role of both the public administration and the public, varying costs of the procedure, to state a few, could be mentioned. Furthermore, a critical need is the definition of specific standards and parameters in the presence of activities that may present risks of relevant accidents.

Key words: criticism, reliability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, territorial planning

Received: June, 2012; Revised final: August, 2013; Accepted: August, 2013

* Author to whom all correspondence should be addressed: e-mail: vincenzo.torretta@uninsubria.it; Phone: +39 0332 218782