



# Implementing Strategic Environmental Assessment of spatial planning tools A study on the Italian provinces

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## ABSTRACT

After more than a decade from the publication of the European Directive 2001/42/CE (Directive) on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), the design and construction of the interested spatial planning instruments has gone through a variety of changes and integrations in European and in world states. This inhomogeneous panorama can be explained with a pattern of institutional structures that have so far affected the implementation of the Directive. The aim of this paper is to investigate the level of implementation of the Directive in Italy by developing a comparative analysis of the quality of integration of SEA within the design of the spatial coordination plan of a set of Italian provinces. Italian practice is analyzed in the framework of a comparative study of worldwide SEA implementation within spatial and land use planning. The results reveal strengths and weaknesses in SEA implementation at the provincial level and, in particular, the emergence of critical areas of research concerning institutional context, public participation, monitoring, and observatory of the spatial transformations.

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## 1. Introduction

The publication of the Directive 2001/42/CE (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2001) introducing the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) dates back to more than a decade ago. In the meantime, the implementation of the principles of the Directive has been characterized by a series of regulations adopted by each EU member state in order to incorporate the European framework regulation and to encourage the application of SEA procedures. The implementation process has become so complex that many academic researchers have applied several analytical methods to evaluate its effectiveness. A prominent field of research includes the design of comparative analyses of the performances displayed by alternative systems, documents, and institutions.

Italy has completed the acknowledgement of the Directive through a long legislative process during the period 2006–2010, while only in 2008, SEA procedure' phases have been clearly specified. This delay in the adoption of the Directive's principles is still causing, in general, a poor quality of the application of SEA and, in particular, of the integration of SEA in the processes of construction and approval of spatial plans. On the other side, the number of applications of SEA procedures is increasing over time and introduces relevant changes in the way spatial plans are constructed, participated, approved, and managed.

With respect to the framework sketched above, the aim of this paper is to develop a comparative analysis of the level SEA integration

within the Italian spatial planning system, by inspecting the case of the provincial strategic spatial plan (Piano Territoriale di Coordinamento Provinciale, PTCP).

The arguments unfold as follows. In the next section, a state-of-the-art summary on comparative studies about the application of SEA is presented. Section three focuses on the application of a modified comparative analysis on the level of application of SEA within the PTCPs in Italy. This section includes a description of the institutional framework, a presentation of data collection, and a discussion of the results. Section four concludes this paper by indicating the most relevant results and possible hints for future research studies.

## 2. Measuring the level of SEA implementation: a state-of-the-art summary on comparative studies

In this section, a brief review is reported on one side about the level of actual implementation of the Directive and the quality of related procedures, on the other about the methodologies suitable to develop a comparative analysis.

Fischer (2010) illustrates a study about the assessment of the quality of the SEA Environmental Report (ER) of spatial planning instruments – i.e. local development documents including core strategy and site specific allocation of land – issued by 117 local authorities in the United Kingdom. The methodology adopted is based on the application of the SEA quality review package and consists on the grading of the performance of SEA ERs with respect to 43 questions reflecting the requirements of the Directive and grouped in the following six sections: plan and environmental (and sustainability) baseline description, plan

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**Table 1**  
Synopsis of methodological issues in comparative studies on SEA processes.

N	Author	State	Methodological issues			
			Number and type of case studies	Type of planning processes	Criteria	Measurement
1	Fischer (2010)	UK	117 SEA reports	Spatial planning tools	43 questions grouped in 6 sections	Qualitative: 7-step letter grading
2	Jiricka and Pröbstl (2008)	Alpine states	30 interviews to government officials	SEA implementation in local spatial planning	5 SEA process steps	Qualitative argumentation
3	Noble (2009)	Canada	10 SEA	Regional and strategic planning tools	25 evaluation criteria grouped in 15 components clustered in 3 SEA macro-issues	Qualitative: criterion fully, partially and not met
4	Fischer and Gazzola (2006)	Italy	45 SEA related publications	A variety of processes	7 criteria grouped in 2 clusters	Qualitative argumentation
5	Retief (2007)	South Africa	6 SEA	Conservation and comprehensive planning tools	16 key performance indicators grouped in five key performance areas	Qualitative: conformance, partial, and non-conformance
6	Fischer (2007, p. 77)	Ten EU and non EU states	11 SEA systems	A variety of approaches to SEA	30 factors grouped in 9 sets in turn clustered in 3 macro-sets	Quali-quantitative: yes, no, partial, unclear modes depending on the number of answers
7	Fischer (2007, p. 117)	Four EU member states	5 SEA	Spatial and land use planning	4 broad issues	Qualitative argumentation

**Table 2**  
Synopsis of critical substantial issues emerging in comparative studies on SEA processes.

N	Author	State	Substantial issues							
			Ineffective screening or scoping	Insufficient consideration of alternatives	High cost	Insufficient tiering or integration	Uncertainty of the procedure	Insufficient evaluation of impacts	Insufficient participation or transparency	Insufficient attention to follow up and monitoring
1	Fischer (2010)	UK	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
2	Jiricka and Pröbstl (2008)	Alpine states	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
3	Noble (2009)	Canada	✓			✓				✓
4	Fischer and Gazzola (2006)	Italy	✓			✓				
5	Retief (2007)	South Africa				✓		✓		
6	Fischer (2007, p. 77)	Ten EU and non EU states			✓			✓	✓	
7	Fischer (2007, p. 117)	Four EU member States		✓		✓		✓		✓

and SEA process integration; identification and evaluation of key issues/options; determination of impact significance; consultation process; presentation of information and results; and recommendations on preferred options, monitoring. According to this study, SEA ERs in general have shown major shortcomings with respect to ineffective tiering in setting the framework for other activities, insufficient consideration of options, insufficient evaluation of impacts, insufficient consideration of specific substantive aspects, unclear impact of public participation

and SEA on plan making, insufficient explanation of uncertainties and other difficulties, and insufficient consideration given to monitoring.

Jiricka and Pröbstl (2008) investigate the SEA implementation of local land-use planning in the Alpine States Austria, France, Germany and Italy. The study focuses on the legal transposition of the Directive in each juridical system and is grounded on a survey of thirty officials working for federal or regional governments and ministries. The survey proposes questions on local land-use planning system,

**Table 3**  
SEA process in Italy: features of the main phases.

N	Phase	Document issued	Objective	Leading authority
1	Nomination of the authorities	Administrative act	Setting the institutional framework	Administration
2	Screening	Administrative act	Determining if a plan is subjected to SEA	Controlling
3	Scoping	Scoping Document	Defining the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Environmental Report	Proceeding
4	Analysis	Environmental Report (ER), Non Technical Synthesis (NTS)	Specifying the level of environmental impact of a spatial plan	Proceeding
5	Approval	ER and NTS are published and subject to public observations	Enabling the general public to propose amendments	Proceeding
6	Consultation	Questionnaire, E-mails, Meeting Reports	Allowing broad participation of authorities, member states and public	Proceeding
7	Final decision	Synthetic declaration	Explaining how environmental concerns have been integrated within the plan	Proceeding
8	Conformity	Motivated judgment	Guaranteeing the goodness of the process	Controlling
9	Publication	All the documents produced are published	Guaranteeing full access to all citizens	Proceeding
10	Follow up	Monitoring report	Describing over time and preventing negative effects of a spatial plan on the environment	Proceeding

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