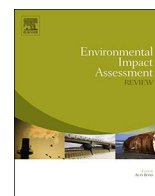




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Strategic Environmental Assessment, key issues of its effectiveness. The results of the Speedy Project

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the results of the European Speedy Project, concerning the application of cross-border SEA, a research that had two main objectives. The first has been the definition of cooperation modalities between various public body as well as private entity through the realization of a digital platform. The aims of this innovative platform include sharing of multidisciplinary knowledge, the training, the participation, etc. The second objective has been to draft a proposal for revision of Directive 2001/42/EC based on the criticalities of implementation in individual Member States emerged during the development of the project. This revision has taken, in the final research report, the form of *problem areas* and suggestions for amending the Directive. A particularly important result, in addition to those related to platform implementation and the SEA Directive revision, is the e-learning section of the same platform. The continuous training provision of the e-learning system, as well as providing a valuable support for professional upgrading, can provide a useful link between the experiences developed by territorial authorities or individual professionals and the construction of a disciplinary and technical corpus that meet new challenges arising from the changes in society and the evolution of the environmental system.

1. Introduction

This paper describes the result of *Speedy*, an European Project that derives from the evaluation activities on the application and effectiveness of the Strategic Environmental Assessment - SEA Directive carried out by the European Commission in 2009 and culminated in the final document of DG ENV entitled 'Study concerning the report on the application and effectiveness of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC)' (EC-ENV, 2009). In this document, the European Commission invited Member States to reflect on the need to amend and modify the Directive 2001/42/EC, and recommended and suggested to use innovative instruments for such studies, e.g. forums and platforms, in order to strengthen the sharing and the transfer of knowledge (Sheate and Partidário, 2010) and cooperation between the Member States. The International Workshop 'Environmental Assessments: EIA, SEA and AA, reflections on the integration of environmental assessment procedures', organized by the Environmental Authority of the Abruzzo Region (It) in May 2011, from which the idea of the Speedy Project was born, has been an important moment of reflection and comparison on the subject of environmental assessment application. The speaker's interventions have proposed a methodological survey pathway for evaluation of the

SEA Directive in terms of integration and effectiveness.

The overall objective of the Speedy Project is to promote transnational cooperation between public administrations in order to facilitate an efficient environmental assessment process in the Adriatic area. The synergy between the neighboring countries is linked to the consideration that common environmental problems can be solved by coordinated interventions and sharing of knowledge. This general objective follows the specific ones that include useful suggestions for updating Directive 2001/42/EC, to create a digital support tool for partners to properly implement the SEA, to create a permanent environmental assessment network, to improve the evaluation procedures and the methods of practical application.

The project, launched at the end of 2012, is structured in 7 phases through which the application models, practices, laws, regulations and experiences of the countries involved are compared and a digital platform is used to achieve the overall and specific Project objectives.

The experimentation has highlighted the problem areas around the application of SEA, some already present in the literature on the theme (Jones and Scotford, 2017; EC, 2016; João and McLauchlan, 2014; Lobos and Partidário, 2014; OECD, 2012; Fundingsland Tetlow and Hanusch, 2012; Bonvoisin, 2011; Therivel, 2010; Weiland, 2010; Retief

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et al., 2008; Bina, 2007; Persson and Nilsson, 2007, Chaker et al., 2006; Stoeglehner and Wegerer, 2006; Busca et al., 2005; Fabietti, 2005; Fischer, 2003, 2002; Partidario and Clark, 2000; Partidario, 1996, Partidario and Therivel, 1996), other new or specifics of the countries involved in the Project. The latter concern the principles underlying the Directive, but also the scope of action both in terms of approach (how the Directive acts, the methodologies (Brown and Thérivel, 2000)) and in terms of repercussion on other areas of the Assessment (the effects of the Directive on adjacent areas such as the EIA (Abaza et al., 2004; Brown and Thérivel, 2000; Lee and Walsh, 1992), AA, participation (Drazkiewicz et al., 2015; OECD, 2012; Coenen et al., 1998), training (OECD, 2012) or knowledge systems (Di Ludovico, 2017; Weinberger, 2011; Di Ludovico, 2011; Di Ludovico and Properzi, 2005).

The design process was concluded at the beginning of 2016 with the drafting of the *Operational Guidelines on the findings and suggestions for the review of Directive 42/2001/EC* (RegAbr, 2016), which inspired this article. The guidelines summarize the problem areas and deepen the SEA in the transnational and national contexts of the partners emerged in the different phases, addressing also the theme of most frequently addressed topics in the national case law and of the case law from the European Court of Justice. On this basis, the guidelines provide some starting points, structured according to criteria and problem areas, which may be useful to the EC not only for the revision of the SEA Directive, but also to broaden its vision on the related issues and understand its implications and necessary integrations.

In addition to describing the path of scientific research and experimentation of the Speedy Project, this paper also provides some insights on possible evolutions of the tools developed under the Project and new approaches to the Strategic Environmental Assessment process useful both at the transnational and national level, which can not be found, for example, in the EC evaluation documents on the topic, including the latest ones (EC, 2016).

2. The Speedy Project and its phases

The ‘Shared Project for Environmental Evaluation with DYnamic governance’ - Speedy, is an European project financed under the ‘Adriatic IPA Cross-border Cooperation Program 2007-2013’ and focuses on the implementation of the SEA - Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive 42/2001/EC in the Adriatic-Ionian area, in a cross-border context similar to that of the EUSAIR - Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion (EC, 2014).

The Project, and hence the structure of the scientific research that accompanies it, has been organized in 7 phases or Work Packages (WP), as can be seen in Fig. 1. WP1 and WP2 regard common activities and project management (e.g. communication) that affected the whole

project. The other WPs regard the technical and scientific activities based on international cooperation and with scientific bodies. They have had the ultimate goal of verifying, in a transnational context, the effectiveness of the SEA and the Directive through assessment tools condensed in the use of a digital platform dedicated and oriented towards the accompaniment of the new Member States to a more proper application of the SEA.

To achieve its objectives, the project first analyzed and compared the institutional models of the different countries and their SEA practices (WP3). The result of this ‘Comparative Dynamic Analysis’ (Dynamic in the sense that the analysis was subjected to several feedback steps) allowed one side to understand the different dynamics underlying SEA in the countries involved and, on the other side, to put the bases for building the ‘Shared Knowledge Platform’ - SKP, a shared platform for Strategic Environmental Assessment (<http://www.speedyproject.eu/>). This digital platform oriented to the theme of the SEA, which will be deepened in the next Sections and which is one of the main goals of the Speedy Project, has been realized through a multidisciplinary scientific contribution to the definition of its model (WP4). In WP5 it has been set up and implemented, and in WP6 it has been implemented and tested (Fig. 1). The methodology developed has exploited the potential of ICT and the dynamism of the digital network.

The last phase, WP7, pursues the goal of translating the evaluations emerging from the SKP experimentation and from the tools it has made available to the countries involved, in operational suggestions for a more effective application of the SEA and the Directive 42/2001/EC condensed into ‘Operational Guidelines’ through which have been reported the problem areas that emerged in the project and have been provided contribution to the European Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes.

The Speedy project has been implemented in four years of activity, and has produced a large number of national and international meetings that have allowed the countries involved in SEA issues to be compared. Training and information events were carried out as dissemination activities, in which also participated professionals and operators from various European regions, exploiting mainly the potential of SKP.

3. Comparative Dynamic Analysis: institutional systems and planning models of the countries involved

‘Comparative Dynamic Analysis’ (WP3) consisted of a cognitive/fact-finding phase where information was gathered on project partners with the aim of identifying the state of the art on the SEA in legislation and making a first screening of critical issues on its application. This cognitive/fact-finding phase was conducted through a questionnaire,

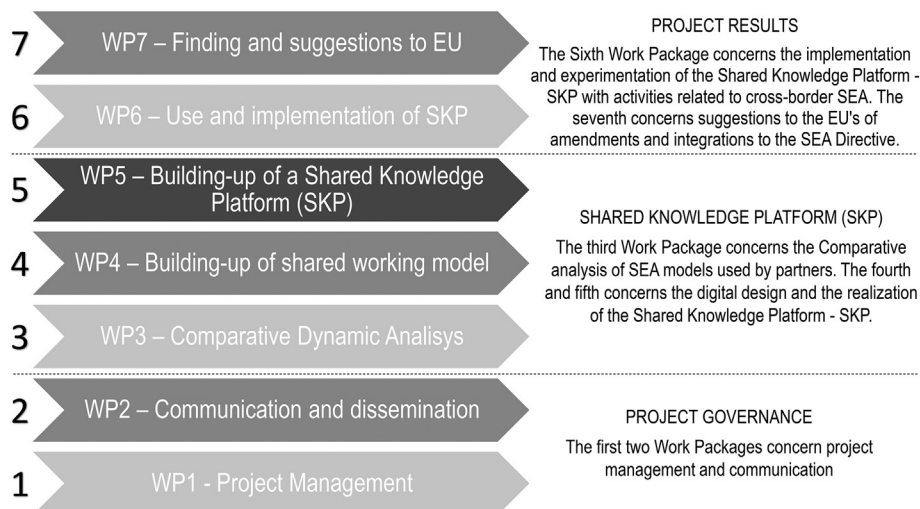


Fig. 1. The phases of the Speedy Project.

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