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Infrastructural projects and territorial development in Veneto Dolomites: Evaluation of performances through AHP

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Abstract

The ensemble of European traffic roads is changing in relation to the economic geography that has been developing these recent years and also to the localisation of production centres, logistics and the demand linked to the transportation of goods. The development of communication has been defined through the project of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). This network has been progressively defined until it has reached the present architecture in which Italy is crossed by four of the nine total corridors that compose the whole network - which means by almost half of the main traffic roads at European level -. Undoubtedly this new geography of European communication offers member States new development opportunities, but it is also true that the distance of the different territories from the major traffic roads can be a disparity factor. In fact, this phenomenon can worsen the marginalisation processes of some European territories, contrary to the objective of the interconnection policy of the EU territories. In front of these possible territorial disparities, the Planning discipline in Italy has not been adequately questioned, aiming instead at the research of the "territorial patching up", progressively decreasing, rather than at the exploration of new development forms. As a consequence, mobility planning becomes strategic for Italy, especially for its Alpine area. Hence the need to set up valid tools for the environmental evaluation as regards planning and programmes, such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), but also projects, as the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The idea to realise an important road infrastructure, which may connect Belluno directly with Austria, is presented in this paper as an emblematic case, in which the application of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) permits to verify the best performing infrastructure on a territorial scale.

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1. The Protocol “Transport” of the Convention on the Protection of the Alps of 1991

The deep economic and financial crisis of these last years has undermined the paradigms of sustainable development, established by the Conference of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, with all the subsequent distorting interpretations that have been more and more focused on a conservative view of “development” until coming to the idea of weird scenarios that can be named “happy degrowth”.

This conservative approach, partially justified by the Convention on the Protection of the Alps of 1991 – especially in the Protocol Transport -, risks of conditioning the modes of transport in the Alpine area.

However, the Convention on the Protection of the Alps, which was formally set up to “protect” the Alpine environment, had also to explicitly recall the need to “[...] contribute to the sustainable development of the habitats and economic areas in which people living in the Alpine region dwell and work by implementing a transport policy which encompasses all modes of transport and is harmonized between the various Contracting Parties [...]” (European Union, 2007).

Even if this policy aimed at following the cultural trend of that moment, based on a somewhat apocalyptic vision of the next “environmentalist catastrophe” (Ling, 2012), on the other hand it realized that the transport system and its infrastructures were (and are even more nowadays) at the basis of the functioning of the territories and so of the preservation of the human presence.

In fact, this protocol states that it is necessary to “[...] ensure the movement of intra-Alpine and transalpine transport at economically bearable costs by increasing the efficiency of transport systems and promoting modes of transport which are more environmentally-friendly and more economic in terms of natural resources [...]” (European Union, 2007).

This means that traffic must be guaranteed with a special attention to the technological development, which must have economically bearable costs, in order to reduce emissions.

Although with its “static” vision, this Protocol Transport actually asks member States “to refrain” from building new major roads until these infrastructures are necessary for the social and economic development.

Well knowing the communication difficulties in the Alpine area, the “Protocol Transport” also underlines the need to create infrastructures for improving mobility “[...] However, in view of the geography and the settlement pattern of the Alpine region, which cannot always be efficiently served by public transport alone, the Contracting Parties shall recognise the need, in these remote areas, to create and maintain sufficient transport infrastructures for private transport to function [...]” (European Union, 2007).

The over-30-year-old Italian “dormancy” in the realisation of big infrastructures (especially roads) can no longer be justified in front of the need to overcome the world economic crisis. In any case, this dormancy did not take place in Trentino Alto Adige Region, which fully exploited the Convention on the protection of the Alps to increase traffic on the Brenner A22 highway and the Verona-Munich railway, probably becoming the most important EU fund collector of all the Alpine area. At the same time, important road works have not been realised yet in some Alpine areas as the Belluno province due to weak policies, and therefore the disanthropization processes have considerably increased in this geographical area. Thus, these territorial disparities are contrary to the strategies of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

This EU strategic one-sided view for the Alpine area has been eventually overcome in the recent elaboration of the EU Strategy for the ALPIn Region (EUSALP) (European Union, 2016).

2. EUSALP 2016

The strategic goals of EUSALP (2016) fully reorient the contents of the Convention on the Protection of the Alps (1991), going from a “conservative” vision (typical response to the capitalist model in the historical stages of strong economic growth and high consumption of energy resources), to an “innovative” vision, typical of mature economies, based on its ability to transform the territory not only in a sustainable, but also in a technologically advanced way (smart).

EUSALP clarifies these innovative actions starting from a revolution of traditional macro-regional strategies through five big general actions.

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