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Environmental and forest planning in Italy: conflicts and opportunities

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Abstract

The necessity of a more sustainable use of lands and environmental resources in general, throughout specific programming and management tools at different scale levels is nowadays widely shared. Forests and woodlands are a key asset of the environment and the traditional and current landscapes. With regards to the state of art of forest planning and management tools in Italy, in this short paper, after a synthetic analysis of the tools currently adopted at different levels, some critical aspects of the relationships of forest planning instruments with other planning tools involved in environmental management (landscape plan, energy plans, basin plans) are investigated, enlightening contrasts and communication conflicts. Solving such problems could enhance the effectiveness of planning.

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1. Introduction

Forests and all the other natural and semi-natural resources are an undisputed key asset of a territory. Apart their productive economic value, they have a greater and all-around importance as expressed by their multiple ecological services and functions. These concepts have well been expressed and reiterated by the “EU Forest Action plan” (Commission European Communities 2006). The current structure, composition and status of forests in Europe is the result of centuries of history and needs of densely populated countries, that overexploited and shaped their woods. As a result managing forest resources is particularly complex and needs an holistic approach to forest

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planning.

Forest planning is the technical-political activity with the target of rationalizing the relationship between man and the forest (Bovio et al. 2004). It is the activity that organizes and rationalizes management on the basis of multi-functional criteria with multiple aims. From the EU community to local levels, passing through national and sub-national, the planning actions run from a list of main program points to a detailed indication of specific management practices. Up to recent times, the core of forest management, in the majority of EU countries (Cullotta et al., 2014), was the local level plan, often aimed to maximize wood production, with a shortcoming of planning at the intermediate between national/regional and local level.

2. Forest and environmental planning in Italy: a complex structure of tools

In Italy, up to the second half of the last century, the forest asset was under two level of rules: the national laws and the local management plan. The main forest law, acted in 1923 and essentially based on hydro geological protection, was still in force up to the regional decentralization process, decreed by the 1948 constitution, but put into effect in the 2nd half of '70. Up to these times the environmental matter was basically ruled by a few acts, and forest assets were only under the general addresses of national law and locally managed by general forest police rules or management plans. The governance was substantially hierarchical, based on a vertical approach. The decentralization attributed the environmental and forest matter of law to the regional authorities, revealing a shallow of midlevel planning, and contemporarily, the lack of a new national forest law, which was necessary to give a common framework for regional laws. In 1985, with the Landscape Act (Legge "Galasso" no. 431), the environmental matter and the forests were transferred to the jurisdiction of the short since instituted Ministry for the Environment. A new nature-oriented forest management was imposed; cutting was allowed as insofar as it was useful for the care of the forest ecosystem, with exception of plantations. In the same period the National Forest Plan (1986) was issued, even if this last remained both unclear with regards to the authority in charge and unfunded by the govern, and consequently ineffective (Corrado and Merlo, 1999). Gradually the Regional authorities adopted their own regional forest plans, and in 2005 the Ministry of Environment issued the guidelines for regional plans: the Decree Law "Guidelines of forest planning" which stressed the importance of midlevel plan and local management, even if the mid level (Territorial or Provincial) didn't formally (legally) existed, nor a suitable framework was issued.

With regard to the territorial matter, as infrastructures, socio-economic peculiarities, productive plant, urban development ecc., in the 1990 a Decree Law instituted, at the regional and the provincial level, the "Territorial Coordination Plan" (Piano di Coordinamento Territoriale), in order to address and coordinate the local rules (urban, infrastructural ecc.) and programming tools under a framework of locally strategic steering.

The need for graduated scale planning became relevant in order to match the forest matter with the other various environmental tools that were issued in those times. The cited Landscape Act of 1985 extended the "cultural value" state and legal restriction to the landscapes and forest, and consequently introduced a new approval regime for any territorial intervention that can cause modifications of the assets as whole. In the year 2004 the new Decree Law concerning the reorganization of the cultural and landscape matter introduced the Landscape Plan (Piano Paesaggistico) at the Regional and consequently (for further regional decentralization) Provincial level. These plans must design a framework of strategies for both urban and landscape management and intervention, as infrastructures etc.. The rules and prescription of the plan become prevalent on local planning tools.

To this general framework, some sectorial tools gradually added in recent times (Fig. 1). Protected areas have also their specific planning tools, as the Park Plans (L. 426/1998), in National and Regional parks, as far as the Nature 2000 sites plans. All these plans regulate all the human activities, with various level of restrictions, in the protected areas, including farming and forestry. It is noteworthy that a relevant part of protected areas is covered by woods, even if the approach of plans between forest and natural asset remains often separated (Corona et al., 2011). In 2006 (D.L. 152) the Basin Plan (Piano di Bacino) was instituted in order to coordinate and program the Hydrogeological protection at large basin level, through specific tools for local setup "Hydro-geological set up Plan" (Piani Stralcio di Assetto Idrogeologico). These last, in particular, can include forestation and landscaping operations to safeguard slopes and soils.

With regards to other planning tools, it is also remarkable that, at the national and at the regional level, the

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