

## **Improving the integration between Rural Development Programs and spatial planning tools.**

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### **Introduction**

Rural Development is one a major policy in the European Union aimed to promote competitiveness, sustainable management of natural resources, and a balanced development of rural areas (European Commission, 2010). It represents one of the two pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the other one being support to production. Currently, the CAP alone accounts for 34% of the total EU budget, with an annual expense of about 55 billion, of which 85% is allocated to the first pillar and 15% to the second one. Rural Development Programmes (RDP) are the instruments that Member States have to elaborate to target funding from the European Rural Development Fund to farmers.

RDP are structured into 4 main axis:

- Axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors
- Axis 2: Improving the environment and countryside
- Axis 3: Rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy
- Axis 4: LEADER approach

Actions financed under Axis 1 are embrace a wide array of possibilities: purchasing of new machinery or substitution of old ones, building of new facilities, introduction and commercialization of new products or processes, education and training, support to young farmers, production of energy from biomasses or solar panels. Many of these actions have also a positive repercussion on the environment for example by reducing consumes of energy or water.

Axis 2 finances the so called Agri-environment schemes (AES): actions implemented voluntarily by farmers who receive financial support in return for adopting environmentally friendly farming practices and/or for delivering ecosystem services. Actions include: organic farming, integrated production, fertilisers reduction, pesticides reduction, crop rotation, maintenance of set-aside areas biodiversity conservation and enhancement actions, upkeep of the landscape including conservation of historical features on agricultural land.

Axis 3 promote the diversification of rural economies; financed actions include the establishment of touristic activities (agritourisms), support to the start up of new small enterprises, as well as development of services and facilities in marginal rural areas.

Axis 4 promote integrated actions by local communities through the elaboration of local development programs aimed at promoting and fostering the endogenous development of marginal rural areas. These programs are elaborated and managed by Local Actions Groups, partnerships made up of representatives from local authorities (municipalities), local companies and enterprises, other local agencies, farmers associations, and other relevant stakeholders representative of the local community.

This brief overview shows that rural development programs act on many different aspects with potential interferences or synergies with other planning and programming tools elaborated for other sectors, including spatial planning tools.

In this paper we draw from the case of the Rural Development Program of Piedmont Region (north-west Italy) to investigate its possible interaction with spatial planning tools, with the aim of fostering integration between these two dimensions of territorial governance. In section 2 we further elaborate on the integration issue, with a focus on the Italian context; in section 3 we present the results of an analysis of the content of two main spatial planning tools recently adopted by the Piedmont Regional government and by the Province of Turin, highlighting possible synergies with rural development policies. In section 4 we discuss the findings and point to some relevant emerging aspects for possible further researches.

## **2. Rural development policies and spatial planning: the need for integration**

In the Italian context, the aspect of integration, coordination and harmonization of rural development policies and other territorial governance tools is particularly relevant at the regional level, as regional authorities have many government responsibilities on a number of issues including spatial planning, health, energy, the management of protected areas and transportation.

The RDP is therefore part of a variegated, complex and dynamic framework made up of many different laws, regulations and plans/programs. Furthermore, regions are in charge of elaborating and implementing the programs which are co-financed by the structural funds of the EU, such as the RDP itself and transnational cooperation programs (in the case of Piedmont, France and Switzerland).

Over the last decade, the regional system of territorial governance has undergone a significant shift from a hierarchical, command and control-based model toward a more cooperative one based on the principle of subsidiarity. The Piedmont regional government initiated a process of harmonization and integration of its plans and programs in order to overcome the traditional fragmentation and sectorialization of

the administrative action. To this end, the region elaborated the so-called Framework of Territorial Governance (FTG), gathering together the three main regional plans concerning spatial planning: the Regional Strategic Document, the Regional Territorial Plan and the Regional Landscape Plan, which all contain directives and guidelines for spatial planning, urban development and landscape/environment preservation for other sectors of the regional government (e.g., waste management, water or energy) and lower-tier institutions (provinces and municipalities).

in the Italian context, agricultural policies and spatial plans have traditionally been developed separately: agriculture related policies were designed considering mainly the economic aspects and only to a minor extent in relation to its territorial dimension. Furthermore, farmers' associations have traditionally been influential in steering the design and implementation of rural development policies and support to production.

However, also urban/spatial planning has traditionally paid relatively little attention to rural areas, which have been traditionally considered as "white areas", "not yet urbanized" underestimating their potential both as productive areas, or as biodiversity sinks and providers of ecosystem services. This separation in policies, plans and program-making has been amplified by an administrative separation within regional structures, whereby the rural department is separated both from the spatial planning department and from the environment department.

In pursuing greater integration between rural development policies and spatial planning, a number of key factors have to be considered: the RDP is a programmatic instrument which allocates economic resources among a plurality of stakeholders (mainly farmers), while spatial plans are regulatory instruments establishing rules and constraints for the transformation and/or preservation of the territory, and are not associated with a budget. This has important implications for how these instruments are elaborated and on their subsequent implementation: the allocation of economic resources and the establishment of regulations (which in the Italian context is the main difference between "programs" and "plans") may follow different rationales.

More recently, however, the need of a deeper integration between these two policy field has emerged also among policy-makers at the regional level: on the one hand, at the EU level the CAP increasingly emphasizes the multifunctional nature of agriculture and, therefore, the necessity of pursuing integration and synergies with other sectors; on the other hand, the newest generations of spatial plans are ever more recognizing the intrinsic value of agricultural areas and their importance from an ecological and socio-economic perspective.

In this frame, the Piedmont Region offers a particularly interesting field of research as new spatial plans have been recently elaborated and approved at the regional and

provincial level. In the next section we explore the interactions between rural development policies and spatial planning tools by examining three key planning documents, two of which were elaborated and adopted by the Regional Authority and one by the Province of Turin, namely:

- The Regional Territorial Plan;
- The Provincial Territorial Plan of the Province of Turin

### 3. Results

The new Regional Territorial Plan (RTP) entered into force in July 2011; it sets the main strategies and rules for spatial and territorial development at the regional level, pursuing the following main objectives:

1. Landscape preservation
2. Environmental sustainability and energy efficiency
3. Territorial integration of the infrastructures of mobility, transportation and logistic
4. research, innovation and productive transaction
5. Valorising human resources and institutional capacities

The RTP also establishes guidelines and rules for the elaboration of plans and programs at lower tiers of government, i.e. provincial and municipal. For the aim of this articles, the contents of the RTP relating to agriculture areas were scrutinized and relevant directives, guidelines or binding norms were identified and sorted out. The results of this exercise are summarized in the following table, in which the first column indicate the reference to the norms of the plans and specify the normative nature of the norm: (guideline/directive of binding prescription)

art. 20 - urban areas outside historic centre (Directive)	local plans shall preserve and valorize agriculture areas at the fringe of the urban fabric as important connection elements of the local ecological network; new developments should be primarily identified within the urban fabric and not in agricultural areas
art. 23 touristic network	Provincial plans should identify potential touristic sites near lakes and rivers and pursue synergies between agriculture and tourism (agritourism).  in the territory of hills, traditional agriculture production shall be

	supported, and the stock of traditional rural buildings shall be preserved
art. 24: agriculture areas	Main objectives: to valorize the role of agriculture as a productive activity compatible with the preservation of biodiversity, habitats and the cultural historic assets
24.4  (directive)	Provincial plans shall identify within the rural territory the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture areas with particular environmental and landscape features</li> <li>• Highly productive agriculture areas</li> <li>• Peri-urban agriculture areas</li> </ul>
art 25 Agriculture areas with particular environmental and landscape features  (guidelines)	the main objective for these areas is preservation of their environmental/landscape features. To this end, provincial and municipal plans shall identify existing buildings with a negative visual impact and pursue the re-localization of existing activities in other areas.  Allowed developments shall be realized with traditional materials and styles of the context; new facilities can be built only if strictly necessary and they cannot be used for other purposes than agriculture or related ones (agriturism, selling of agriculture products)
art. 26 Highly productive agriculture areas	These areas correspond to the ones classified in classes I or II of land use capabilities, according to the classification introduced by the USDA and based on soil characteristics and morphology. In these areas no limitations to agriculture production exists. In these areas the objectives are to support productions, integrate the income of agriculture and enhance productivity. To this end local plans shall avoid land take in these areas, support production, allow multifunctional uses (such as agriturisms) with the aim of creating new jobs
art. 27 peri-urban rural areas	in these areas located at the fringe of the urban fabric, provincial and local plans shall avoid further fragmentation and soil sealing and support multifunctional activities as source of integrating income for farmers. Plans shall also pursue improvements in the ecological equipments of these areas through tree plantations, installation of hedgerows and foster urban design aimed at demarcating more strongly rural areas from urban ones.
art. 28 Hilly areas	In Piedmont these areas have a strong tradition of vineyards cultivation and wine production. Provincial and local plans shall incentivize and preserve this production, while allowing for multifunctionality of farms oriented to the eno-gastronomic tourism
art. 29 Mountain	these areas the main objective is to contrast marginalization and

territories	abandonment of territories. To this end, their natural and landscape features shall be preserved, and form of income integration for farmers shall be pursued through eco-tourism and preservation of typical cultivations and pastures
art. 31: limitation of land take and soil sealing	Provincial plans shall establish specific rules to limit land take, soil sealing and urban sprawl, promoting the realization of new development in brownfield areas where possible. Municipalities cannot increase their urbanized areas more than 3% over a five year-period

The Provincial Territorial Plan (PTP) of the Province of Turin was elaborated in parallel with the RTP and approved in the same period. It is thus the first provincial plan approved after the entrance into force of the new RTP and shall implement its directives at the provincial scale.

Overall, the PTP pursues a strong policy of limitations of soil sealing and land take and requires that municipal plans subdivide their territory in three types of areas:

- *Dense urban areas* - where the urban fabric is consolidated and long established, and where the main urban services and facilities are located;
- *Transition Areas* - localized at the margins of dense urban areas and characterized by a less dense urban fabric;
- *Free Areas* - where agriculture or natural assets are the predominant land uses.

Following this classification, the PTP require that no new urban developments are planned in free areas: to meet the local demand of housing and other development, municipalities shall use the already existing stock of buildings or infill transition areas.

This undoubtedly represent a strong stand by the provincial government to counter current trends of land take and urbanization, which increased at an average annual rate of more that 2% in the provincial territory in the period 1990-2006. This policy is of course relevant also for rural areas, which, beyond natural and seminatural habitats, constitute the majority of the *free areas* as defined by the plan.

The PTP also introduces the concept of ecological compensation of new developments when they affect free areas or determine negative impacts on natural assets.

The PTP, following the directives of the RTP, also provides for specific policies and rules for agricultural areas, which are summarized in the following table.

<b>art. 17, 21, 25, 27</b>	I and II class soils according to their land use capabilities shall be preserved. No new developments (either residential or productive) are allowed on these areas unless strictly necessary and no other
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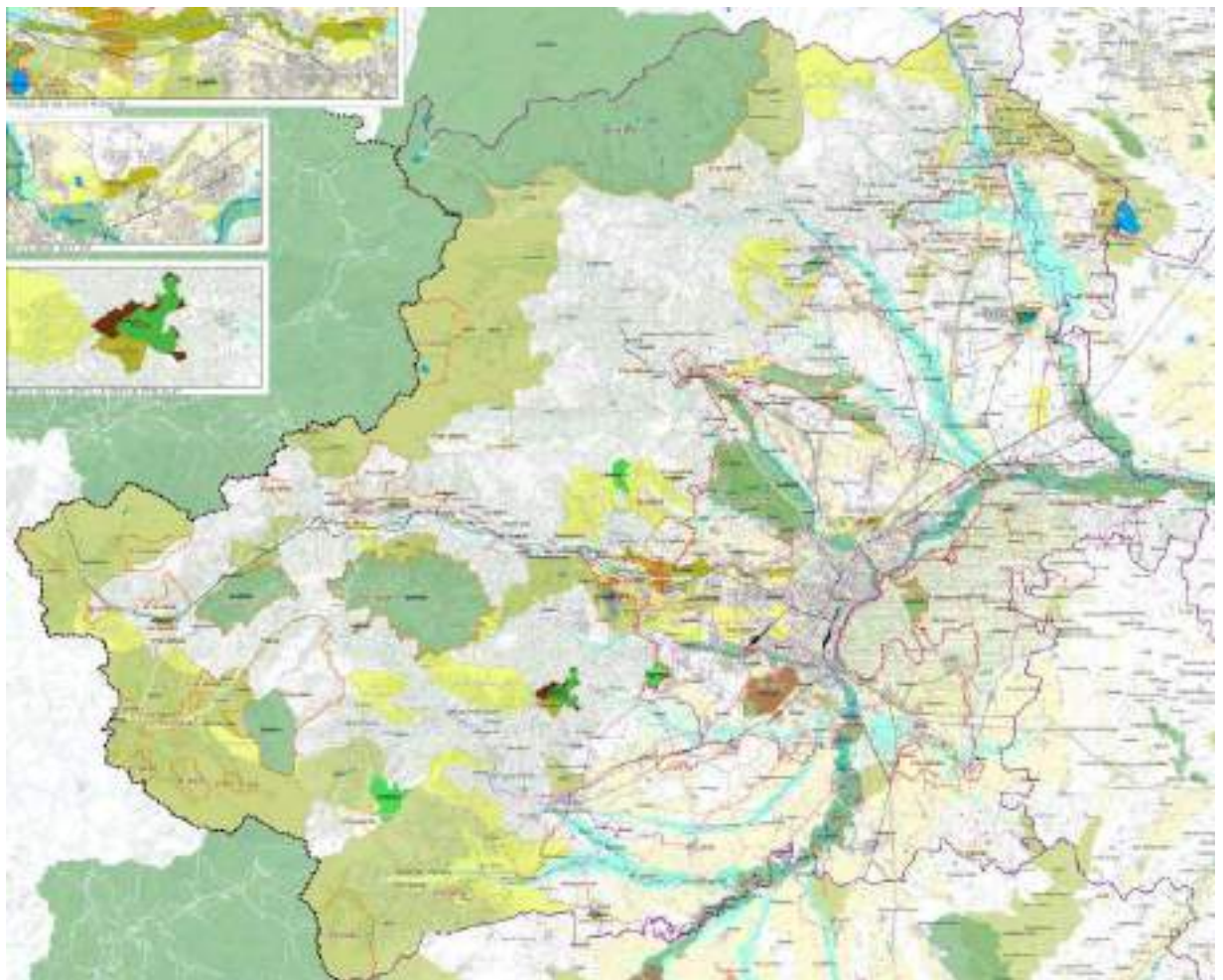
	alternative are feasible. On these areas municipal plans shall encourage the permanence of agriculture activities and farms, and foster multifunctionality of agriculture.
art. 26 agriforest sector	<p>the PTP pursues the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhance the natural value and ecological functions of rural areas;</li> <li>• decrease the factor of environmental pressures determined by agriculture activity</li> <li>• increase the carbon sink capacity of agriculture areas</li> </ul> <p>new buildings in rural areas shall be realized according to traditional local architectural features and materials.</p>
28 specialised cultivations	Specialised cultivations (DOC or IGP products) shall be preserved and no other land use a part agriculture is allowed on these areas, unless this is strongly motivated by external conditions.
31 peri urban areas	These are agricultural areas located at the fringe of urban areas, often fragmented, and at risk of being urbanized. In these territories local plans shall: incentivize the permanence of agriculture land use; enhance their ecological value by improving their vegetal equipment; improve their visual attractiveness by clearly demarcated the urban-rural edge, promote multifunctional uses according to the principles of the CAP and encouraging farmers to pursue synergies with the regional Rural Development Program

In addition to the directives outlined above, the PTP also designs the Provincial Ecological Network, which is articulated in the following types of areas:

- *Core areas*: comprise protected areas and natura 2000 sites
- *Main corridors*: comprise rivers and main creeks with a buffer
- *Buffer zones*: other areas with significant environmental and landscape features identified by the PTP; woods and wet areas if they are not comprised in core areas or corridors

In the following figure, the provincial ecological network as established by the PTP is depicted.





**Aree protette (Core Areas - Artt. 35-36 NdA)**

- EUAP\* Nazionali/Regionali Istituite
- EUAP\*\* Provinciali Istituite
- EUAP\*\*a, PP199000\*\*p Proposte provinciali di ampliamento e/o nuova istituzione
- Proposta di riduzione del Parco Tre Denti e Freidouir

**Siti Rete "Natura 2000" (Core Areas - Artt. 35-36 NdA)**

- IT\* SIC - ZPS
- IT\*\* - IT\*\*p SIR - SIP

**Fasce perifluviali e corridoi di connessione ecologica (Corridors - Artt. 35-47 NdA)**

- Fasce perifluviali\*
- Corridoi di connessione ecologica\*\*

**Aree di particolare pregio paesaggistico e ambientale (Buffer zones - Artt. 35-36 NdA)**

- AP\*\* APV\*\* Aree a vincolo paesaggistico ambientale ai sensi del dlgs.42/2004 e smi e del PTC1
- AP\*\*b\*\*b Proposte
- Tangenziale verde sud
- AP Ambito individuato dallo studio regionale per il Piano Paesaggistico della collina torinese
- Tenimenti Mauriziano
- Aree boscate \*\*\* (Artt. 26-35 NdA)
- Aree verdi urbane (Art. 34 NdA)
- Suoli agricoli e naturali ricadenti nella I e II classe di capacità d'uso dei suoli \*\*\*\* (Art. 27 NdA)

Figure 1: the ecological network of the Province of Turin



#### **4. Discussion and concluding remarks**

The analysis of two key planning tools carried out and reported in the previous section, has showed the deep interlinks between agriculture-related policies and spatial planning. It has also pointed to the fact that, at least from the spatial planning perspective, these interplays have now been fully recognized and recent plans now play much attention to the role and potential of rural areas.

As regards the PTP in particular, the relevance of its provisions concerning rural territories is twofold: on the one hand, as the previous table demonstrates, the PTP attaches great importance to agricultural areas not only in terms of spaces that shall be preserved by potential urbanization, but also in relation to their function as socio-economic drivers and providers of environmental assets and ecological services. This undoubtedly represents, in the Italian context, a significant innovation, especially considering that, although the provincial plan as a relatively weak prescription power, the majority of its norms being directive or guidelines, the province has a voice in the approval procedures of municipal plans, the only ones which can establish specific land uses and establish property rights. In particular the Province can impede the approval of the municipal plan if this is not compliant with the PTP.

In addition, the PTP explicitly refers to the CAP and the Rural development programs, and identifies in Agri-environment scheme a key tool to achieve its environmental objectives related to rural areas. Although the province has, overall, a limited role in the implementation of AES, this again represent a relevant step forward towards integration of planning policies and agriculture ones.

In this frame, the design of the ecological network is another key element, with potential strong interplays with rural development policies. In fact, as **explained in the introduction section**, poor spatial targeting represents one of the main weaknesses of current implementation of AESs in the regional territory. The identification of the different elements of the ecological network now provides a detailed reference to identify agriculture areas to which target AESs; the PTP itself identify the different elements of the ecological networks as the areas where compensation and enhancement measures shall be realized with priority and also states that the most suitable areas where to implement compensation measures are agriculture areas where the ecologic value can be significant increased. Whilst AESs as designed in the current RDP already provide for spatial priorities, the identification of the ecological network in the province of Turin represent a more detailed reference and would allow for a better spatial targeting of AESs.

The other side of the coin, that is the pursuing of stronger integration with spatial planning by agriculture-related policies and programs is instead less demonstrable. Previous analysis of the ongoing RDP of Piedmont Region aimed at assessing the coherence of the RDP with other regional plans and programs (Spaziante et al., 2012)

found that, although no incoherencies could be detected, deeper strategic integration between the different instruments were lacking in many cases. The design of the objectives and actions of the RDP is indeed based on a detailed analysis of the regional context, which covers not only agricultural aspects, but broader environmental and socio-economic ones as well. However, its implementation follows a sectoral rationale, meaning that its integration with other regional instruments has not been fully developed. Improvements in this sense shall thus be pursued for the next programming period (2014-2020). In 2013 the new RDP will be elaborated, and it is hoped that the lessons learnt from the current one will be taken into account.

We want to conclude by highlighting a further possible development along the lines outlined above, concerning the monitoring of both, spatial plans and RDP. Monitoring in fact represent a key activity in steering plan's implementation, and the new RTP and PTP attaches a great importance to this phase. As mentioned earlier, monitoring of RDP is regulated by the EU level, but the current Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is not adequate to assess environmental effects properly, nor to evaluate the level of integration with spatial planning tools. In this perspective, a further research development could be to analyse monitoring schemes of spatial plans, identify the indicators directly or indirectly related to agriculture and identify, as for the RDP, the actions that can produce changes in those indicators. A deeper harmonization of different monitoring systems would thus represent a very straightforward and concrete way of pursuing spatial planning/agriculture policy integration.

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