SEAPs, land use and transport planning choices

A matter of urban dimension

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Introduction

The need for an increased awareness around the importance of improving energy saving and efficiency in urban functions have been strongly highlighted by the EU in the last ten years through the promotion of policies sustaining a more rational use of energies. In the field of the “20-20-20 policy” the EC launched the “Covenant of Mayors”, that foresees the development of a Sustainable Energy Action Plan aiming at a 20% reduction of CO₂ emissions by 2020. Two interesting case studies, Genoa and Noli, will be introducing inside the present paper. They have been the occasion to cope with the issue of energy saving in relationship with urban form [3], land use and transport planning in Italy. Basing on the findings achieved in the case-studies experience, considerations will be made on the rapport between city dimension [3] and their convenience (or not?) in signing engagements that, taking into account the real efficacy of their decisional power, risk to become almost unsustainable in socially and economically fragile urban contexts.

About the structure, in the first section, a brief remind will be developed around policies and tools targeted to transport and energy planning in Italy. Then, the deepened focus on the two cases (in the second part) can be the ground to compare opportunities and constraints regarding the proposal of actions within the SEAP. Some conclusions, about the relationship between the characterisation of the city, in terms of dimension and form, and the evolution of the Covenant mechanism, will be drawn in section 3.

1 – Energy saving and governance levels

Within the "Sustainable Energy Europe (SEE)" Campaign, the Italian Ministry of Environment promoted initiatives specifically addressed to the energy saving, the struggle against the fossil fuels dependence and the air-pollution. The increase of the awareness in the public opinion and the incentives for a correct use of energy sources in a Kyoto perspective are the main objectives of this action.

As known, transport and mobility cover a strategic role taking into account the wide range of fields, activities and services whose efficiency and sustainability depends
on that one of the urban mobility system, a great number of actions can be proposed to plan a more rational urban development.

In this way, referring to the Italian framework, we can consider, as useful, not only the instrument designed by the law to strictly rule energy planning (Municipal Energy Plan, MEP), but also those sector-based planning tools affecting the energy field. Concerning transportation, the soundness of the Urban Traffic Plan (UTP) and the Urban Mobility Plan (UMP), for example, must be assessed not only on their effectiveness in congestion management, but also on the achievement of environmental goals (i.e. Air quality and GHG Emissions).

They are all drawn at municipal scale except for the UMP, for which it is possible to gather municipalities as far the quote of 100,000 inhabitants, while the Covenant of Mayors is open to whatever city-dimension.

The attention paid to an instrument like the SEAP, takes researchers and administrators to reason about the need and the advantages of the potential adoption of an integrated energy policy in urban areas. The first step is the implementation of a BEI (Baseline Emission Inventory): it represents the state of the art of CO₂ emissions assessed for a fixed year and it will be considered the starting point to calculate the -20% of consumptions. The second step is the definition of actions (Action Plan) in the fields of buildings, transports, renewable resources, urban planning, wastes and participative processes, in which the Signatories will be engaged from the submission to 2020. The drawn up of Action plans strongly depend on decisional opportunities of the signatory body; parity in the administrative level does not always correspond to parity in the decisional power, what takes to an implementation of SEAP that must be weighted according to the “dimension” of the signatory city, especially in the field of transportation. The question must be posed also about the convenience of certain urban realities in subscribing such engagements and on the flexibility of EU policies face to heterogeneous urban dimensions.

This suggests, both in methodological and practical terms, a critical revision of the SEAP as an instrument municipally-sized, by verifying the possibility to differentiate various kinds of subscription as well as SEAP’s contents.

2 – Two Italian cases of SEAPs: Genoa and Noli

The case of Genoa

The Municipality of Genoa is one of the first cities in Italy to submit its SEAP [4]. The peculiar geographical configuration of the city of Genoa, “sandwiched” between the coast and the hills, occupying some 70% of the territory, gives to the city its unique landscape and strongly influences its urban development and infrastructure system. Hillside and inland areas, immediately behind the coast, have become residential suburbs, with arising problems of mobility and accessibility. Geographical features and past urban developments are at the base of the connection that occurred between the transport (Urban Mobility Plan) and land use planning (PUC) tools, and the SEAP.
By means of Council Resolution of 13 January 2009, the local government adopted the 10-point master plan for the sustainable growth of Genoa, devised as part of the general strategies and planning criteria: special attention should be paid to the Municipal anti-sprawl policy in the form of the proposed boundary marking the relationship between the compact city and its green environs (“green line”, embracing the hillside built-up area, and the “blue line” along the sea). The idea is to avoid dispersion and fragmentation of urban functions and market forces, thus avoiding the social and environmental repercussions, while striving to restore the ideal balance between the built environment and enhanced quality of life. This objective will be reached, inside SEAP, through the integration between spatial and transport planning [2] achievable, in the case of Genoa, thanks to its metropolitan “weight”.

The case of Noli

Noli is a small Municipality of less than 3000 inhabitants in the Western coast of the Liguria Region.

The dependency of the Noli local economy from a strongly seasonal tourism as well as the low accessibility of the city by public transports (and the total lack of power by the administration to act on them!) deeply affected the range of possible actions sustainable from the social and economical point of view. The SEAP of Noli tries to propose the guidelines for a sustainable urban management and development restricted to the possibilities and competencies of the local administration. The city appears as a good framework for the implementation of action for the citizens’ engagement and the dissemination of best practice, while no actions will be developed in the field of public transports. High level of energy saving could came from a larger use of such a service or even from drastic reduction in the parking offer, but the risk to affect tourist arrivals cannot be negligence.

The comparison of the two cases, allows to highlighting the deep differences between their respective situations, despite a parity in the administrative level that permits both the subscription to the Covenant.

3 – Different strategies for different city-dimensions

According to our vision, SEAP is not intended to be part of the ordinary planning, but as a methodological approach which defines a set of priorities for the government of the city in the short and long-term: in this sense, it should be considered more as a strategic vision than a simple energy balance. In the Genoa case, this fact could be attributed not only to its governance capacity, but also to the role it played as a metropolitan area, intended as a matter of “dimension” [1] rather than of administrative level. The management of the urban transport system is what more highlights the difference of cities in playing an active role [2].

The implementation of SEAPs, in the case of Noli and Genoa, has been an opportunity, in terms of research, to advance the debate around urban management and energy challenge; the main results being the strong dependency of the planning on the urban dimension both in the physical (form) then in the administrative sense.
Sustainability must not be considered as a standard concept; the complexity lies not only in the crossing of the three different pillars (environmental, social and economical), but also in their adaptation according to the city dimension.

References


