

Soil information in the Strategic Environmental Assessment of Rural Development Plans

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Soil information is essential for land planning at different administrative levels. Currently, in Europe there is a hierarchy of at least seven main territorial administrative entities which consider soil in their land planning policies. In this study, European, national and regional regulations that affect soil are discussed, considering themes, priorities, and focus areas. A better attention on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Rural Development Plans (RDP) 2014-2020 is given, by analysing the Environmental Reports produced in the framework of the SEA of the RDP 2014-2020 of some European Regions. Both old and new soil indicators are introduced, as well as the consequences of their adoption for soil science and soil scientists.

It is evident from this study that soil information is treated very variably, not only because of the different kinds of available information, but mainly as a consequence of the expertise and sensitivity to the soil issues of the authors, since they can be different kinds of public or private bodies hired by regional authorities. Therefore, despite having the same reference, the SEAs are very different. In most cases, the amount of soil information is little or negligible, even when available. The ex-ante impacts are often only qualitative, or quantified only in terms of the areal extent of applied measures. On the other hand, following the European recommendations, the ongoing and ex-post reports of the monitoring activities of RDP are expected to provide a wealth of soil information, both qualitative and quantitative. Soil scientists, soil and water conservationists, and management experts will be requested to provide more sophisticated and dynamic types of information. Therefore, the SEA of RDP and similar land planning activities will provide greater scientific and technical opportunities for soil science, provided that the public bodies in charge of evaluations, namely Member States, Regions and their auditing counterparts within the European Commission, are able to implement their own recommendations.