HIA methodology to support Regional Health Authorities in urban planning

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Introduction

Since 2007 the Emilia-Romagna Region has been implementing the MONITER Project aimed at defining an environment epidemiological surveillance and evaluation system in the areas where municipal incinerators are located. In this context, the Emilia-Romagna Region launched a Project Line to promote the adoption of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as a tool to include the evaluation of environmental health issues during the planning process. This task was entrusted to the Project Line n.6 through the "Development of criteria for conducting the health impact assessment for possible future installations" (Action No. 1), also requiring the production of recommendations on "Communication in the process of HIA", in close relation to this research activity (Action No. 9). According to the minimum HIA requisite of model identified, the developer has appointed technical experts to draw up a guideline for public bodies for the evaluation of new or renewed plants and to begin a legislative process for including HIA as an evaluation tool in routine tasks by institutions and local agencies (Action No. 3).

Description

A review of HIA methodology and case-studies was performed, to set up a questionnaire for Health and Environment Professionals aimed at identifying the core values, a choice among different methodological approaches and the expected goals for a tailored HIA on the relevant context. The theoretical content of this research have been made operational in a Rapid HIA applied to a real context (both a desktop appraisal and a participatory workshop were performed at an incineration plant operating in the Region) aiming at testing preferred values, materials and methods but also social-cultural dynamics of the political and local government. The communication issue emerged thanks to a structured interview to 12 MONITER Project Lines personnel: the main obstacles, stereotypes but also opportunities for public inclusion in the decision making processes have been discussed, to produce further element to be included in DELPHI questionnaire and HIA implementation.

Data and overall knowledge emerged were analyzed critically for structuring three-round Delphi survey aimed at developing consensus among experts on a "HIA model". The final model was described in terms of procedures and methods, innovative procedural steps for the proposal context. The final translation in recommendations was developed by the competent personnel of the Emilia-Romagna Region.

Urban development programs

Experience and knowledge gained on HIA resulted in an enrichment of local cultural, political and administrative context. This process has been proposed to public bodies so that they can include HIA in urban planning, including a specific focus on stakeholder involvement. The experience developed has been useful in practice to start a debate on the issues of cross-disciplinary assessment of the health impacts of policies, plans and projects under the regional government. The extensive technical project report produced, albeit for a dialogue with the experts and shows the feasibility of the construction specific HIA models in future case-studies. Tools produced, such as checklists and questionnaires, show interesting potential for a local use to support "technical advices" on health issues in permits release. The Emilia-Romagna Region has oriented its Security and Prevention Department to adopt a procedure for health effects evaluation alongside the strategic and environmental assessments (EIA, SEA), urging the inclusion of HIA procedure in the early stage of proposals screening.

Keywords: waste management, stakeholder involvement, urban planning