
SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN ITALY: THE CASE OF SCR PIEMONTE

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Abstract

Public procurement represents an activity with consistent impact, both in general and with particular reference to Italy. In the European Union, in effect, public procurement is highly represented, covering about 14% of the gross domestic product (GDP), an amount confirmed when looking at Italy only, whereas public procurement covers about 10% of the GDP (Fregonara et al., 2022).

Particular emphasis recently has been given, within public procurement activities, to the so-called sustainable public procurement (SPP), a central tile in the mosaic of European procurement law, which is not an awarding procedure *per se* representing, *contra*, a specific approach to procurement.

This approach is deemed to integrate environmental protection (green public procurement) and social aspects (socially responsible public procurement) into public procurement through the use of appropriate procedural procurement strategies

According to Berg et al. (2022), SPP is a process by which public authorities seek to achieve the appropriate balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects when procuring goods, services and works; put in those terms, of course, SPP is closely related to green public procurement, which refers to the public purchase of goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact

throughout their life cycle when compared with goods, services and works with the same primary function which would otherwise be procured (European Commission, 2021).

Further, it is related to socially responsible public procurement, which pays attention to achieving positive social outcomes from public contracts (Tepper et al., 2020).

The Italian Procurement Code, among other things, provides for an additional, particularly appreciable form of procurement, such as the so-called innovative procurement (IP).

In relation to IP, innovation is related to the ability to satisfy a need that the market, through its products or services, is unable to satisfy at present, a need that is typically expressed in compliance with environmental and social parameters. If a procurement process succeeds in developing a new product or service for which there is a need, or in profoundly improving it to that end, but which the market for various reasons cannot at that precise moment provide, then that procurement is an IP.

Our study, after a brief presentation of the normative framework in Italy, examines the SPP and IP strategies of one of the most important Italian central purchasing bodies (SCR Piemonte), including through a series of semi-structured interviews with company managers and governance members (board directors and auditors), aimed at capturing the governance and organizational factors that either fuel or mitigate the propensity to SPP and IP (Wijayasundara et al., 2022).

The main contributions of the research are twofold: the first is represented by the managerial and organizational outcomes, since we trace some strategic levers that, in an increasingly pressing logic of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and business ethics, virtuously nurture public procurement toward social and environmental issues; the second is regulatory and legislative, that is the Italian instrument of IP.

If in “traditional” procurements the mechanisms of SPP acts “downstream” of the procurement procedure, in the sense that the various sustainability clauses and criteria are included in a pre-existing procedure, which is logically distinct from the sustainability criteria and not dependent on it, it can be seen that, on the other hand, the same is not the case in “innovative” procurements.

In them, especially in the case of innovation partnership and pre-commercial procurement, it is possible to protect sustainable development already “upstream”, at the stage of research and development of the product or service, creating is worth a good or service whose characteristics are sustainable by themselves, that is, inherently conforming to the principle of environmental and social sustainability.

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