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Geodesign as a supplementary tool to strategic environmental assessment

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Abstract

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is applied to inform decisions on sustainable development but may be limited in its mechanisms for unlocking the potential spatial information, and facilitating actual and effective collaborative planning and decision-making. Geodesign has been highlighted as a concept, workflow and tool that may address some of the shortcomings of SEA. In South Africa SEA is widely used to inform decisions on sustainable development. However, there are no examples of the explicit use of geodesign approaches to support decision-making in this context. Furthermore, although geodesign has been identified and explored as a tool to enhance SEA, it has not yet been empirically evaluated against SEA performance criteria. This research aimed to pilot a geodesign workshop and evaluate its potential as a supplementary tool to SEA, based on a South African case study. An online pilot geodesign workshop was executed as an SEA scoping phase activity for the Saldanha Bay Local Municipality of South Africa. The workshop demonstrated that implementing geodesign approaches in the scoping phase of SEA has the potential to enhance SEA performance by facilitating more Focused, Integrated, Iterative, Participative, and Accountable workflows and outputs. Workshop participants perceived geodesign as a potentially useful tool for SEA, as well as for other environmental management and planning tools. Concerns were raised around the veracity of local knowledge contributions and the general accessibility of digital geodesign tools in under-resourced communities and countries.