Quality of Strategic Environmental Assessments

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Central European University
(http://www.ceu.hu/)

- International post-graduate and research university founded in 1991, located in Budapest, Hungary and promoting...
- … a system of education in which ideas are creatively, critically, and comparatively examined
- Students from over 50 countries, faculty from ca. 20 countries
- The Department strives to be a regional center of excellence in environmental policy and management scholarship
- M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Environmental Sciences and Policy registered and accredited in the USA. M.Sc. validated by the University of Manchester
- Welcome to visit at Nádor u. 9 in Budapest!
## Content

- General remarks on quality assurance
- Quality control of SEA reports
  - As required by the Directive 2001/42
  - Lessons from quality control of EIA reports
  - Specifics of SEA reports
  - Quality review package for SEA reports of land-use plans and lessons from its application
- Extending quality assurance beyond the reports
- Discussion questions

## Quality, performance and effectiveness

- **Quality**
  - The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs (ISO 9000)
- **Performance – meeting defined objectives**
- **Effectiveness – causing change**
Notes on quality management

- Shifts from controlling the product to ensuring sound quality management systems
  - i.e. formal framework for control of critical activities (processes) that affect products and services
- Does not replace product specifications or requirements
- Principles:
  - Systematic methods
  - Focus on processes
  - Documented processes (Say it! Do it! Prove it!)
  - Defined responsibilities
  - Continuous improvement

Aspects of EA quality management

- Training, guidance, data and tools, networking
- Capacities
- Actors
- Practice
- Review
- Process
- “Licensing”, responsibilities, and similar arrangements
- Report
Role of quality review in EA quality management

- A key element of quality assurance
- Can be used as an administrative tool
  - Validation or rejection of particular EA processes
  - Mediation in conflict resolution related to EA processes
- Can be used for as a capacity building tool
  1. Improving individual EA cases
  2. Strengthening EA practice/system as a whole
     - Developing common and shared expectations
     - Education and training ("curriculizing" expectations)
     - Identifying regulatory weaknesses, assessing capacity needs
- Standardized approach is essential for most of these uses
- Ensuring quality of the environmental report is required by Art. 12 of the EU Directive

Interpretations of Art. 12.2 of the Directive 2001/42

"... ensure that the environmental reports are of a sufficient quality to meet the requirements of this Directive ..."

- Most narrow:
  - Review environmental reports so that they contain information listed in Annex 1
- Most extensive
  - Adhere to the spirit of the Directive through ensuring the quality of SEA
Principles of a good (S)EA report: useful for decision-makers & the public

- Integrity (completeness, consistency)
  - Appropriate methods
  - No “post hoc” justification
  - Objective reporting

- Relevance
  - An analysis, not an encyclopedia
  - Focus on significant issues
  - Sufficient attention to alternatives
  - Interdisciplinary

- Transparency
  - Clearly documented methods
  - Concise and understandable
  - Be illustrated by maps and other graphic material

The Lee-Colley EIS Quality Review Package

Advice for reviewers
1. Description of project and affected environment
   - Description of project
   - Site description
   - Environment
   - Baseline

2. Description of impacts
   - Identification, definition and scoping
   - Magnitude
   - Significance

3. Alternatives and mitigation measures
   - Alternatives
   - Mitigation measures
   - Commitment to mitigation

4. Presentation
   - Layout
   - Presentation
   - Emphasis
   - Non-technical summary

Collation sheet
Lee-Colley EIS Review Package

Area 1

Category 1.1

Subcategory 1.1.1

Category 1.2

Subcategory 1.1.2

Subcategory 1.1.3

Area 2

Overall assessment

Lee-Colley EIS Review Package

B

C

B

C

B

C

D

C
Lessons of applying the Lee-Colley package

- Application of the package is relatively easy (ca. 3 hours for an average EIS of 50 pages)
- The area of applicability far exceeded the one originally envisioned
  - In particular many derivatives of the L-C package were issued in different jurisdictions
- Systematic application showed a steady increase in quality of EIA reports in the UK and the EU between 1988/1989 (2/3 unsatisfactory) and the mid-1990s
- Quality tends to be better in Areas 1 and 4 and lower in areas 2 and 3.

Specifics of SEA reports

- Focus on strategic environmental objectives
- Level of detail should be appropriate for the level of detail of the plan
- More integrated into the planning process and more focused on sustainability
- Importance of addressing uncertainties, monitoring and tiering
Key specifics of the proposed quality review package for SEA reports of land use plans

Area 1 (Plan and the environment)
- Description of the plan
  - Relationship with other plans and policy documents
  - Environmental objectives in relation to other environmental objectives
- Description of the affected environment
  - Explicit focus on a wider environment

Area 2 (Impacts)
- Scoping treated differently
- Less focus on assessment methods – more focus on assessing “sustainability” of the plan
- Level of detail should be appropriate for the level of the plan
- Explicit mention of indirect and cumulative impacts

Area 3 (Mitigation and alternatives)
- Incorporate arrangements for review and monitoring
- Incorporate tiering arrangements

Area 4 (Presentation)
- Report uncertainties
- Report public consultation process and outcomes

Lessons of applying of the SEA reports review package

Application and its limitations
- Nine land-use plans in the UK and three in Sweden
- Only a small number of SEAs/plans systematically reviewed
- Reviews conducted in 1998, before many formal provisions and guidance have been introduced

The plans themselves as well as their SEA reports were reviewed
Disagreements between different reviewers were more profound in Swedish case-studies
Despite these disagreements common shortcomings were identified
- Most of the reviewed reports were not satisfactory in all categories
- Areas 2 and 3 are particularly poorly addressed (also perceived by interviewed officials)
- Some reports were satisfactory even in the most “difficult” areas
Self-standing SEAs seemed to be of slightly better quality
Better SEAs correlated with better planning processes
Challenges for quality review for SEA reports

- **Methodology**
  - Addressing the trend towards “sustainability assessment”
  - Expanding beyond land-use plans and to different national contexts
  - Ensuring the appropriateness for the needs of planning and decision-making

- **Procedure**
  - Timing of quality control
  - Relation with the QC (if any) of planning documentation

- **Institutions**
  - Who can carry out QC?
  - How to ensure that the findings are used and acted upon?

Beyond the report (process quality control)

- Might involve looking at:
  - Actors (type, capacities, etc.)
  - Activities (type, timing) and outcomes
  - Interactions, networks, learning, institutions

- **Much more resource-intensive**
  - Though simpler forms can be developed

- **Standardized approach is more difficult to achieve**

- **Is unlikely to be institutionalized**
  - However, may be extremely useful on a non-mandatory and ex post basis
Selected criteria for SEA process evaluation (Rasso 2002)

- Timing of SEA
- Clear and appropriate Terms of Reference for SEA
- Integration of SEA and the development of PPP
- Appropriateness of SEA scope to the needs of decision-making

... SEA report criteria ...

- To which extent the SEA process is systematic
- Participation, consultation and consensus
- Timely input of SEA process to decision-making
- Independent review of SEA outcomes

Example of “process-oriented” review package
(proposed by IDPM for National Strategies for Sustainable Development)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainable development principles</th>
<th>Strategic planning principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Integration of Economic, Social and Environmental Objectives</td>
<td>E. Targeting, Resourcing and Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Participation and Consensus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Country Ownership and Commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Comprehensive and Coherent Policy Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| A.1 Integration | B.1 Involvement of significant stakeholders | C.1 High level government commitment | D.1 Build on existing processes | E.1 Budgetary provision |
| A.2 Social and poverty issues | B.2 Transparency and accountability | C.2 Broad-based political support | D.2 Analysis and information | E.2 Capacity for implementation |
| A.3 Environmental and resource issues | B.3 Communication and public awareness | C.3 Responsibilities for implementation | D.3 Realistic goals | E.3 Targets and indicators |
| A.4 International Commitments | B.4 Long-term vision and consensus | C.4 Coordination with donors | D.4 Decentralisation | E.4 Monitoring and feedback |
Quality assurance is important for functioning EA systems. Quality review is a key element of quality assurance:
- Review of reports – some promising experience, many challenges
- Review of the process – much less experience, even more challenges
Relevance of quality review is likely to increase as SEA practice becomes more widespread.
Quality review "packages" have been an effective tool, especially for project-level EIAs …
- But the proposed package for SEA of land-use plans needs to be substantially modified in light of recent experience.
Discussion questions

- **Review of SEA reports**
  - What are/would be the most appropriate procedures (e.g. timing) and institutions
  - What are/would be the most appropriate methods (e.g. suitability of the proposed package)

- **Review of SEA process**
  - What would be effective and feasible?
  - How and who: by which methods, procedures and institutions?

- **Ensuring quality of SEA reports and process (beyond the review)**
  - What would be effective and feasible?

Group work 2 results

- **A common evaluation framework**
  - Multiple uses (monitoring, periodic audits, etc.)
  - Many users (authorities, planners, consultants, municipalities)

- **Should include certain process elements**
  - E.g. timing of inputs, implementation structures

- **Several levels of quality assurance**
  - Internal “checklists”, legal compliance, adherence to “best practice”

- **Concerns:**
  - Not to make too complex – stick to legal requirements
  - Focus on the utility of the process, rather than formal criteria

- **Other ways to ensure quality (licensing, quality of input data)**