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SEA in Spatial Planning: key issues for consideration

Maria R. Partidário
Portugal

Recent Developments in SEA

- Limited development as a strategic approach
- Unresolved debate with respect to limits of environmental scope versus sustainability
- Debate between SEA as dual-track EIA or as integrated approach to impact assessment
- Debate between SEA as a technical assessment or as a facilitator of decision-making
Recent Developments in SEA (cont.)

Why a limited development as a strategic approach?

Evidence shows that many SEA are following the path of EIA, looking backwards rather than forward…

… and showing limitations in getting a broad scale and long-term perspective

Recent developments in SEA (cont.)

Why unresolved debate with respect to limits of environmental scope versus sustainability?

-Because the environmental concept is difficult to define given…
- different cultural perspectives
- the institutional structure of decision systems
- and the different understanding on the role of SEA
Recent developments in SEA (cont.)

Why the debate between SEA as dual-track EIA or as integrated approach to impact assessment?

Because of the socio-political nature of rational decision systems … …and the way decisions are currently made!

Recent Developments in SEA (cont.)

Why the debate between SEA as a technical assessment or as a facilitator of decision-making?

Because it takes time in changing the way decision are made… …and because SEA has been unable to effectively show its added-value to decision-making
Key issues in SEA

- Process
- Content
- Players

Key issues

But before that, two questions -

1. What is SEA for? What is its purpose?

   Is there a clear objective for SEA in people’s minds?
What is SEA for?

1. Is it to look at sets of projects in a plan or programme, in a given time and geographic area? (…cumulative impacts)
2. Is it to look at the intentions of development of major projects or to its strategic outcomes? (…good EIA)
3. Is it to look as the opportunities and consequences of strategies?

Where do we have more opportunities to influence decisions on strategies?

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SEA in practice?

- **Integrating** environmental issues in spatial planning (& other PPP)?
- **Assessing** the impacts (or the extent of integration/ consequences/ opportunities) prior to decision(s), to improve decisions?
- **Validating** plans (& other PPP) regarding environmental considerations?
- **All of the above**?
Such multiple purposes of SEA have implications on:

- Timing of SEA in planning process
- Key players (institutional and technical)
- Outcomes

Designing SEA with focus on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Leading Players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Intention of new plan, when stating planning objectives</td>
<td>Planners + environment (consultants or officials) + authorities / public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Draft or final planning proposals</td>
<td>Environment consultants / officials + other authorities / public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>Before plan approval</td>
<td>Gov authority re. Plan or EIA (planning, env, other) + public</td>
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2. What is expected with the integration of environmental issues? - how is that done?

- Substantive
- Procedural
- Methodological
- Institutional
- Political

(Eggenberger and Partidário, 2000)

Isn’t that also integrated planning?

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Key issues

1. What is the purpose of SEA?

- **Validation** - legal compliance
- **Integration** - better planning and effective plans for sustainability

These are not incompatible, but can be made to be, depending on the SEA system set-up
Key issues

2. SEA system: What is the relationship between SEA and the planning / decision process?

- How to do an SEA?
  influence of two key schools:
  ➢ EIA school
  ➢ Policy / planning school

How to do an SEA? 1

EIA-based model

Planning Process  SEA Process

SEA Report  TOO LATE
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### How to do an SEA? 2

**Fully integrated model**

Planning + SEA Processes indistinct

| SEA effective role difficult to know |

### How to do an SEA? 3

**Parallel model**

Parallel and distinct processes

| Planning Process | SEA Process |

| one SEA process fits all |
How to do an SEA?  
4  
Decision-centred model

Planning process drives the way

Planning Process  
SEA - framework of key activities

SEA is taylor-made and shape forms / processes

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Modes of planning:
Linear planning process (Litchfield, 1976)

- Objectives
- Baseline
- Analysis and diagnosis
- Identification and assessment of alternatives
- Proposal/Decision
- Monitoring
- Review

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Modes of planning: The cyclic planning process (Hickling, 1985)

The relationship between SEA and the planning process is critical for effective SEA - implications are on:

- Timing
- Responsibilities
- Products

When are decisions taken? Who takes them? How to best communicate?
### Key issues

3. Content / scope of SEA (substance)

**What to consider in SEA? What scale?**

- environment (as related to Earth issues)
- environment and social issues
- sustainability: interface and overlap of the environment, social and economic dimensions

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### Content / scope of SEA (substance)

Is this important?

Yes, because:
- How to deal with policy conflicts? - a large share of strategic impacts
- How to deal with trade-offs in spatial planning?
- How to balance options in view of sustainable development?
Key issues
4. Players - institutional framework

- Capacity
- Design
- Knowledge
- Information

Institutional framework

Ensure means and capacities - organisational culture
Effective institutional integration - binding agreements (MoU)
Clear identification of competences - balance of power and leadership
Key issues

Players

Effective communication (jargon…)
Appropriate information and participation, jointly with planning
Clear trade-offs in spatial planning
Multi-sector stakeholder groups to guide planning processes

Key issues

5. The relationship between SEA and EIA

- What is the added-value for EIA?
- What will change in terms of thresholds, content, speedness?
- Are current SEA forms doing more than what EIA should do?
**Key difference between SEA and EIA**

EIA is a command and control tool, helps to design better projects, but is reactive to proposals.

SEA should be a facilitator of decision-making, a framework to help identify development opportunities that are environmental and sustainable, anticipating proposals, acting strategically.

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**Very important**

SEA does not / should not replace EIA.

but EIA will benefit by having a better context for improved performance if SEA is in place.
Concluding, what is SEA?

a strategic decision support framework to integrate issues and assess impacts on the environment and sustainable development of visions, intentions or strategic proposals with the purpose of improving the quality of decisions

When do we know it is SEA?

- When it focus on the strategy, rather than on the outcome
- When it works with processes, not with products
How?

Environment and sustainability at the core of the decision process

When it recognizes

- the incremental, often unstructured, flexible and changing nature of strategic decision processes
- the socio-political, and not only technical, nature of decisions
Any form of SEA should be equally good in:

- informing decision-making in a timely manner;
- enabling the integrated consideration of all relevant issues in decision-making;
- improving the quality of decisions;
- making overall development processes easier and more sustainable.
Concluding, successful SEA is

- a facilitator of decision-making
- tailor-made to, and/or well articulated with, decision-making
- focussed on strategies – which route to take to achieve long-term objectives
- works with “strategic” alternatives
- enables public participation and institutional cooperation
- an added-value to decision-making