
CONTEXTUAL ISSUES IN ENSURING AN ADDED VALUE OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TO TOURISM PLANNING: THE CASE OF THE WALLOON REGION

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Abstract

Since July 2004 the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC is effective. Therefore, tourism plans, which fall under the scope of the Directive, have to be submitted to SEA procedures. This new legal framework and its requirements raise methodological questions on how to adapt and integrate SEA processes in tourism planning processes.

Before the 1980 institutional reforms in Belgium, tourism planning in the Walloon Region was integrated with spatial planning on a national level. After the reforms, tourism, environmental and land-use planning competences were transferred to the regional governments. These changes in the institutional arrangements resulted in a shift in tourism development planning and tourism sector organisation from an integrated economic/spatial/environment based approach to an economic dominated sectoral approach. The development of an effective SEA process in the Walloon Region tourism sector must therefore take into account the features and trends of the current policy-making context which is characterised by a weak link between tourism planning and environmental considerations.

Based on the case of the Walloon Region, this contribution aims to emphasise the importance of analysing the organisational and planning context before developing a SEA process. Furthermore, it underlines the added value of SEA as a tool which can contribute to integrate environmental concerns into sectoral tourism planning. As a result, SEA can be seen as promoting a more sustainable tourism development through a proactive, integrative, cooperative and participative planning process.

Keywords : strategic environmental assessment ; tourism ; contextual issues ; integration ; Walloon Region, Belgium

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Introduction

This paper aims at contributing to address the issue of the relationship of Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) with the immediate and wider contexts in which it must operate. It focuses on the case of the Walloon Region (Belgium), which is concerned with the SEA European Directive¹, and specifically on the tourism sector which falls under the scope of the Directive.

As a Member State of the European Union, Belgium was required to implement the SEA Directive which was to be transposed at the latest by July 2004. Since the Regions are competent for environment in Belgium, the Walloon Region was responsible for adopting transposition measures of the Directive and it is done since May 2004². Nevertheless, the WR has anticipated the Directive by integrating SEA requirements in land use planning legislation in 2002³. Among others, the tourism sector falls under the scope of the directive. Henceforth, an environmental assessment shall be carried out for new tourism plans and programs in the WR.

The Walloon Region (WR) has not a long experience in SEA. Therefore, the new European legal framework and its requirements raise methodological questions on how to adapt and integrate SEA in decision-making processes and particularly in tourism planning processes in the Region.

While addressing the methodological and procedural issues raised by the implementation of the Directive is a major theoretical research ground – as there are margins of discretion in interpreting it (Risse *et al.*, 2003 : 455 ; Therivel, 2004 : 23) –, there is also a need to analyse the characteristics of various contextual dimensions.

In this sense, several authors (Dusik and Sadler, 2004 : 95-96 ; Risse, 2004 : 69 ; Verheem and Tonk, 2000 : 182 ; Brown and Théritel, 2000 : 185 ; Sadler and Verheem, 1996 : 35) put the emphasis on the fact that the implementation of SEA processes needs a detailed analysis of current planning processes in the institutional structure concerned. The understanding of the political culture and the identification of the institutional arrangements, the practices of planning and the actors involved in the system are considered as primordial steps in adapting SEA to a specific context and in determining deficiencies and opportunities which are to be taken into account.

Hence, the institutionalisation of SEA in the WR and its operationalisation in tourism sector face up to contextual issues. These are related to the immediate context – the way of planning and organising tourism development in the WR – and to the wider context defined in terms of political, cultural, institutional and administrative dimensions (Bina and Wallington, 2005 : 4).

This paper proposes an analysis of planning processes, actors and institutional arrangements in the WR tourism sector, in order to shape the contextual dimensions to which SEA processes are intended to integrate with. This research approach is argued as a prerequisite to the development and implementation of SEA processes in the tourism sector in the WR.

¹ Directive 2001/42/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, European Union, 27.06.2001

² Decree related to the 1st Book of the Code of Environment, Government of the Walloon Region, 27.05.2004

³ Decree modifying the Walloon Code of Town and Country Planning, Urban Development and Heritage (CWATUP), Government of the Walloon Region, 18.07.2002

Economic, social and environmental issues of tourism

The economic boom of the sector

Tourism is one of the most prosperous economic sectors of the world. International tourism receipts represented in 2003 approximately 6 per cent of worldwide exports of goods and services (as expressed in US\$). When considering service exports exclusively, the share of tourism exports represented nearly 30 per cent in 2003⁴. In Europe, the most important destination worldwide, tourism concerns more than two million firms and 7.7 million of jobs, and provided 5 to 12% of the GDP in 2001 (Commission of the European Communities, 2003 : 2).

Tourism is also a major social phenomenon since the middle of the 20th century : the number of international arrivals shows an evolution from a mere 25 million international arrivals in 1950 to more than 700 million in 2004, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 6.5 per cent⁵. In view of this exceptional evolution which has led to important changes in some areas, the expression 'mass tourism' is commonly used.

Although some events may temporarily lower the tourism demand at the regional level (e.g. the epidemy of SRAS and the tsunami in Asia) or at the world level (Gulf War, September 11th), the world's annual average growth of the tourism sector is strong and sustained. For the future, World Tourism Organisation's Tourism 2020 Vision forecasts that international arrivals are expected to reach over 1.56 billion by the year 2020. Of these worldwide arrivals in 2020, 1.2 billion will be intraregional and 0.4 billion will be long-haul travellers. The total tourist arrivals by region shows that by 2020 the top three receiving regions will be Europe (717 million tourists), East Asia and the Pacific (397 million) and the Americas (282 million), followed by Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

The interdependence between tourism and environment

The relations of the tourism sector with the environment are issues at stake as well as the economic weight and the social importance of this phenomenon. As an economic activity, tourism involves the production of goods and services and, as a social activity, diverse practices of consumption, mobility, activities... All these factors are closely linked by the laws of demand and supply, but they are also connected with the environment which is to replace among the production factors of the tourism sector.

From one hand, the production of goods and services for tourism is involving, as other industries, the consumption of renewable and not renewable – thus limited – natural resources (raw materials, fossil fuels, water...) and waste production. On the other hand, environment is a tourism attraction *per se* and, in this view, some types of area – especially littoral areas but more and more rural and natural areas – support more demand and pressure. Since various tourist infrastructures and facilities are built on these areas, space and resources are locally consumed and mobility locally and regionally produced.

Measures for controlling the environmental impacts of tourism

The worldwide importance of tourism phenomenon, its territorial extent and the practices which are associated to, are arguments to not deny the environmental, social and environmental issues of tourism. Although denunciations of the damaging effects of the mass tourism have been for a long time the dominant interpretation of the environment-tourism relations, this negative vision is today better balanced with the discourse enhancing the contributions of tourism to heritage conservation, opening of territories, and local economy diversification. The number of alternative tourism projects

⁴ Data from the World Tourism Organisation website : <http://www.world-tourism.org/>

⁵ *id.*

and products (ecotourism, green tourism, ethical tourism...), which represent attempts to reconcile tourism, environment and development, is increasing.

Since the 1990's, the question of the negative as well as positive tourism-environment interactions is at stake in the larger debate of the sustainability of tourism. Many volunteer initiatives related to 'sustainable tourism' have emerged : charters, codes, international organisations resolutions, sectoral guidelines, tourism industry commitments... (Commission of the European Communities, 2003 : 28).

All these actions provide new strategic frameworks for tourism development. However, to this point, it is essential to re-emphasise the importance of two traditional families of environmental protection tools : legislation and planning.

As a restrictive tool, legislation is essential to guarantee an adequacy between the human activities and the protection of the environment. Three legislative sets are regulating the relations between tourism and environment :

- *land use legislation*, including land use plans, urbanism rules, urbanism authorisations...
- *nature protection legislation*, including different protection statutes (national parks, natural parks, nature reserves, humid areas...)
- *environmental legislation* (in a strict sense), including norms and regulations for water and air quality, waste management, environmental authorisations, and environmental assessment procedures

Environmental management systems are also important tools complementary to the legal framework and contribute to sound and sustainable decision-making. A range of tools are frequently used : EMAS and ISO systems, environmental audits, reporting and monitoring systems using indicators...

In addition, planning processes of tourism development, in the form of spatial planning – which aims at organising and designing tourist areas, attractions and facilities – or environmental planning, also play an essential role for environmental protection. Since planning is organising the future – by preparing a set of decisions and defining implementation means – in order to achieve certain objectives (Inskeep, 1991 : 25), it has the capacity to predict and minimise impacts. In practice, that anticipative approach of tourism planning is not strictly and universally operated and it is one of the arguments to promote SEA as a tool to contribute to a more sound and sustainable tourism decision-making.

Tourism planning in the Walloon Region : an historical perspective

The institutional reforms of the Belgian State : consequences on tourism sector organisation and tourism development planning in the Walloon Region

Belgium is officially a unitary state until 1980. However, several revisions of the Constitution have progressively transferred certain competences to the regional governments and transformed the Belgian National State in a Federal State. These institutional reforms were initiated in 1970, complemented in 1980 and 1988-1989, and a last constitutional reform led to the new Federal State in 1993. The 1980 reform is crucial because it makes official the existence of the Flemish, German and French Speaking Communities and of the Flemish, Brussels and Walloon Region (Sägesser, 2004). Each Region and Community manages competences and areas which are variable from each other.

The successive institutional reforms of the Belgian State have changed the allocation of tourism, environment and land use competences and resulted in shifts in tourism sector organisation and tourism development planning.

Before the 1980 reforms, tourism competency was managed by the central State and administered by the *General Commissariat of Tourism* (GCT), which was responsible for tourism development and promotion in Belgium. This national tourism administration was created in 1939 and reorganised several times (Lambot, 1978). The GCT was assisted by *Consultative Committees of Tourism* (one committee for each cultural community) and by an *Interdepartmental Committee of Tourism Coordination*. This latest was instituted in 1970 to coordinate actions of all State departments regarding directly or indirectly tourism sector.

The national administration was managing tourism development by the upstream and performing two types of complementary policy-making processes : economic planning and spatial planning. During this period, several tourist investment programmes and facilities development plans were elaborated. At the same time, land use legislation was incremented by new plans, regulations and land use programmes which provided a framework for the physical planning of tourist investments (Lambot, 1978 ; Ministry of the Walloon Region, 1988).

The GCT, as the national administration of tourism, played on the two scenes since it contributed to the elaboration of both investment programmes and land use plans for tourism. It could be concluded that, until the 1980 institutional reforms, there is integration mechanisms connecting economic and spatial decision-making processes of tourism, and a coordination between institutional actors from both policy fields.

In 1980, tourism competency was transferred to the Communities as other cultural domains. The GCT was divided into two bodies : the GCT of the French Community and the GCT of the Flemish Community. Environment and land use management competences were transferred to the Regions.

The French Community essentially based its tourism policy on investment and profitability, in spite of a claimed political will to take into account all the dimensions of tourism development (i.e. economic, cultural, social, environmental issues) and to coordinate all the public actors involved in tourism sector.

The economic orientation of the French Community tourism policy, added to the fact that environment and land use planning competences were managed by other institutional actors, has led to a disconnection of tourism policy from other decision fields linked to tourism. Moreover, the Interdepartmental Committee of Tourism Coordination was dissolved although this coordination structure was very essential in a decentralisation context to integrate all regional policies influencing tourism development (economic development, land use planning, environmental planning, transport policy...).

In 1993, the French Community has decided to transfer the management of the tourism competency to the Walloon Region. This step has marked an important change in the way of approaching tourism planning in the Walloon Region as its tourism policy objectives are centrally oriented according to a market rationale : organising the sector ; developing, structuring and promoting supply ; professionalizing economic actors ; improving tourists reception ; ...

The regional tourism administration is responsible for developing and promoting tourism. Other public tourism organisations are also playing several roles at the provincial (sub-regional) and local levels : development and promotion, but above all information and tourists reception. As these actors are working quite independently, they are tending to undertake various actions aimed at creating synergies.

Spatial planning and environmental planning of tourism in the Walloon Region

As mentioned above, land use planning and environment competences were transferred to the regional governments in 1980 (the Flemish Region, the Brussels Region and the Walloon Region).

In the Walloon Region (WR), the *Walloon Code of Town and Country Planning, Urban Development and Heritage* (CWATUP) is the legal framework for spatial planning and is composed of two parts : a regulatory part including land use plans which regulate activities in different types of areas (e.g. leisure areas) – and a strategic part orienting the spatial policy of the Region. The Regional Development Scheme (SDER, 1999) constitutes the strategic planning instrument for land use and development of the WR, and concerns all spatially-related sectors. The SDER is also a transversal instrument as it integrates objectives established for sectoral plans and programmes. For tourism sector, the SDER sets up several strategic goals : structuration of the regional area in tourist poles, cooperation between actors, synergies development... Therefore, as a global strategic framework of spatial development, the SDER creates links between tourism development and the other sectoral policies of the WR.

Regarding environmental planning, the Walloon legislation requires the periodic elaboration of specific documents : state of the environment reports, environmental plans for sustainable development (EPSD), sectoral programmes, and communal environment and nature development plans. Hence, environmental planning in the WR is composed with several action levels. It also integrates these levels, both horizontally (implementation of transectoral measures) and vertically (setting up of hierarchical relations). As tourism and leisure concerns, the current EPSD – dating from 1995 – especially aims for a better integration of environmental considerations with tourism development.

The issue of 'integration' in the Walloon Region

Before the 1980 institutional reforms in Belgium, tourism planning in the Walloon Region was integrated with spatial planning on a national level. However, the reforms – which led to the regionalisation of tourism, environmental and land-use planning competences, resulted in a shift in tourism development planning and tourism sector organisation from an integrated economic/spatial/environment based approach to an economic dominated sectoral approach.

Therefore, in view of these changes in the institutional arrangements, we could argue that current tourism planning in the WR is characterised by a lack of integration between tourism policy and other tourism-related policies (i.e. environmental policy, spatial policy, transport policy...). This is illustrated by the lack of synergies between those policy fields and correlatively by the lack of coordination between institutional tourism-related actors. Actually, we observe that the WR has clearly defined spatial and environmental strategies for tourism sector. However, but regarding isolated exceptions, strategic documents elaborated by tourism public actors in the WR are not integrating these spatial and environmental strategies. There is a large coordination gap both between tourism-related policies and institutional actors, hence no environmental strategic framework for tourism development. As there are no environmental anticipation mechanisms at planning level, environmental regulations are the alone buffers against impacts. Institutionalising SEA in the WR is therefore a necessary driver for making tourism strategies more environmentally sustainable.

From a theoretical point of view, these conclusions about the weakness of the framework for environmental governance of tourism in the WR brings a very interesting research ground and raises relevant issues to explore, especially regarding evaluation of the role of SEA in integrating environmental considerations into tourism strategic decision-making. This argument also meets calls from various international organisations promoting policy integration as a way to sustainable tourism development.

Potential contributions of SEA to tourism planning in the Walloon Region

The development of an effective SEA process in the Walloon Region tourism sector must take into account the characteristics and trends of two related issues : firstly, the current policy-making context where tourism planning and environmental planning are not linked and, secondly, the potential added-value of SEA as a tool which can contribute to integrate environmental concerns into sectoral tourism planning.

The potential added-value of SEA towards the WR context needs to be questioned by examining two theoretical aspects.

First, it would be necessary to re-examine the basic principles or, more fundamentally, the *raison d'être* of SEA – as "a process that aims at integrating environmental and sustainability considerations in strategic decision-making" (Therivel, 2004 : 3) – in light of the WR integration issue. The general added-value of SEA has often been characterised by three main benefits (Sadler and Verheem, 1996 : 30 ; Dalal-Clayton and Sadler, 2004 : 20) : strengthening project EIA ; addressing cumulative and large scale effects ; and, advancing the sustainability agenda. However, much of SEA literature to date has dealt with the definitions, objectives, roles and principles of the tool. Today, all these features are quite largely explored. As several authors put emphasis on the need to adapt SEA to contextual characteristics, it is also necessary to identify the specific potential contributions of SEA to a specific situation.

In the case of tourism sector in the WR, the global lack of integration between tourism-related policies constitutes a critical situation which could benefit from systematic grafting SEA on tourism decision-making processes.

Identifying the added-value of SEA to tourism planning in the Walloon Region : the integrative capacity of SEA

Today SEA is acknowledged to be a relevant tool for integration of environmental considerations into decision-making processes and for promoting sustainability. Including identification and assessment of alternatives, and public participation, SEA can be a vector for changing decision-making processes to more environmental sustainability.

Based on the reflections of Eggenberger and Partidario (2000) about the concept of 'integration', this section aims at analysing various potential contributions of SEA to tourism planning in the WR, regarding different forms of integration.

Concerning SEA, the concept of 'integration' has various meanings so it is essential to establish a typology which could help to interpret them. Here we consider the different forms of integration identified by Eggenberger and Partidario (2000 : 204) : substantive integration, methodological integration, procedural integration, institutional integration and policy integration. We propose an interpretation of this integration typology in order to adapt it to the specific integration issue of the WR tourism planning case (see Figure 1).

Substantive integration

Substantive integration is the capacity of a tool to articulate different issues or challenges. As regards SEA, it aims to ensure that environmental issues are addressed at the same level, at the same time and in a balanced way as economic and social issues in different steps of a decision-making process (i.e. political agenda, negotiation, alternatives assessment, decision, monitoring...).

As we have seen, tourism planning in the WR is today based on an economic dominated sectoral approach. Although international organisations are encouraging national governments and tourism

organisations to develop more sustainable tourism policies and projects, the WR is not fundamentally changing the basic terms of reference of the regional tourism policy.

Therefore, the implementation of SEA in tourism sector in the WR could contribute to a better balance between environmental, economic and social considerations at the strategic level.

Procedural integration

Procedural integration corresponds to all the means used to articulate different processes. It can operate both horizontally and vertically.

'Horizontal procedural integration' is a governance principle that stresses – at a governmental level (national, regional, local) – the importance of creating transversal synergies between decision-making fields.

In integrating environmental considerations into a tourism planning process, SEA favours the coordination of different tourism-related policies : regional development, environmental policy, spatial policy, agriculture, transports... SEA can establish coordination mechanisms between sectoral actions and help to identify and avoid / mitigate potential antagonist goals and measures. Horizontal coordination is contributing to make political actions more coherent and effective from the environmental point of view.

'Vertical procedural integration' is related to the 'tiering' concept. Environmental integrity of tourism policies, plans or programmes is depending of and would benefit from tiering mechanisms between these strategic levels (and related assessment processes ; see *Methodological integration*). In the WR tourism sector, there are many strategic levels and actors, and tiering mechanisms are quite inexistent between strategic actions. Implementation of SEA in the WR tourism sector could encourage the tiering of environmental aspects, so it could favour the articulation of different policy-making levels.

Methodological integration

Methodological integration is aiming at making complementary a set of approaches and tools.

In order to enhance SEA, it should be coordinated with initiatives sharing complementary goals (e.g. environmental planning for tourism, state of the environment reports, environmental management systems, Local Agenda 21), as it is argued by Enggenberger and Partidario (2000 : 202), and with tools and approaches developed at the same level and having other substantive objects (e.g. cost/benefit analysis, multi-criteria analysis, social impact assessment).

As mentioned for procedural integration, SEA implementation could include tiering mechanisms between different levels of assessment, so it could contribute to vertical methodological integration.

Institutional integration

Institutional integration includes all coordination and cooperation actions operated by public actors – and private actors in a 'new governance' context – in order to harmonise their strategies.

Substantive and procedural integration mechanisms confront political actors to new issues and require a dialogue and a coordination between different stakeholders groups from the same institutional level or different ones.

In a global context where sustainability issues are increasingly central in the political agendas, sectoral planning processes tend to be more holistic and systemic, so integrated in the sustainability sense. Therefore, certain stakeholders not getting used to work together have to collaborate more frequently.

As it aims at integrating environmental considerations into decision-making processes, SEA is promoting institutional integration in tourism sector in favouring creation of new synergies between tourism-related and environment-related actors (administrations, para-state organisations, non-governmental organisations, professional federations, civil society organisations...).

Effective tourism sector development and management require both horizontal and vertical coordination between all actors influencing tourism sector. A SEA process applied to a tourism policy-making process needs to integrate all tourism-concerned actors and their particular strategies in order to support planners in producing policies, plans or programmes which are more environmentally coherent.

Policy integration

Policy integration is a result of above-mentioned forms of integration. As SEA is a tool for improving the strategic action and ultimately protecting the environment (Therivel, 2004 : 7), a more environmentally sustainable political action should be the expected result from substantive, procedural, methodological and institutional integration. Aggregation of the different integration functions of SEA enhances the fundamental role of SEA as a *decision-aiding* tool.

Figure 1. Potential contributions of strategic environmental assessment to tourism planning in the Walloon Region.

FEATURES OF TOURISM PLANNING (TP) IN THE WALLOON REGION	POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TO TOURISM PLANNING IN THE WALLOON REGION (WR)	
> Economic dominated sectoral approach	SUBSTANTIVE INTEGRATION	→ P O L I C Y
	> Integration of environmental and sustainability considerations into tourism decision-making processes in the WR	
> No coordination between regional tourism policies and environmental and spatial policies	HORIZONTAL PROCEDURAL INTEGRATION	→ I N T E G R A T I O N
	> Creation of synergies between tourism development policies and environmental and spatial policies	
> Many decision levels > As many strategies as actors > No effective tiering	VERTICAL PROCEDURAL INTEGRATION	→
	> Establishing tiering mechanisms between policy levels > More environmentally and spatially coherent tourism strategies at all levels (from regional to local)	
> No long SEA tradition in the WR	METHODOLOGICAL INTEGRATION	→
	> Horizontal and vertical harmonisation of SEA with other assessment approaches and tools used in tourism planning	
> No extended coordination between tourism-related actors	INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION	→
	> Setting up of communication and coordination mechanisms between different tourism-related stakeholders groups from the same level (horizontal integration) or different levels (vertical integration)	

Conclusions

This paper was aimed to underline the contextual issues with which SEA institutionalisation and operationalisation are confronted in the tourism sector of the Walloon Region (Belgium), and to focus on the potential added-value of SEA to tourism planning in the Walloon Region (WR).

As tourism planning in the WR today is oriented according to an economic dominated sectoral approach and is weakly coordinated with other tourism-related policies (i.e. environmental and land use policies), we conclude that there is a general lack of integration in tourism development, both between strategies and actors. Furthermore, there is no SEA long practice in the WR and especially in the tourism sector. Hence, the SEA Directive is a strong driver in institutionalising and implementing SEA in the WR.

The emphasis on political, institutional, organisational and procedural issues – to which SEA implementation in the WR faces up – was directed at identifying potential contributions of SEA to tourism planning in the WR. The obvious integration issue in the WR was addressed in light of different components of the integrative capacity of SEA and this research approach gave us a better understanding of the ways how SEA could play a transformative role both of the immediate and the wider features of the WR tourism planning.

As a result, SEA can be seen as promoting a more sustainable tourism development through a proactive, integrative, cooperative and participative planning process. In practice, implementation of SEA directive requirements will force adaptation of policy-making processes. However, as there are margins of discretion in operationalising this new regulatory framework, the optimisation of the various added values of SEA will depend on other contextual positive factors : political will to take into account new considerations into policy-making, to work with an extended actor system, and to make a structural reform of certain organisational systems and traditions of decision-making ; opening technocratic policy-making to participation ; setting up of effective integration mechanisms and of methodological learning processes...

In the specific framework of tourism sector, SEA is also questioning the way how tourism development is planned and organised in the WR, and is opening new research grounds in the fields of policy evaluation, organisational analysis, environmental governance and public-private partnership formation.

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