

IAIA Prague – September 29, 2005

Session E5: Operating SEA Knowledge Centres

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Focus and approach

Two contributions were received, but one changed to another session and the presenter of second one could not find funding to participate in the conference.

The set-up of the session included:

- Introduction of the position paper by session leader (ppp);
- Short presentations of different EIA Centres, see listing below;
- Open discussion with some 15 participants during the first session and some individuals during the second session.

Presented (websites of) Knowledge Centres:

- EIA-Centre Manchester
<http://www.art.man.ac.uk/EIA/sea/index.htm>
- Ministry of Transport, The Netherlands (see attachment)
- EPC Hong Kong
http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/environmentinhk/eia_planning/sea/sea.html
- SEA-info helpdesk
<http://www.c4s.info/>
- Netherlands Commission for EIA, with focus on development cooperation
[http:// www.eia.nl/nceia](http://www.eia.nl/nceia) (including the SEA database) and poster
- Swedish EIA Centre
<http://www-mkb.slu.se/engelsk/indexe.htm>
- Eastern Africa Association for Impact Assessment
<http://www.ira-aaaia.org> and newsletter.

Main trends, issues and developments

SEA is developing very quickly in

- methodology in countries and institutions;
- number of experiences in practice;
- geographical distribution.

It is hard to hold track of what is happening. In view of good practice SEA and capacity building for SEA, SEA knowledge and experience should be shared. SEA Knowledge Centres could play a role herein.

SEA Knowledge Centres are described as a focal point for the collection and dissemination of 'knowledge' about SEA, covering a local, country, regional or wider area perspective, which

- may have a web presence, a physical presence or both;
- can be operated by any one of a range of types of organisation (e.g. government, academic, research institute, NGO, etc.). However, any centre will need to demonstrate a generally impartial outlook and lack of bias, in order to maintain credibility with a wide range of stakeholders. Next to an independent look, there is a need to deliver quality.

Profile of status, quality and effectiveness:

Current status; strength and weaknesses.

An SEA Knowledge Centre can deliver a range of outputs, but needs to be aware of being over-ambitious (see key findings below). Knowledge can be delivered in many formats, from providing links to other sources through a web page, to a physical library of a range of documentation, or through contacts with an helpdesk. An overview:

- Web links to relevant material (at country, regional or wider international level);
- Library;
- Information leaflets;
- Lists of SEA reports;
- Newsletter to update on developments;
- Research studies;
- Provision of training;
- Helpdesk.

In fact, there is a lot of information out there, more and more in digital format. But this does not mean you always can find what you are looking for. A lot depends on whether you have sufficient financial and technical resources available to access this knowledge (e.g. developed vs. developing countries; universities vs. government bodies).

Quality

Quality of information has a lot to do with the source; the person or institution behind the information is an indicator. But then you must know the arena. Databases within re-known institutions can be a source of good information.

Outcomes and benefits; effectiveness

Information at country level, which was indicated as useful to encourage a basic similar content of coverage (web and/or physical) encompasses the following key areas (as suggested during the A2 Asia session):

- Legislation;
- Guidance;
- (Listing of) SEA reports;
- Key case studies / lessons learned;
- Training facilities.

Exchange of theoretical knowledge and practical experiences should be done more effectively. Universities in both developed and developing countries can play an important role, if they stay in touch with practice.

Key findings

- The majority of the Knowledge Centres are focused on their own staff, and are only to a limited extent focusing on sharing with the outside world. Examples are the EIA-Centre of the Ministry of Transport in the Netherlands and the Swedish EIA-Centre, a network of some 1200 professionals. The latter receives some funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) for its particular remit regarding developing countries.
- A Knowledge Centre needs to be sustainable, at least in the short to medium term. Practice shows that e.g. databases for external users are not kept up-to-date anymore, as soon as funding stops (like the EU-funding for the database of the EIA-Centre Manchester).
- Realistically, a Knowledge Centre needs to start small with a regional focus based on existing initiatives, e.g. Centres focusing on Africa, Asia, Europe. There was no need felt for “one world-wide SEA knowledge centre”. Though IAIA plays a role, e.g. the list of websites, the special training page, the training facilities.
- The multi-nodal model (as proposed for Asia, involving a research centre in South Korea, the Environmental Protection Department in Hong Kong, together with a centre in Japan; all linked; providing material in two languages - their own and English) seems to provide a good basis for other regions. The linked nodes may lead to SEA knowledge networks, per continent but also between continents.
- A centre is more likely to be sustainable if it already has some remit relating to SEA and gathering related information, e.g. the Netherlands Commission for EIA with practical experience as well as an official helpdesk responsibility (till now focused on developing countries). This will also enhance its capacity to act as an effective focal point in SEA for the geographical area in serves. It is important to have incentives to contribute to such webpage or database.
- There should be a way that practice and research meets more often, with incentives for both parties.

Future (next year): a number of participants has indicated they will work on the country by country information provision, and support each other with information on the format and technical possibilities. Next year in Stavanger we will meet to discuss first results.

Petrie van Gent,
(supported by Carys E. Jones, Manchester)
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