

The Converging Evolution of Land-use Planning and Environmental Assessment: Theoretical Implications for SEA

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Terminology Used

- EIA is taken to refer to project level environmental assessment
- SEA is taken to refer to planning level environmental assessment
- EA (Environmental Assessment) is here used to incorporate both EIA and SEA

Early EIA Theory

- Was based on a modernist information processing model
- It drew upon science and the rational planning paradigm
- It postulated:
 - ➔ EIA adds environmental and social dimensions to economic and technical decisions
 - ➔ Information from EIA leads to improved decisions
 - ➔ More information leads to better decisions
 - ➔ EIA makes information accessible

Recent EA (and SEA) Theory

- Is based on postmodern models of governance
- It draws on political pluralist as well as institutionalist paradigms for planning
- It postulates
 - ➔ Power is as important as rationality
 - ➔ EA politicises technical decisions
 - ➔ EA fosters alliances and accommodations
 - ➔ EA asserts the primacy of environmental concerns
 - ➔ EA works to regulate / modulate proposals

Shifts in Planning Paradigms Concurrent with the Evolution of SEA

- A loosening of control over development. Plans are perceived as flexible guides, a response to centralism's weakness in social problem solving
- Entrepreneurial action (project-centred) in response to localised needs is preferred to comprehensive redevelopment according to central policies
- A change from technical to evaluative (value based) activities

The Social Functions of Planning

- 1 To promote the common interests of the community
 - 2 To consider external effects of proposals
 - 3 To improve the information base for decision making
 - 4 To considers equity and distributional effects of proposals
- (After Klosterman 1985)

Which Social Functions of Planning Does SEA Address?

- 1 Promoting the common interests of the community - *partially*
- 2 Considering the external effects of proposals - *yes*
- 3 Improving the information base for decision making - *yes*
- 4 Consideration of distributional effects - *yes*

Activities Common to Planning and SEA

- State intervention to protect collective rights
- Establishing a framework for collaboration
- Mobilising public and private participation
- Defining issues to be addressed
- Applying knowledge to action
- Reconciling conflicts and agreeing on actions
- Monitoring implementation of proposals

SEA Modulates Planning Proposals

For both private sector interests and public authorities:

- SEA entrusts planning to proponents, but simultaneously opens planning to multiple actors by engaging them in the decision process
- SEA enables proponents to test needs, purposes, and preferred alternatives before seeking formal approval for plans

- The injunction to consider alternatives takes SEA beyond subservience to market forces
- SEA opens proposals to challenge, thus ensuring unreasonably narrow needs and alternatives can be modified to be more broadly acceptable
- SEA evokes proactive rather than reactive corrective action

The Converging Evolution of SEA and Planning

- Both share a common institutionalist theory of governance
 - ➔ responsibility is shared amongst multiple agencies and actors
 - ➔ recognition of the importance of mutual adjustment
- Both see the State as the orchestrator of policy networks and proposal arbitration

- Both perceive plans and SEA guidelines as only one set of inputs for regulating proposals, others being
 - ⇒ Financial considerations
 - ⇒ Legal implications
 - ⇒ Social consequences
 - ⇒ Ecological consequences
 - ⇒ Stakeholder acceptability
- Both recognise social values as being as important as technical judgements
- Both are moving away from an emphasis on methods and procedures
- Both de-emphasize reporting

Conclusions

Planning and SEA have converged to a far greater extent than EIA and planning, not because of different methods and procedures between SEA and EIA, but because of theoretically different constructs of how these variants of EA actually work

The theoretical constructs on which EIA, SEA and EA are based deserve far greater attention than they have received from environmental professionals