

Module 1: Basics of SEA

History, Trends and Drivers of SEA

Maria Rosario Partidario

International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA)

New University of Lisbon, Portugal

The Roots of SEA

SEA shares original roots and common principles with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is normally applied to projects

Need/Motivation for SEA

- **Timing of decisions**
- **Nature of decisions**
- **Level of information**

Initial Calls for SEA

NEPA

(National Environmental Policy Act) 1969, U.S.

Required that all Federal agencies prepare a detailed statement by the responsible official for

“...every recommendation or report on proposals for legislation and other major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment” (Sec 102 [2] [c])

Initial Calls for SEA (cont.)

Regulations for implementing procedural provisions of NEPA define Major Federal Actions inclusive of:

- **New agency programs or regulations**
- **Broad actions relevant to policy in agency planning and decision-making**
- **Proposals by more than one agency**

***(US Council on Environmental Quality
Regulations 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, reprint
1992) (1502.4)***

Initial Form of SEA

USHUD

(United States Housing and Urban Development)

- **1975, Interim Guide for Environmental Assessment**
- **1981, Areawide Impact Assessment: a Guide Book**
- **e.g.1983, Utah Housing Development Areawide Study**
- **Programmatic Environmental Impact Studies as requested by the US CEQ Regulations since 1979**

Subsequently....

Many different countries / regions have developed approaches to SEA, in different forms:

- **Some departing from the project's EIA practice (for example the Netherlands , Hong-Kong SAR or the European Union)**
- **Others adjusting to the spatial planning practice in part (for ex. The United Kingdom, Sweden or Australia), or in full integration (as in New Zealand)**
- **Others attempting to follow the policy analysis rationale (for example Canada and Denmark)**

and....

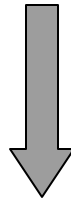
The scope of issues considered in the assessment has also been different:

- **Some focus on an environmental scope limited to physical and ecological issues**
- **Others incorporate social and cultural issues in the environmental concept**
- **Others prefer to adopt a wider sustainability scope, including environmental, social and economic issues**

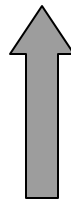
Methodological Approaches to SEA

In short, two dominant schools had influence

POLICY / PLANNING SCHOOL



SEA



**PROJECT IMPACT
ASSESSMENT SCHOOL**

Methodological Approaches to SEA

These two schools influenced different models methodological approaches to SEA, for example:

- **EIA-based model -- the same used for project's EIA**
- **Integrated model -- environmental assessment as part of policy -making and planning**
- **Decision-centred model -- policy-making and planning determine the process, SEA the framework for assessment**

Late 1980's - 1990's Follow-on

The development of SEA showed:

- **EIA expanding to apply to programmes, plans and policies (EIA of PPP)**
- **The planning practice calling on its substantive analysis and assessment responsibilities to incorporate the principles and practice of EIA**
- **The sustainability paradigm calling for wider perspectives and integrated approaches**

Currently....

We observe multiple forms of SEA.

Sometimes the same tag - SEA - is used for different outcomes; and also different tags are used for similar outcomes

This happens because of:

- **Methodological influences in designing SEA**
- **Cultural differences in decision-making systems**

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...

...because of the perspective that matters...

...because of 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 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

Drivers of SEA

- **Sustainability agenda**
- **Environmental policy, including biodiversity**
- **Integrated decision-making**
- **Quality assurance**

Sustainability in SEA

Can be

- **a benchmarks against which objectives and criteria in SEA can be measured; or**
- **a strong policy that helps to shape new forms of decision-making in support of sustainable development**

SEA Facilitates Sustainability by:

- **Establishing a broad perspective and addressing strategic options;**
- **Articulating sectoral policies and institutional contexts in a policy framework;**
- **Contributing to create a strategic culture in decision-making;**
- **Ensuring good communication mechanisms and wide involvement of different perspectives;**
- **Monitoring decisions to determine actual outcomes.**

Environmental Policy

- **The sustainability focus can only be successful if the environmental policy drives the political and international agenda**
- **The Biodiversity Convention (1992) call for integrated approaches at planning and programme levels has been a key driver for SEA**
- **SEA must become strategic and instrumental as a facilitator in high-level policy-making**

Integrated Decision-making

Chapter 8 of Agenda 21 - Integrating environment and development in decision-making at policy, planning and management levels

The nature of SEA as a facilitator in decision-making to help ensure a broad perspective on how the different parts may come together, has a determinant role to play

Quality Assurance

Early beginning...

...better chances to get it right

Future Trends

- **Sustainability agenda as a key driver in SEA**
- **SEA more as a framework to facilitate the social / political side in decision processes**
- **EIA-based models increasingly replaced by integrated / decision-centred approaches**
- **SEA expanding in multiple forms - more countries in developed and developing world adopting SEA to fit their purpose**

Summary of Key Messages

- **SEA shares EIA roots**
- **Two main schools have influenced SEA methodologically: the policy/planning and the EIA schools**
- **SEA has, and will, evolve differently, depending on decision-making systems and cultures**
- **Sustainability is on the mainstream of future SEA development**