

Effectiveness of the Environmental Impact Assessment

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ABSTRACT:*The common experience of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as an anticipatory instrument for environmental protection has given rise to significant controversy as to the degree to which it achieves its objectives. This was assessed in terms of the 'effectiveness' of the EIA, particularly as the discourse shifted away from procedural implementation concerns to the more specific aims of the EIA and its role in wider decision-making contexts. The relatively poor degree of control of the EIA on planning decisions, which is increasingly due to its rationalist beginnings, has been shown by empirical studies. The object of this article is to steer this debate towards the basic political aims of the EIA, which, it is argued, provide an overlooked, but solid, foundation for the reform of the EIA. As a result of this redirection, a range of illustrative suggestions are made to enable the EIA to take a more determinative role in decision-making and to contribute to more sustainable development planning trends.*

KEYWORDS:*Environmental impact assessment, Founding purpose, Effectiveness.*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the assessment of the impacts that are likely to result from a significant environmental impact project (or other action). It is a structured mechanism for evaluating potential impacts before a decision is made about whether permission to proceed should be granted to a proposal or not[1]. Among other items, the EIA needs the publication of an EIA study detailing the possible major impacts in detail. Consultation and public engagement are integral to this assessment. Thus, the EIA is an anticipatory, participatory instrument of environmental management. The most immediate goal of the EIA, which emerges directly from these roles, is to provide decision-makers with an indication of the possible environmental effects of their actions. This is with the goal of ensuring that growth only continues in an appropriate way. (To this end, the EIA offers mechanisms for proposals for implementation to be revised where appropriate and to improve the potential adverse effects. While the EIA can contribute to the withdrawal of such proposals, it focuses more strongly on mitigating any possible negative environmental impacts.)

Effectiveness of the EIA

There has been no lack of studies into (and commentary on) the degree to which EIA is achieving its goals, in parallel with the widespread take-up of EIA[2]. These research, performed by academic and regulatory bodies, included the study of particular EIA cases and the components of EIA procedures; wide-ranging, comparative analyses of EIA procedures have also been carried out. Uh, programs. Many of these studies is content to investigate whether or not the EIA were carried out in compliance with its own methodological criteria. Increasing emphasis has, however, been focused on evaluating EIA according to more substantive standards and, in particular, on whether EIA results in the types of results usually sought (Cashmore et al., 2004)[3]. In terms of EIA 'effectiveness,' this has usually been

couched. Simply put, the EIA efficacy assessment is intended to decide how much the EIA makes a difference. This question should preferably be answered with regard to the underlying aims of the EIA, such as 'restoring and preserving the standard of the atmosphere' (NEPA, Section 101(a)). However, there are evident problems in making a comparison of the environmental[4].

With those with EIA, circumstances that could prevail without EIA. Not only is this a very abstract analogy to be made, but the different facets of environmental quality that could be enhanced as a result of the EIA is difficult to describe in a measurable way. The principles of sustainable growth and sustainability, which are gradually being embraced as the basic priorities of the EIA, are much more elusive, but remain ill-defined at best (Baker et al., 1997; Mebratu, 1998)[5]. These definitions may be useful aspirational statements of the ultimate intent of the EIA, but they remain too indeterminate to allow the efficacy of the EIA in this regard to be considered meaningfully. The basic regulatory goal of ensuring that environmental factors are taken into account in decision making is more useful in trying to assess the efficiency of the EIA. In legislation, guidelines and scholarly literature, this is also stated to be the aim of the EIA (e.g. Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999; Glasson et al., 2005; Sadler, 2005; It's 1996). Therefore, when a construction project or a strategic plan is initiated, the EIA needs the possibility of considering adverse environmental impacts and carefully evaluating possible effects; the results of this analysis should then be integrated into the proposal's decisions. It is in the sphere of decision-making regarding particular projects that the It is best to measure the impact of EIA; Sadler (1996) refers to the impact the mechanism has on decision-making as the 'litmus test' of the efficacy of EIA. In other words, we have to turn to the proximate, rather than substantive, target of the EIA (Sadler, 1996) to find measurable effectiveness criteria[6].

CONCLUSION

The EIA has become an internationally recognized and proven method for environmental management over the past 35 years or so. Over this era, the EIA procedures have been strengthened and the ability of the EIA has been improved in several different contexts, including developed, emerging and transitional economies. There is no doubt that EIA has made a difference in development patterns through design changes, institutional learning, and participation of stakeholders, particularly in more mature EIA systems. As a result of the increased use of alteration or mitigation, the use of tougher permit requirements and, sometimes, the non-implementation of potentially environmentally adverse plans that may have been previously accepted, the consistency of decisions concerning the EIA has improved. Nevertheless, there has been growing frustration with the fact that the effect of the EIA on development choices is relatively limited and that it seems to be falling short of its full potential. Also the most urgent objectives are to ensure that the possible environmental impacts of changes are adequately taken into account and, where necessary, only enhanced where necessary to a restricted degree, reached. While difficult to determine, the achievement of its substantive goal of leading to more sustainable patterns of activity appears to be far more elusive. This may be partly because this objective is in itself ill-defined, but it also betrays a failure to integrate any specific reason for working to that end into EIA schemes. A number of practical steps to improve the EIA structures have been proposed and many have been adopted over the years. These have typically centered on the implementation or enhancement of appropriate procedural criteria, underpinned by guidelines, training and study capacity-building steps. The case has also been raised for structured frameworks to ensure the

'follow-up' of the EIA with respect to specific projects, such as ties with environmental management systems. However, the impact of these measures remains minimal and, in general, the EIA continues to make only relatively minor revisions to development proposals. This disappointing performance has led to a growing questioning of the essence of the EIA and a realization that its inherently rationalist approach is out of touch with decision-making realities. This has started to concentrate attention on the context of decision-making itself, suggesting that the EIA should be more closely adapted to the processes it aims to impact. Effectiveness studies also show, on a positive note, that the EIA is already more implicitly involved with decision-making, suggesting that the EIA provides more far-reaching benefits than those strictly associated with concrete project decisions.

EIA has been given its most strategic sense of mission by the ongoing aspiration that EIA should contribute to the larger effort to bring about sustainable growth, but this has not been explicitly translated into EIA structures, principles or methodologies. Setting up this mission will be a way of re-establishing the EIA's founding goals and giving it a greater meaning. Determinative role in the processes of project planning. For instance, it is likely time to reconsider the essence of Caldwell's (1998) 'unambiguous mandatory clause' (Section 2) and give the EIA a legislative purpose. A ton could be achieved by increasing the weight of environmental resources and capabilities in current EIA systems. By ensuring that the EIA is related to the particular objectives of environmentally sustainable development, the same aim can be achieved. The effectiveness of the EIA would be reinforced if the underlying aim was to achieve 'no net environmental destruction' and, if this could not be shown, to incorporate the application of the precautionary principle in decision making.

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