

Impact assessment, sustainable development, and inter-generational equity

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Impact assessment (IA)

- An anticipatory strategy:
 - to guide the systematic and proportionate examination of the wider implications of proposed actions, before we commit to those actions
 - implications for people and communities, natural and built environments
 - looking ahead, over the reasonably foreseeable life of a proposal
- A core tool for policy and plan making, project design and decision-making
 - Our best way to minimise “unexpected consequences”

I'm discussing *ex ante* IA: prior to decisions, as distinct from “impact assessment” in *ex post* sense: have our policies had the desired impact.

What impact assessment contributes

- Information about wider implications
 - wider than intended outcomes of proposals...the unintended outcomes
 - due to direct and indirect pathways of cause and effect; also induced effects, cumulative effects, etc.
 - those that might cause harm after a proposal is implemented, but also wider benefits
- Helps to shape policies and plans as they develop
- Contributes to the project cycle, ideally from earliest stages of design through to fine-tuning to suit local conditions
- Enables stakeholders to participate in processes on an informed basis

Impact assessment as process

- Many are familiar with environmental impact assessment (EIA)
 - other names: EA, ESIA, ESHIA, etc. depending on jurisdiction
- Also strategic environmental assessment (SEA), for policy and plan levels of decision-making
 - EU, Canada, China, Australia....
- But IA does not require an institutional basis...
- IA as a way of thinking, to complement other processes
 - part of the design process for policies, plans, projects
 - something we can use for *any* decision that may have repercussions for others, and for the natural and built environments

IA and SDGs

- IA can support all policy processes associated with the SDGs
- There are also specific forms of IA that may help with particular SDGs
 - health impact assessment; social impact assessment; ecological impact assessment; cultural impact assessment; etc.
 - within an integrated IA approach, or stand-alone
- IA can be a community-led process, help empower marginal communities, indigenous communities, etc.



Inter-generational equity

- IA examines wider implications over the life of a policy, plan or project
 - using a sustainability framework
 - identifying beneficial as well as adverse implications
 - promoting an integrated perspective
 - ecological, social, cultural, health....
- Overall, IA seeks to avoid, minimise or mitigate adverse impacts in short, medium and longer terms
 - if trade-offs cannot be avoided, these must be transparent in assessments
- Future generations served by minimising adverse changes now, retaining options and opportunities for the future

IA resources

- There is a well established global IA community of practice
 - largely linked to the use of EIA for licensing major projects
 - driven either by national procedures, or by funding agency requirements
- The use of IA at policy level growing
 - strategic assessments of various kinds
 - regulatory impact assessment (RIA) used by many governments
- Resources, guidance, training widely available
 - International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) provide an international “hub”, with 15+ national affiliates
 - and links to WB, ADB, IFC, WHO, UNEP....

Thank you for listening

For those wanting more insight into IA, in May 2020 I recorded a 40 min webinar: “Understanding Impact Assessment” for IAIA. This available on their website at: <https://www.iaia.org/webinar-details.php?ID=27>