

Assessment and Planning– reasons for confusion, possible solutions

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Analytical approach

is focusing on the object – environment is physical and outer reality, created by objects and contrasting subject, culture/man and nature/environment are confronting elements. Nature is protected against people.

Phenomenological approach

puts emphasis on the relationship between object and subject – man creates the environment, just like the environment creates man, man is the integral part of the environment. Nature is protected for people.

Those two **different approaches lead us to different acting**. The analytical approach leads to expert- and control-centered acting. The phenomenological approach leads to opened process oriented acting, to expertise by involvement.

Two definitions of environment

Rio documents (1992)

economical, social and natural environment.

European Spatial Planning Charter (1983)

economical, social, cultural, natural environment.

Avoiding of cultural environment is the main reason for a certain failure of the Rio process.

In spatial planning cultural environment is extremely important, because settlement, landscape, townscape planning deal with are first of all cultural phenomena.

The Ljubljana Declaration on the Territorial Dimension of Sustainable Development (16-17.09.2003) of CEMAT (Conference Europeenne des Ministres Responsables de l'Aménagement du Territoire) stressed that sustainable development cannot be regarded only as to the natural environment, it is a complex concept that must secure also economic and social sustainability and where in the context of spatial planning cultural sustainability acquires particular importance.

Assessment – instrument for control of decision or instrument for decision-making

Analytical approach

assessment as instrument for controlling of planning decisions in the end of planning process.

Phenomenological approach

assessment as an essential part of planning working methods, that should be used during all the planning process and by using of what we can make/prepare better and more balanced planning decisions.

These different understandings about the role and position of assessment in the planning process are the main reason for disputes, confusions and conflicts between representatives of different approaches.

Spatial planning is not a sectoral activity

We can observe that the regulations of the Directive are more or less appropriate for sectoral strategic documents but not fitting so well with spatial planning. The idea of assessment is mainly initiated by environmentalists. Spatial planning is usually treated by environmentalists as a sectoral activity. Spatial planning is however not sectoral activity, it is an interdisciplinary and interactive activity. Just because of that it is very difficult or even impossible to apply the same rules to a sectoral strategic plan and to a spatial planning.

Difference between project level and strategic planning level

Experience of assessment of likely impacts of implementation of strategic document in the sense of the Directive is limited in Europe. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the project/investment stadium have much longer and bigger experience. Methods of EIA are much easier to apply than possible methods on strategic level. In EIA you usually deal with some impacts that have more or less concrete characteristics. In strategic level, specially in spatial planning you deal with a large complex of likely effects. Usually in strategic level its not possible to talk about concrete characteristics of impacts, in this very comprehensive/general level of planning you should try to forecast what likely effects we can have on the result of implementation of this or that planning decision. So we can say that there is a **clear difference between EIA and assessment on strategic level - EIA is defining concrete impacts, assessment on strategic level mainly forecast likely effects**. The problem is that those who are used to work on EIA level try to apply the rules and working methods of EIA to strategic level and expect assessment on strategic level to provide the same detailed result that are possible for EIA.

Assessment – team work or expert work

Answer to this question (variations of possible answers) depends crucially on:

- what kind of approach we take,
- how we define environment,
- do we see planning as sectoral or interdisciplinary activity.

Analytical approach - planning as a sectoral activity,

- limit environment only to natural environment
- over-estimate the role of the expert.

Phenomenological approach - stress the importance of team-work where necessary experts are involved during all the process. Usually this approach secure a more balanced result of assessment.

Assessment was initiated **mainly because of the unsatisfying quality of planning**.

The **reason** for unsatisfying planning is usually that planning still remains

maestro/expert-planning where involvement of the general public/local community is too low. The **paradox is** that when fighting against maestro/expert-planning the

environmentalist in good will to avoid mistakes of planning demands an **overestimated role to the environmental expert**.

Planning is an assessment-process

Good and balanced planning is a process where weighting/consideration/assessment/motivation of different planning decisions is the essential part of the process – weighting/consideration/assessment/motivation has been an essential part of good and balanced planning through all the history of contemporary planning.

So for good planners it has been always a question why requirement for additional assessment is necessary at all. If we agree that planning is an assessment-process then we end up with the question – what is assessment of assessment. This question is again one reason for confusion and conflicts around impact assessment and planning. So the only conclusion can be that we don't need separate impact assessment but the quality and essence of weighting/consideration/assessment/motivation of different planning decisions during the planning process and in the planning report must improved.

As conclusion

for this part of my presentation we can say that the main reason for confusion and conflicts around impact assessment and between environmentalists and planners is different understanding about the ways how to improve the quality of planning and how to make spatial planning decisions more balanced. The extreme of understandings is that for planners weighting/consideration/assessment of planning decisions is an essential part of planning process but environmentalists would like to control planning decisions by impact assessment.

Both, environmentalists and planners have principal agreement in one point – improvement of quality of spatial planning is absolutely necessary.

Possible solutions

LEGAL

METHODOLOGICAL

Legislation

Environment is defined

Result of assessment is defined

- *Spatial planning is democratic and functional long-term planning of spatial development which co-ordinates and integrates the development plans of various fields and which, in a balanced manner, takes into account the long-term directions in and needs for the development of the economic, social, cultural and natural environment.*
- *The task of comprehensive plan is to assess likely economic, social and cultural effects of the proposed spatial development and the likely effects on the natural environment and, on the basis thereof, to establish conditions for sustainable and balanced spatial development.*

Legislation

Complete regulations in one law

In Estonia assessment-regulations were located into separate act. It was initiative of environmentalists.

Conflict and disconnection of separate acts would be specially deep if planning act is based on the phenomenological approach and assessment-act is based on the extreme analytical approach.

Over-regulation must be avoided

Methodological solutions

Reporting

The objectives of a comprehensive plan are to:

- form the principles for the spatial development of the rural municipality or city;
- assess the potential economic, social and cultural impact of the proposed spatial development and the potential impact on the natural environment and, on the basis thereof, to establish conditions for sustainable and balanced spatial development;
- determine general use and building provisions for land and water areas;
- designate the areas and cases outside cities and towns where preparation of a detailed plan is mandatory;
- designate built-up areas of cultural and environmental value, valuable arable land, landscapes and natural biotic communities, and to establish the provisions for their protection and use;
- establish the conditions to ensure the functioning of the green network;
- define the location of roads, streets, railways, ports and airports and the general principles of traffic management;
- define the location of principal utility network routes and technical infrastructure;
- designate recreation and leisure areas;
- make proposals, where necessary, for specification, amendment or termination of the protection regime for areas or objects placed under protection;
- make proposals, where necessary, for placing areas and objects under protection;
- take account of general national defence needs and, where necessary, to designate national defence areas and specify the boundaries of national defence areas designated by the county plan;
- make proposals to prevent, by way of planning, the risk of criminal activity in urban areas;

Reporting

Usually there is separate chapter/paragraph for every objective in the planning report. If we stay in the position that assessment is an instrument for decision-making, then it means that weighting/consideration/assessment/motivation of decisions on every objective can be described only in corresponding chapter/paragraph i.e. motivation can't be separated from decision into separate chapter/paragraph.

In Estonia we had tried to fulfill obligation of reporting in this way and according to our experience it rises the quality of the plan and planning report.

Separation of environmental reporting into a separate chapter/part of the planning report will only harm the quality of spatial planning and demolish/spoil/ruin complete planning process and planning report. If we demand the environmental report to be a separate part of the planning report we ignore the interactive and interdisciplinary nature of planning

In spatial planning **planning-report is on the same assessment-report**

Methodological solutions

Role of expert

Usually the most necessary expert is not an environmental expert but process-building expert

Expert provide administration and other participants of the process with necessary specific information

Expert don't evaluate/criticize planning document or solutions but by participation in the planning process secure balanced and sustainable solutions

Local wise men, active people should be treated too as experts – some times they know and can help as even more than academic experts.

Expert don't have central/key-role, but supporting role

Participation

If the process is built up so that all necessary/possible parties, including necessary experts, are involved it is nearly a guarantee that the amount of weighting/consideration/assessment/motivation of different planning decisions is sufficient

Suggestion/request

Please lets finish

using of the term ***strategic environmental assessment***.

This term defaces the meaning of activity behind it. We should talk about *assessment of likely effects of the implementation of the plan*. If it is a too long term lets talk just about *assessment*.

Principal question

Why it is necessary to introduce requirements of assessment into legislation and into planning practice

To improve environmental consciousness of all parties participating in the planning process

The more environmental and cultural values are recognized protected and enhanced by environmental consciousness and **civic duty** of people, the more we can speak about **a society of sustainable development, society of environmental culture**

Mental values determine