Strategic Environmental Assessment Follow up

Position paper

Aleg Cherp (cherpa@ceu.hu)

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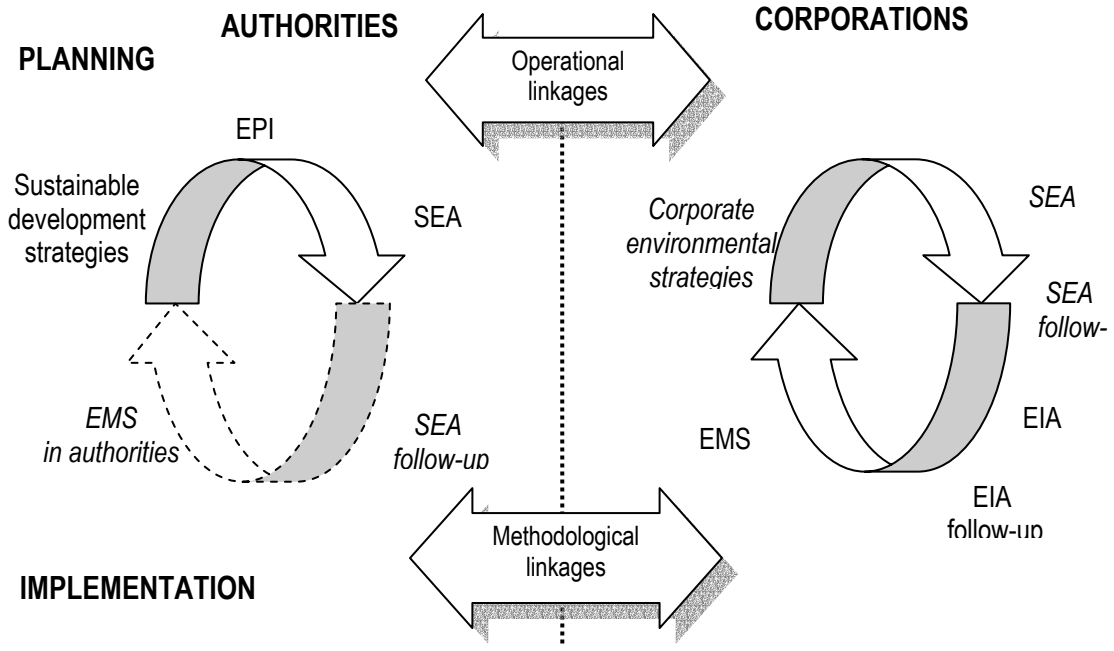
Background

There has been a growing recognition that SEA should be accompanied by "follow-up" activities adjusting its prediction and recommendations in light of the information obtained during the implementation of the policy, plan or programme (PPP). The concept of SEA follow-up is operationally important because it "closes" the environmental planning and management cycle as shown, in a simplified diagram, on Figure 1. The diagram illustrates that SEA follow up may be used by both authorities and corporations, however, in the former it is unlikely to be linked with or supported by project-level EIA.

Figure 1. Key elements of environmental planning, assessment and management tools in public authorities and corporations



Notes: italics designate emerging and less established concepts

SDS - sustainable development strategies; EPI - Environmental Policy Integration, EMS –Environmental Management System. *Methodological* linkages imply transfer of a method or approach from one tool to another. *Operational* linkages imply transfer of goals, targets, indicators or information between the tools. Some linkages are both methodological and operational.

The SEA follow-up thinking has been largely derived from that on EIA, where there is an increasing body of literature and a consolidating international consensus (see e.g. Arts (1998), Nitz and Holland (2000), Morrison-Saunders and Arts (2004), Morrison-Saunder and Arts (forthcoming)). Morrison-Saunders and Arts (2004) definition of the principal components of of the project-level EIA follow-up is applicable to SEA as well[1]:

- **monitoring** (eg baseline data collection, impact monitoring, compliance monitoring, state of the environment monitoring etc.);
- **evaluation** (ie appraisal of monitoring results against established benchmarks);
- **management** (ie making decisions and implementing appropriate project and environmental management actions in response to monitoring and evaluation findings); and
- **communication** (ie informing all stakeholders in the EA process of EA follow-up outcomes).

They also distinguish between three levels of EA follow-up: the *micro* level focusing on individual cases, the *macro* level focusing on EA systems and the *meta* level focusing on concepts of environmental assessment. All three levels of EA follow-up are linked to enable wider learning and communication. Thus defined, follow-up encompasses not only an environmental assessment and management tool, but an environmental policy analysis tool as well.

Further distinction is typically drawn between the 1st party EA follow up (by the proponent), the 2nd party follow up (by the regulator) and the 3rd party follow up (by other stakeholders). EIA follow up has to date occurred under different institutional arrangements including voluntary (e.g. in Scottish Power, see Marshall (2004)) and regulatory (e.g. in Hong Kong, see Au and Hui (2004)) schemes.

The current thinking on EA follow up also highlights challenges and directions for future developments which, essentially, go "beyond project-level follow up" (see Sadler (2004) and Arts (1998))

- **area-oriented follow-up** (eg based on regional approaches and state of the environment reporting);
- **SEA follow-up** (see below);
- **sector-oriented follow-up** (eg based on groups of similar industries or thematic similarities for different project types);
- **multiple party follow-up** (ie moving away from follow-up driven principally by a single stakeholder type to more integrated and participative programs benefiting all parties in the EIA process) ; and
- **sustainability assurance approach to follow-up** (ie as with the growing interest in sustainability assessment, there is a similar opportunity to expand follow-up tools into this important area).

[1] In this case we speak about EA (EIA + SEA) follow up unless otherwise noted.

EIA follow-up is conceptually strongly linked with EMS. The classic linkage through an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) developed as an outcome of the EIA process has not only been extensively described, but also operationalized, e.g. in the World Bank policies (Goodland and Mercier (1999)). In a recent comprehensive publication on the subject, Sánchez and Hacking (2002) suggest a framework for linking an EIA process and an ISO 14001-compliant EMS. They emphasize the importance of the overarching 'capacity management' which should take place during the EIA process and EMS implementation in order to strengthen the entity's capacity to deal with environmental issues in both 'preventive' and 'curative' modes.

SEA follow-up

Despite this wealth of literature on EIA follow-up, publications on SEA follow-up are much more limited. The need for SEA follow-up has been noted from the earliest SEA publications (e.g. Lee and Walsh (1992))[2]. The researchers have generally noted both great challenges and a significant need to have an effective SEA follow-up, without, however, providing many specific suggestions or practical examples.

In probably the only specialized paper on this topic, Partidario and Fischer (forthcoming) recognize that despite increasing interest, the thinking on SEA follow-up is only emerging and is largely non-formalized. SEA follow-up practice is at the stage of informal experimentation and is primarily focused on monitoring activities. These authors also primary focus on monitoring and evaluation activities within SEA follow-up where they identify important challenges contrasting with the project-level experiences.

The main challenge in SEA follow-up is that impacts of PPPs are difficult to trace as they are normally influenced by factors external to the PPP which is subject to an SEA. Likewise, appropriate management responses may be needed at administrative (national, sectoral, municipal, etc.) and decision-making (policy, plan or programme) levels different from the one at which the PPP was adopted (and SEA conducted).

Morrison-Saunders and Arts (2004) consider that broadly similar approaches can be applied to EIA and SEA follow up, though they recognize that the existing experience primarily relates to project-level follow up. Partidario and Fischer (forthcoming) suggest that approaches to SEA follow-up will vary depending on the type of a strategic action to which an SEA is applied. They identify four goals of SEA follow-up[3] which broadly correspond to the four types of SEA follow-up: conformance, performance, uncertainty and dissemination.

[2] See a review in Partidario and Fischer (forthcoming)

[3] (a) checking conformance of PPP to the one approved; (b) checking satisfactory performance at lower decision-making tiers; (c) managing actual impacts and dealing with uncertainties; and (c) disseminating experience for improving the practice of SEA and decision-making.

In summary, the current thinking seems to emphasize the importance of SEA follow-up, however does not suggest any tools distinct from project-level follow-up. The existing literature seems to struggle with the attempt to establish "causal links" between strategic decisions and their consequences. It is reasonable to suggest that finding such causal links in most cases is both unfeasible and unnecessary. Moreover, looking for such causal links is somewhat at odds with the increasingly widespread notion of SEA as focusing on *objectives* rather than *impacts*.

Thus, the current focus of the SEA follow-up theories on monitoring and evaluation[4] should be expanded by the emphasis on management, which was shown to be important elements in EIA follow-up. It may be reasonable to suggest that in the same way as project-level EIA is linked to corporate EMS the public sector SEA should be linked to EMS in public authorities (see Figure 1).

At the same time the connection to the EMS in public authorities and SEA is rarely, if at all, mentioned. In particular it is unclear whether such EMS can play any role in SEA follow-up[5]. Moreover, it is not clear to which extent EMS in public authorities has, so far, been "strategic". In particular, a frequent criticism is that local authorities employ EMS to deal with their own affairs, but not with their policies (which are often subject to SEA) or "indirect impacts". (This observation was made in Sweden (Naturvårdsverket (2004)), New Zealand (Cockrean (2000)), Japan (Srinivas and Yashiro (1999)), and the Netherlands (Emilsson and Hjelm (no date)).

Issues for discussion

Since SEA follow up is a novel topic, any paper addressing it from a conceptual or empirical perspective will be welcomed. In particular, the organizers would like to discuss the following issues:

1. What are (or should be) the key elements of SEA follow-up?
2. How do these relate to the elements of the project-level EIA follow-up?
3. How can the specifics of SEA, in particular its focus on objectives, be reflected in the follow-up arrangements?
4. What are the "management" elements of SEA follow-up?

[4] This focus can be partially explained by the EU SEA Directive's legal requirements which stipulate only one type of SEA follow-up, namely, monitoring. Similar requirements are presented in the Dutch and Finish SEA legislation (see Partidario and Fischer (forthcoming))

[5] Netherwood and Shayler (1998) argue that one advantage of the EMAS process in local governments is that it can "provide basis for environmental policy, objective and targets and can also link the findings of other initiatives such as the environmental appraisals of development plans [i.e. SEA – AC] … into the EMS process" (pp. 229-230). Thus, a direct suggestion of using EMAS in local governments in connection with SEA of land-use plans is provided, but no operational, procedural or methodological suggestions are elaborated.

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