

SEA for strategic evaluation in planning

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Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) can contribute to evaluation in planning by strategically enabling environmental integration and assessment throughout the planning process. The presentation addresses SEA as a decision-centred instrument, that is driven by the dynamics of the planning process and which is focused on assessing strategic processes, rather than plans or programmes. It aims at the integration of environmental issues and the identification of sustainability paths, defining SEA as a strategic facilitator of sustainability processes. A decision-centred SEA means that SEA is flexible and tailor-made to each decision process, conceived as a framework of key elements and activities that need to be strategically positioned to enable SEA to play its decision support role and to ensure its added-value to decision-making. This also requires great flexibility in planning, yet structured as opposed to disorganized. It is through the structured, rather than prescriptive, conciliation of both planning and SEA processes that the dialogue can be established. The presentation points out in particular to how SEA can be made methodologically more strategic, using an approach based on the identification of key integrated factors - the critical factors for decision-making - that influence and structure the whole SEA approach. This call for the consideration of technical and other supra-technical dimensions, in which the socio-political role of SEA is determinant. Which means that SEA need to act strategically in relation to why doing, who to engage, what to consider and when to influence the planning process.

Keywords: SEA; sustainability; integration; strategic approaches.