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## STATUS, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Fast, forward and more - these are slogans of the society we have been members of. The development of the society has been directed towards an unlimited growth of the economy and welfare.

Most people have not been concerned with other people's problems, with problems of exhausted raw material sources that the next generation might be missing.

The nowadays state of the environment can be considered critical and could result in an endangered existence of human beings. This might be caused by not only interfering into the ecological balance in a negative way, by environmental devastation but by the uncapability to solve the problem of the social process as well. In spite of the above mentioned facts we pretend not to know about anything not to hear anything.

An alternation to this development could be the so called permanent process of sustainable development of the society connected with the environmental protection. The process can be characterized as an achievement for harmony between man and the nature in respect of needs of further generations. This requirement can be carried out only if the lifestyle change.

We all will come to a conclusion that we all have to search for a new process of the society development.

The process must include activities connected with the environmental protection and will result in a balance of human beings and environment. Thus the environmental protection must include all the efforts connected with forming a healthy environment and its protection, with the rational use of natural sources.

All the means used in the process of controlling the man's activities and behaviour within the environment and the methods of protecting the environment are called - the tools of ecological policy.

*Eco-politics is a process which consists of many phases:*

- identification of the problem
- identification of the goals and strategies
- legislation
- promotion
- development
- results - conclusions

*Within the particular phases, there are different tools used:*

- laws and policies
- economic tools (taxes, charges, repayments payroll taxes, reimbursements)
- organizational tools
- land use planning
- education
- information and monitoring
- science and research

While the above mentioned instruments are more or less formalized tools (policy regulations, organization of public administration, tools of economic stimulations), the methods are ways of integrating the instruments.

*The methods are:*

- planning
- evaluation of chances and definition of priorities
- integrative protection of the environment
- evaluation of influences on the environment
- promotion of ecological requirements

In my thesis research I focus my attention mainly to the effects of spatial changes in this process.

Basically I will attempt to evaluate and specify particular methods and tools which participate in the development of the process. I am aware that the methods are not standard; therefore, it is quite difficult to find any possible logical solutions.

In the further development of my thesis research I would like to concentrate on the diverse tools. This offers a great opportunity for further realization.

To solve this problem I have gathered information from the book SEA - Status, Challenges and Future Directions. The book is a report which deals with the strategic evaluation of the environment introduces SEA, its potential and feasibility for integrating environmental considerations into decision making at the policy, plan, and programme levels. SEA is a systematic process for evaluating the environmental consequences of proposed policy, plan, or programme initiatives.

In the framework of the International Study the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment organized a workshop on SEA in

December 1994. There were 45 participants from 22 countries and organizations from different parts of the world presented. As an evidence there were papers on practical SEA experiences prepared to precede a national workshop. Those papers are published in a separate document "Environmental Assessment of Policies; Briefing papers on experience in selected countries."

The basis of this report is formed by the papers and discussions in this workshop. The intention of the authors, Barry Sadler and Rob Verheem was to give an almost complete overview of the diverse aspects, development and directions of SEA. Their work on this theme that was far more than expected deserves great gratitude.

I consider this overview a basis for the growing practice and effective use of SEA. Thus, by learning from the experience and successes of other people, the practice of SEA will grow. The reporting on experience with approaches of SEA can be seen as a very important mechanism.

*The book captured my attention with the following methods:*

- divide the problems into categories
- solve the problems
- organize the problematic topics

For my thesis research I found a very interesting part of the book about how and when to use SEA. This section pulls together the previous discussion. It outlines key points and perspectives regarding the use of SEA.

SEA is a systematic process for examining and incorporating environmental considerations into the pre-project levels of decision making, policy, plan and programme design.

*The advantages of this approach include:*

- strengthening and streamlining project EIA (Environmental Impact Analysis),
- identifying and offsetting cumulative effects at an early stage, and
- addressing the causes, rather than treating the symptoms, of environmental deterioration.

For the long term, SEA should be regarded as a temporary or transitional instrument that leads toward the goal of integrated policy making, planning and programming.

SEA can be used to check the environmental credentials of development proposals or compensate partially for the absence of policy integration.

The inclusion of social and economic considerations in SEA is optional on existing arrangements and alternatives range from integrated analysis to separate approaches. This must be coordinated at some stage to clarify the trade-offs to be made by decision makers.

In practice, the scope and form of SEA will vary with the type of policy, plan or programme under review.

*A crucial question is:*

- whether or not the proposal will initiate or determine specific projects and activities (type, form, size, etc.), and
- will likely result in direct or indirect environmental effects

This distinction gives a preliminary indication of the suitability of applying either impact analysis methods to identify direct environmental effects or other modes of policy appraisal to examine indirect environmental effects (issues, implications).

SEA could be interpreted as a promising approach to incorporating environmental considerations into the mainstream of policy making. The program leads toward sustainable planning. SEA provides the basis for an integrated approach. This approach to environmental assessment is derived from the foundation of experience with project of Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA).

The introduction of SEA can help to refocus and streamline project EIAs, making those more consequential and reducing the time and effort involved in their preparation. For example, SEA will help to clarify and establish an integrated policy framework of goals, objectives and principles against which project EIA can be conducted effectively.

Looking to the future, there is a call in many organizations and countries to look closer and specify SEA research. To reach this, the role of public might be important. It might be understood as one of the elements of an effective SEA process. As it was already said, SEA needs the continuous and complex planning. Not to mention the culture, traditions, beliefs, values and attitudes of specific countries or even regions. The proper selection of methods and tools as well as time and public involvement would contribute to rapid and effective progress. Sure, the role of environmental agencies should not be omitted. The development of the policies, planning and programmes themselves ought to be accomplished by the assistance of the appropriate environmental authorities.

Regarding the information used in the book, it can be said, that the quality of the up-to-date information on environmental conditions, trends and issues for practice was not only exhaustive but also challenging. The topic I have chosen for my thesis research and also the number of the books and literature available was quite limited. There are only a few libraries offering technical English books in the Slovak Republic.

To focus on the quality of the publication - Status, Challenges and Future Directions (SEA - published

by Ministry of Housing, Spatial planning and the Environment of the Netherlands). The style of writing should be mentioned. There is too much broad information which both offers weak conclusions and also keeps things and problems open. On the other hand, the aim of the SEA publication was to provide new, possibly challenging facts and tasks to make the public (with the strong environmental feelings and knowledge of the problems) think and get involved in the process.