

IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND WATER

Dear readers,

A special IAIA Ireland-UK branch symposium was held 1-2 September 2016 on 'Water and Impact Assessment: Investment, Infrastructure, Legacy' in Lincoln, England. This brought together over 60 participants, not just from Ireland and the UK, but also from other European and non-European countries. The symposium happened in close temporal proximity with a range of other major water related conferences (e.g. 'Global Water Conference' in Myanmar, 'World Water Week' in Sweden, and 'International Conference on Sustainable Water Processing' in Spain, to just name a few). The sheer density of international events underlines the key global importance of water, which is the 'most important resource on this planet and a significant proportion of global investment and infrastructure is concerned with ensuring its supply, management, quality and transportation' (from the final programme of the special symposium, <http://conferences.iaia.org/ukwater/index.php>).

A wide range of topics was covered and there will be a call for papers for an associated special IAPA issue (watch this space). An important message taken from the symposium was that the water environment is experiencing a lot of stress and that significant efforts are required to protect and enhance it. In this context, 'business as usual' was not seen as a viable option. Effective communication and dialogue between stakeholders was considered to be at the heart of approaching current challenges, underlining the importance of IA instruments, which in many instances provide the only platform for open debates on various problems, in particular those connected with management of whole river catchments. These do not normally lie within one jurisdiction and / or within the boundaries of one planning authority. Rather, there is often a split in responsibilities and IA has the potential to help overcoming associated problems (see e.g. Barker and Fischer, 2003).

An important emphasis of the special symposium was on the planning and assessment of water bodies. Another key issue was the management of water resources. In this context, a problem in many developed countries is that drinking quality water is used (and wasted) for activities that do not require water of such high quality, including e.g. industrial activities, use of toilets or watering of gardens and lawns. Here, impact assessment was seen as a suitable tool to pro-actively support the process of finding innovative solutions, in particular at the strategic levels of decision making.

In addition to issues of effective management of water catchments and resources, the symposium also looked at the differential effects from global climate change experienced in many countries. These range from e.g. draughts to flooding in close geographical proximity, making planning for adaptation challenging (Jiricka et al, 2016). Participants agreed that many of the challenges are currently found at the local level and that in this context, the development of communities of resilience needed to be seen as a priority. Other issues were thought to require better strategic thinking (such as river catchment planning), and here IA was thought of having a pivotal role in meeting associated challenges.

With the conference happening in post BREXIT referendum Britain, future threats to the currently high standards of environmental protection and environmental assessment were discussed. In this context, whilst some participants thought that 'no country' would deliberately make decisions to lower or even abolish standards that secure a good quality of life for its population, others were somewhat sceptical. This scepticism was fuelled by historical examples and experiences. Here, the introduction of the Public Health Act in the UK in 1848 can serve as an example, which is widely

considered to be one of the most important initial pieces of environmental legislation in the world. At the time, the conservative newspaper 'The Times' commented on the Act as follows: '*The English People would prefer to take the chance of cholera, rather than being bullied into health – a reckless invasion of property and liberty*'. Some close monitoring of the current government's action will clearly be in order.

This issue of IAPA consists of 6 papers. The first focuses on the spatial analysis of environmental impacts of highway projects with special emphasis on mountainous area. The second is exploring whether stakeholder engagement in health impact scoping is leading to consensus, referring to a Dutch case study. This is followed by a paper on the importance of cultural aspects in impact assessment and project development, reflecting on a case study of a hydroelectric dam in Brazil. The fourth paper is reporting on regulatory impact assessment in development aid and the fifth is looking at the incorporation of climate change mitigation and adaptation into EIA, focusing on transport projects in England. The sixth and final paper is providing suggestions for cumulative impact assessment for barrages in Sindh (Pakistan). I hope you enjoy reading!

Yours

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References

Barker, A. and Fischer, T.B. 2003. English regionalism and sustainability: towards the development of an integrated approach to SEA. *Europ. Planning Studies*, 11(6): 697-716.

Jiricka, A.; Formayer, H.; Schmidt, A.; Völler, S.; Leitner, M.; Fischer, T.B.; Wachter, T. W. 2016. Consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation in EIA practice – Perspectives of actors in Austria and Germany, *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 57: 78-88