**December 2017 Editorial**

Dear readers,

Welcome to the last issue of IAPA in 2017. Once again, this summer and autumn saw a number of record breaking storms and hurricanes that caused serious damage in India, the Caribbean, Southern US and elsewhere. Hurricane Irma, which caused extensive damage, was reported as having been the strongest Atlantic hurricane on record and in India, over 200 people died in July during severe monsoon flooding. Whilst natural disasters are usually triggered by natural events that cannot be immediately influenced by humans (even though there are linkages, e.g. with regards to global climate change), vulnerability is amplified by the way humans develop and use land, and also frequently by (human induced) environmental degradation (Gore and Fischer, 2014; Tajima et al, 2014). Core aims of development and spatial / land use planning policy in most countries world-wide revolve around supporting economic growth. In this context, impact assessments (environmental, social, health and other assessments) function as tools that aim at rebalancing decision processes, integrating other non-economic, supposedly weaker aspects and raising their status (Fischer, 2014; Morrison-Saunders and Fischer, 2006).

IA’s potential role is currently becoming increasingly important. A persisting problem in this context, though, is that frequently IA tools do not have any real ‘teeth’, meaning possibilities for delivering sustainable options on the ground are often limited. Various ideas to enhance the impact of IA have been discussed in the professional literature for numerous contexts (see e.g. Arts et al, 2012; Hanna et al, 2014; Syafiq, 2015). Frequently, next to strengthening legal provisions, improving capacity, enhancing IA training / education and strengthening the role of the public in IA, the preparation of better / more effective guidance is also raised. Here, a need for being detailed enough to be useful in specific situations of application, whilst allowing for sufficient flexibility to be helpful in different contexts has been suggested to be key for improved effectiveness (see e.g. IAEA, forthcoming). However, one important aspect which often remains insufficiently considered is the expectations of different stakeholders. For example, consultancies may be particularly interested in efficiency gains, whilst environmental bodies are likely to be more interested in increasing effectiveness of the ability to protect the biophysical environment. Or, whilst scientists may be particularly keen on clarity with regards to the usage of specific indicators, political decision makers are likely to make any interventions dependent on the interests of (their) electorate. To date, how different interests may be integrated into guidance, hopefully resulting in effective IA has remained poorly understood. In this context, an associated call for papers will be made on the IAPA homepage shortly. – Watch this space!

Subsequently, six papers are brought to you by authors from five continents (Africa, South America, Asia, Australia and Europe). These report on environmental and sustainability assessment practices in different sectors and contexts in Tanzania, Belgium, Brazil, Thailand, India, Australia.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading this issue of IAPA. With best wishes for your end of year celebrations and a good start into 2018!

Thomas B Fischer, editor-in-chief

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