

7 Linking SEA with other assessment and planning tools

By Thomas B Fischer

In many instances, SEA is not the only assessment instrument used in policy, plan and programme making processes, but is conducted next to other assessment and planning tools (Fischer, 2006a). Whenever this is the case, it is important that different assessments recognise each other and link up. If this isn't achieved, they could end up working to different objectives. As a consequence, assessment effectiveness, and ultimately the quality of the assessed policy, plan or programme could be undermined. Furthermore, if recommendations provided in different policies, plans, programmes and their assessments are inconsistent or even incompatible, they will not be perceived as being helpful and, as a consequence, may be ignored.

In this chapter, firstly, the meaning of and rationale for linking up different assessment and planning tools is further elaborated on. Three types of linkages are then discussed, including:

- (a) the application of different assessment instruments to the same policy, plan or programme at the same time;
- (b) linkages between different policies, plans, programmes and their assessments; and
- (c) linkages across administrative, sectoral and other boundaries.

This chapter also provides for a discussion of the extent to which linking up may be desirable. In this context, integration is distinguished from co-ordination. Whilst in practice, cases in which different assessment and planning instruments ignore each other have also been observed (i.e. assessments are conducted in isolation), this is not considered a desirable option.

The focus here will be on co-ordination between different instruments on the one hand, and their attempted integration on the other. In this context, pros and cons of full integration of different instruments are identified. One important aspect which is closely connected with the topic of linking up is not further elaborated on, namely tiering. Readers interested in tiering of policies, plans and programmes and their assessments are advised to consult e.g. Arts et al (2011) and Fischer (2006b).

7.1 Linking up different assessment instruments and planning tools – meaning and rationale

Since the 1970s, numerous impact assessment instruments, supporting policy, plan, programme and project making have emerged throughout the world. In 2004, Vanclay found over 100 different types of impact assessments developed by authors and practitioners from various disciplines. Different assessments are not only applied in different situations, but occasionally also at the same time within one specific decision making process. Examples include e.g. strategic environmental assessment (SEA) which is applied next to social impact assessment (SIA), health impact assessment (HIA), equality impact assessment (EqIA) and others.

The plethora of instruments available (Tajima and Fischer, 2013, found eight different types of impact assessments applied to spatial plan core strategies in the UK alone) has started to create confusion as well as "widespread frustration among many practitioners, academics and students" (Sheate, 2011, p.243). This confusion is connected with often ill defined boundaries and roles of different tools. In practice, the application of numerous instruments is often leading to various overlaps, in particular when several assessments are applied to a single decision.

Linking up of different instruments is seen to be of crucial importance for overcoming confusion and for supporting effectiveness of those instruments. In this context, linking up may have different meanings (Bond et al., 2001). It may, for example, mean that separate forms of assessments are undertaken with some or more extensive coordination in the timing of assessment stages. It may also mean that several assessments become fully integrated. This can result in the creation of a single 'integrated assessment'.

The rationale for linking up different assessments was explained by Vanclay (2004). He suggested that it may:

- a) enhance the comprehensive understanding of all impacts;
- b) enhance efficiency in terms of monetary and time resources; and
- c) lead to greater visibility of voluntary impact assessments by piggy-backing on those that are legally mandated.

While linking up of different instruments is usually perceived to be beneficial overall, the extent to which simple or more extensive co-ordination or full integration of different instruments is desirable has been controversially discussed. The main argument here is that while full integration may contribute to increased efficiency and assessment effectiveness, it could also lead to the subordination of certain assessment issues, particularly those that are supposed to have their status raised in decision making through specific assessment instruments (Gibson, 2001; Scarse and Sheate, 2002; Fischer, 2003; Vanclay, 2004; Pope et al., 2004; Morrison-Saunders and Fischer, 2006; Kidd and Fischer, 2007). Based on emerging empirical evidence, Therivel and Fischer (2012), for example, suggested that in English spatial plan related SEA inclusive Sustainability Appraisal (a form of integrated assessment) practice, environmental values ultimately tended to be subordinated to economic values.

Another reason for why full integration may remain a distant ideal is of a logistical nature. Thus, it may not be impossible to effectively manage the coordination of numerous assessment aspects, processes, and stakeholders, even in the presence of quantitative support tools (see e.g. Rothmans and Vellinga, 1998). Furthermore, full integration may also turn out to be too far removed from how existing administrative structures are organised and responsibilities are distributed (sectoral or otherwise). Whilst one of the purposes of more integrated forms of appraisals is usually to help overcome traditional silos, in many instances achieving more simple forms of co-ordination may already present a great challenge to existing practices.

It is important to stress that calls for using some caution in approaching full integration have received some strong criticism by various integration advocates. The main argument brought forward is that decision makers want simplicity, not complexity, as well as efficiency. In this context, Nielsson (2009) argued that "*I have never met one official that considers they would find it more useful to have an assessment of environmental issues alone, instead of one dealing with social, economic and environmental issues—in parallel or integratively*". However, whilst most decision makers will probably speak out strongly in favour of full integration, this doesn't mean integration will ensure assessment effectiveness in terms of reaching general as well as specific objectives; particularly of those aspects that tend to be weak. In this context, it is interesting to look at the Netherlands, and contrasting the highly formalised advocate tool EIA with the more informal, largely flexible and more integrative e-test for legislative proposals. Whilst the latter was found to be highly popular amongst decision makers, but largely ineffective in leading to any changes to decisions, the

former was found to be rather unpopular amongst decision makers - in particular as it costs time and money and is perceived as a 'hassle'-, but rather effective in changing decisions (Verheem, 2005; see also Arts et al, 2012).

Aspects of linking up

Following e.g. Bond et al. (2001), Emilsson et al. (2004) and Cherp et al. (2006), three aspects of linking up different assessments may be distinguished; the linking up of (1) '*processes*', (2) '*substance/outputs*', and (3) '*assessors/institutions*'. Linking up of (1) processes can happen in different ways. They may be fully integrated or touch at several points or at one point in time only. Linking different assessment processes early on is thought to be crucial for achieving effective assessments, potentially leading to greater consistency and helping to avoid duplication. If the assessment process was to start only after a policy, plan and programme process was completed, the ability to influence decisions would be greatly reduced. If, on the other hand, the assessment process was to start at the beginning or even before the start of the policy, plan and programme process, the likelihood of it having an impact will be much greater.

Linking up of (2) different substantive aspects and outputs is crucial for the overall consistency of different assessments. In this context, it is important that while each assessment is likely to add information to the decision process, more information does not necessarily mean a better decision is reached. The crucial point here is whether outputs are presented to the decision maker in a manner that is coherent and not confusing, enabling informed decisions. In order for this to be achieved, not only need other assessments' outputs be mentioned by each of the assessments, but there needs to be clear cross-referencing and active interaction. Furthermore, it is important that only information relevant for the decision is provided, i.e. there is a need to distinguish between significant and insignificant impacts.

Finally, linking up of (3) different assessors and institutions can happen through building multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams of assessors (Sheate, 2011). This is important as different assessments are often designed to advocate specific values (e.g. environmental, social, health). Usually, these are the values of those organizations using specific instrument (i.e. SEA, SIA HIA). Linking up of instruments may thus also enhance communication between different disciplines. The three types of integration will subsequently be elaborated on in further detail.

7.2 Linking up different assessment processes

In practice, linking up of different assessment processes can happen in different ways. Furthermore, the extent to which linking up is happening may also differ. Thus, there may be deliberate attempts to integrate processes fully. This is pursued in e.g. the UK spatial plan making system, where sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental assessment are fully integrated (Therivel and Fischer, 2012). Furthermore, there are examples where assessments link up at specific stages, e.g. during consultation and public participation stages (see Tajima and Fischer, 2013). However, in practice, there may also be cases where assessments do not link up at all. These include assessments conducted by different administrations for different sectors or subjects. This was observed e.g. by Fischer et al (2010) for German local administrations. Traditionally, many of these administrations act rather autonomously and have clearly allocated responsibilities for different areas, based on the Federal constitution. Whilst here, individual assessments were frequently found to be rather

comprehensive and of a high quality, due to the failure to link up during preparation processes, outcomes were not always consistent. Furthermore, whilst baseline data provided by different assessments were clearly useful in different situations, in practice they were at times ignored by other assessments, as they were seen to fall within the responsibility of a different administration.

In UK spatial planning, a parabolic correlation was found to exist by Tajima and Fischer (2013) between the extent of procedural integration of sustainability assessment with some other assessment instruments and the overall effectiveness of an assessment in terms of reaching stated policy goals and objectives. This implies that at least here, attempted full procedural integration often fails to deliver assessments that effectively influence decision making. Similar observations were also made by Smith (2009) for the integration of spatial and transport planning.

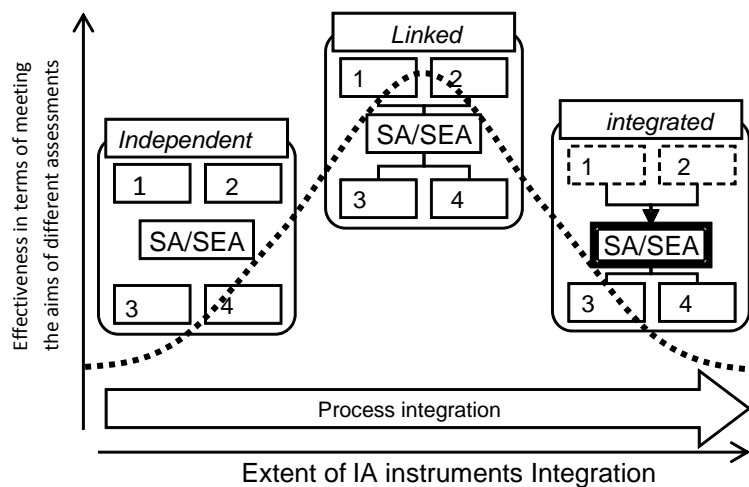


Figure 1: extent of process integration versus effectiveness in terms of meeting aims of different assessments.

7.3 Linking up of substantive assessment aspects

Linking up of different substantive aspects is done actively in various countries and assessment systems. The extent to which this can and is actually happening appears to depend in particular on the specific decision making tier. Thus, Fischer (1999; 2006b) observed that the higher the strategic level at which an assessment is applied, the more likely an integration of different substantive aspects is attempted. Therefore, policy level assessment systems (both, formal and informal, as well as in legislative processes and other policy situations) tend to function as integrated assessment systems. Examples include the European Commission's impact assessment procedures for draft directives and other policies and the UK's impact assessment (formerly regulatory impact assessment) for policy initiatives. More recently, territorial impact assessment (TIA) of European policies has also been designed as an integrated assessment (Fischer et al, 2011). Various initiatives for similar instruments have been observed in other countries (e.g. New Zealand, Germany, Slovenia; see http://www.espon.org/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_TargetedAnalyses/EATIA.html).

At lower decision tiers, i.e. at the levels of plans, programmes and also major projects, linking up of substantive aspects tends to be more infrequent, even though, traditionally, programme

assessments have often been based on multi-criteria and cost-benefit analyses (Fischer, 2002). One important reason for less integration at lower tiers is the increasing level of detail and therefore a greater data intensity. This is visualised in Figure 2.

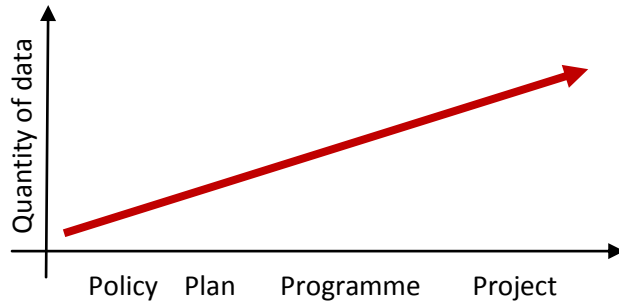


Figure 2: Quantity of data versus decision tier

A range of methods and techniques is available for linking up substantive aspects in impact assessment. Besides the above mentioned multi-criteria analysis, these include the triple bottom line approach (Vanclay, 2004), ecological footprinting (Wackernagel and Rees, 2006), human impact assessment (Kwiatkowski and Gosselin 2001) and others. Frequently, these methods are based on mathematical modelling exercises and at times may also result in the production of indicators, which, in case of the ecological footprint, for example, may be expressed in one figure, i.e. square meters. It is important to note that whilst related exercises can provide for some useful and simple, aggregated information to decision makers (Journard and Gudmundsson, 2010), they have also been observed to potentially hide increasing levels of uncertainties (Duncan, 2008), thus pretending there is certainty, when in fact there isn't.

Linking up different assessment instruments as fully as possible may be advisable when the issues covered are more or less the same. In this case, it may not make much sense to cover them more than once. This applies in particular to the generation of baseline data. Furthermore, the alternatives considered for a particular policy, plan or programme should not differ between different assessments, if comparable results are to be achieved. Generating the same data more than once would normally be perceived as a waste of time and resources.

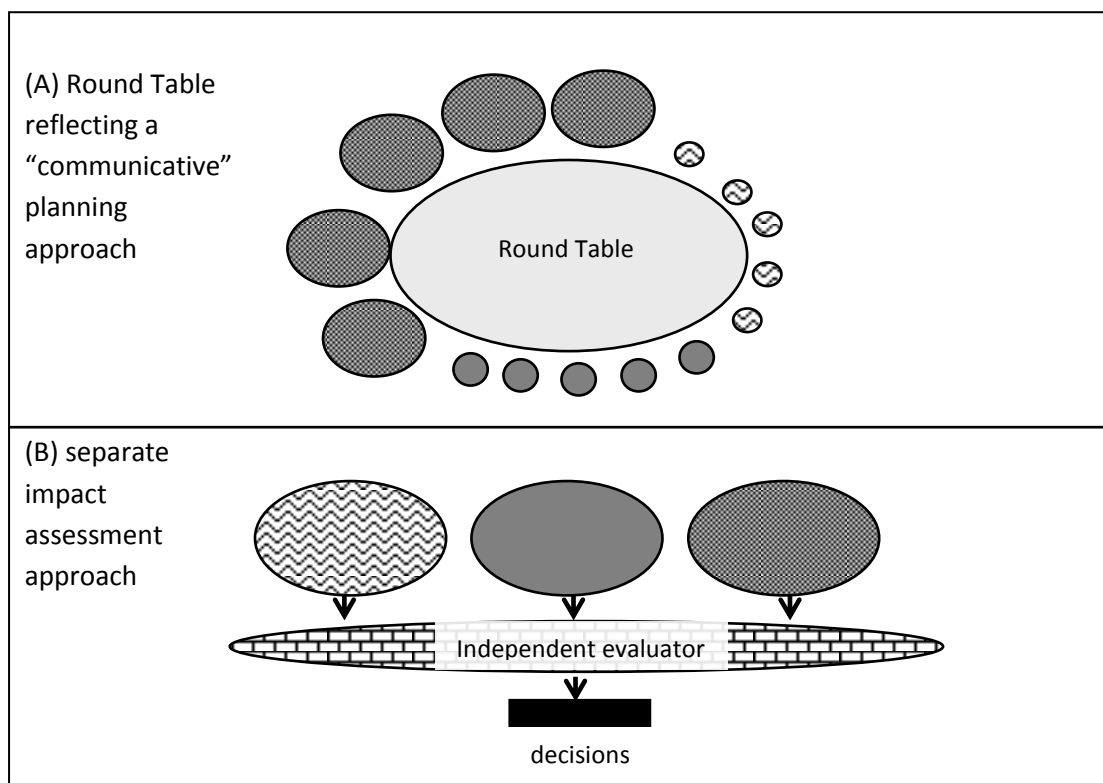
7.4 Linking up assessment instruments used by different administrations

In practice, linking up impact assessments conducted by different administrations is frequently particularly problematic. In many systems, traditionally, different administrations are used to act autonomously and may even be hostile towards the idea of co-operation. In many such instances, linking up is perceived to mean giving up responsibility, and thus ultimately power.

Following arguments brought forward by communicative planning theorists, round table approaches have been suggested as a possible way to overcoming traditional (e.g. disciplinary) silos and administrative isolation. A round table could thus act as a platform for assessment integration. However, in reality the suitability of this approach for achieving a more balanced consideration of different aspects appears to depend on the specific situation. In situations where round table participants are not trying to push particular outcomes, but are instead open to different solutions, the approach may successfully integrate the interests of different actors and institutions. This was

observed, for example in the case of a waste management strategy for the city of Vienna by Arbter (2004) and for the management of regional plans in the state of Brandenburg by Rückert-John (2000). However, a round table approach may not be fitting in other situations, in particular where it is not very likely to overcome power imbalances of different subjects and administrations, e.g. in transport planning. This was visualised by Fischer (2004; see Figure 3). As power imbalances are difficult to address in round table approaches, powerful actors may be able to influence the outcomes of such an exercise to a larger extent than others. To those not being part of the round-table, transparency of the assessment process may actually be reduced as opposed to decision processes, where assessments present their results separately and where an independent body evaluates them (indicated by (B); Fischer, 2003).

Barker and Fischer (2003) also suggested that assessments may be used in order to achieve greater consistency between aims, objectives and suggestions for action of different administrations. As an example they used the (now abolished) regional level in UK spatial planning. They hypothesised that regional assessments may lead to more consistent and congruent national and local level spatial plans.






 = environmental
  = social
  = economic representatives

Figure 3: the representation of different interests in (A) a round table approach and (B) a situation where valuations are performed by an independent evaluator

7.5 Further arguments for and against full integration of different impact assessment instruments

In the previous sections, the discussion focused on whether and how linking up of different assessment instruments may be desirable. In this context, a distinction was made between full integration on the one side of the spectrum to co-operation on the other side of the spectrum. Whether full integration or rather simple co-operation should be attempted was said to be depend on a range of issues.

In addition to the various issues already brought forward and discussed, other aspects may also play an important role in deciding on how to link up different assessments. Regarding a more complete integration, various aspects were brought forward and discussed by the UK HIA Gateway (2012), taking into account a wide range of observations and various international experiences. Following on from these, it can be said that attempting more full integration may be a desirable attempt for:

- Avoiding “Impact assessment fatigue”; in the presence of too many assessments, those involved in assessment processes may become increasingly tired of conducting them; this is likely to lead to a decrease in overall assessment effectiveness.
- Using resources and time available to administrations effectively, as these tend to be limited; each assessment costs money and time and linking them up or combining them in one assessment can undoubtedly potentially lead to greater efficiencies.
- Simplifying processes and reducing work loads; policy, plan, programme and project developers would normally be expected to see their work load reduced when integrated assessments replace numerous other assessments processes.
- Creating spaces of collaboration of representatives or champions for different substantive issues; if these collaborate, they may become more powerful and potentially find it easier to get heard by others.

On the other hand, various additional arguments have been brought forward against attempting to fully integrate different assessments. These include:

- Current impact assessment instruments have often been introduced as advocate tools that aim at raising the status of those aspects that tend to be subordinated to others; if these instruments are integrated with other assessments, they may actually lose their purpose, i.e. those issues that are supposed to be advocated may lose out.
- A “tick box approach” to assessment may be encouraged; achieving integration is likely to be complex and complicated and there is a danger that different issues will receive only superficial treatment of the issues at stake.
- The involvement of (too) many people; linking-up different assessments may mean involving numerous people; making sense of all their contributions could create a substantial amount of additional – rather than less – work.

Again, these arguments suggest that there is no easy solution available for deciding on when and how to integrate. A situation specific approach is likely to be necessary, considering a wide range of aspects, ranging from those that are contextual to those that are situation specific.

7.6 Conclusions

Linking up of different assessment instruments is clearly important in order to at least potentially achieve greater impact assessment effectiveness and efficiency, particularly in situations where different assessments are applied to the same policy, plan, programme or big project. Thus, more consistent results may possibly be achieved and costs for conducting assessments may be reduced through greater integration. However, as this chapter has shown, deciding on the way and the extent to which linking-up should happen is neither an easy nor a straightforward task.

Different types of linkages have been said to include the assessment of different assessment instruments to the same policy, plan or programme at the same time, as well as tiering between different policies, plans, programmes and their assessments. Finally, there are linkages across administrative, sectoral and other boundaries.

Whether weaker or stronger co-operation and co-ordination or even full integration should be attempted is likely to depend on a range of factors. These include:

- The recognition of power relationships: different assessment aspects are often represented by actors that are not equally influential or powerful; full assessment integration may hide those differences, rather than bringing them to the fore. In the absence of power differences, round tables may be a useful technique for integration. However, in the presence of power differences between different actors, keeping the assessment of different aspects intact may be preferable.
- The acknowledgement of capacities to deal with a large amount of integration all at once: this may be limited, both, in technical (e.g. in quantitative) terms, as well as terms of responsible bodies (not) being able to deal with them (e.g. in qualitative terms); in a specific sector with a clear substantive focus (e.g. waste management), full integration may be easier achievable than in e.g. spatial planning, which aims at integrating different aims, objectives and potentially also implementation strategies of different sectors.
- The acknowledgment of traditional, constitutional, administrative and any other silos and boundaries: whilst overcoming silos and boundaries is undoubtedly desirable, those that represent them need to be convinced of the necessity. There may be constitutional reasons for different administrations or bodies dealing with different issues and those need to be acknowledged when attempting to link up; ways for overcoming them may also be explored.
- The recognition of the specific tier of decision making: the specific decision making tier at which assessments are conducted plays an important role when attempting to link up. At legislative and policy levels of decision making, full integration of different assessment aspects in one process is currently more routinely attempted than at plan making levels. In programme preparation, the use of multi-criteria analyses and cost-benefit analyses that integrate different aspects has also had a long tradition.

Not enough evidence has been produced, yet, for being able to give clear recommendations for when either co-operation or full integration is advisable, and currently there is clearly no 'one-fits-all' approach. Integration which results in equal weight given to different assessment aspects is only likely achievable in the absence of great power differences. Co-ordination, on the other hand, may be preferable in situations in which trade-offs are not to be hidden. What is clear, though is that not

linking up different assessments at all is unlikely to result in effective assessment instruments and ultimately in 'good' policies, plans and programmes.

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<p>Main trends and developments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEA may be linked up with assessment instruments applied (a) to the same policy, plan or programme (PPP), (b) to different PPPs, or (c) at different administrative, sectoral and other boundaries in terms of process, substance and assessors/ actors. - Co-ordination of different assessment efforts can be distinguished from their full integration. - Whilst there is no 'one-fits-all' approach, there is growing understanding of what type of linking up may be preferable in specific situations of application.
<p>Key issues and perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whilst there are many advocates of full integration of different assessment instruments, empirical evidence has shown that this may not always be the best way to go. - Traditional constitutional, administrative and other silos need to be acknowledged in any linking up effort. - Understanding power relationships in PPP and their assessment processes are key for making an informed decision on how to link up.
<p>Key lessons regarding process effectiveness and quality of practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In practice, attempted integration is currently closely connected with the decision tier; whilst at policy and programme levels integrated assessment is more likely to occur, it is observed less often at plan levels. - Full assessment integration through e.g. a round-table approach may result in effective linking up of different instruments in situations where participants are not trying to push particular outcomes. - Co-ordination between different assessment instruments is likely to be preferable in situations marked by an unequal distribution of power with regards to different assessment aspects; this means that here, different instruments that are used to advocate certain issues and values should be co-ordinated, rather than integrated
<p>Future directions and prospects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More empirical evidence for effective linking up needs to be produce