

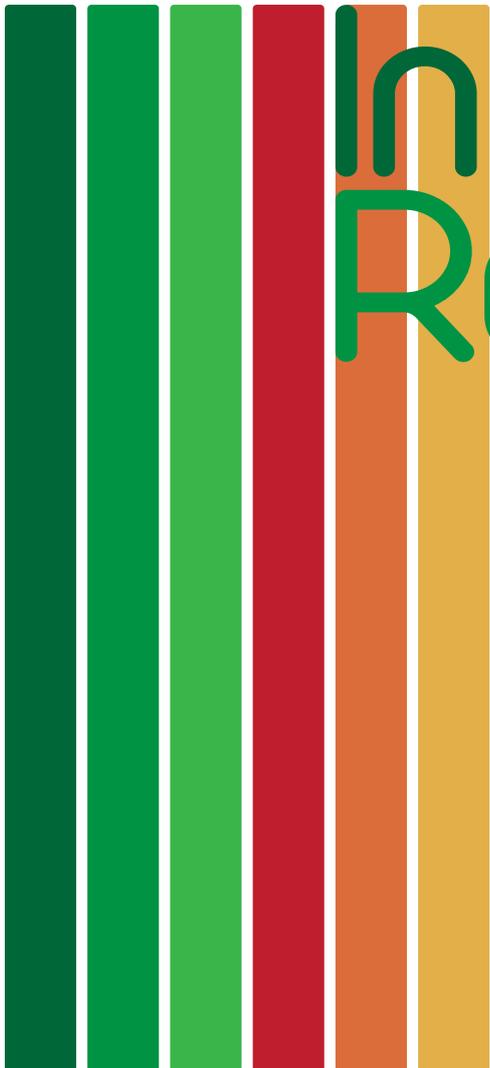


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Linking
Impact
Assessment
Instruments to
Sustainability
Expertise



Innovation Report

Impact
Assessment
practice in
Europe



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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

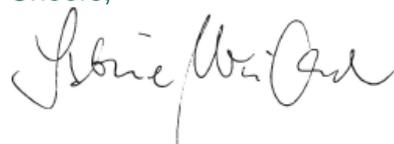
The second issue of the LIAISE Innovation Report is out at the beginning of the second year of the LIAISE project. LIAISE is now a well-established research network and a number of important achievements have already been made since its inception. One result is the focus of this innovation report: the most comprehensive survey yet conducted of tool use and user needs with regard to Impact Assessment (IA) systems in 17 European countries. Data was collected, as part of the LIAISE project, through documentary analysis and interviews with c. 120 people who steer IA at a strategic level. Previous surveys of this kind have been either narrower in focus¹ or not as in-depth². None have focused on the experience and insights of those people at national level who determine the strategic direction of IA.

The survey, summarized by Camilla Adelle (University of East Anglia), in the article 'User needs in Impact Assessment' for this issue of the Innovation Report, finds a wide variety in the IA systems studied. Many – but by no means all – of the 17 IA systems already harness the analytical power of IA tools to inform their assessment activities. The use of IA tools in practice is highly differentiated between, both, the main tool types (simpler tools tend to be more popular than more sophisticated ones), and amongst individual IA systems (tool use is generally higher amongst the older Member States than the newer ones). Of those countries that have grappled with the challenge of how to increase IA tool use, some have pursued it more actively and strictly than others. But even amongst the most enthusiastic advocates, IA tools are not seen as a 'silver bullet' to improve the quality of IA. Likewise, user needs with respect to IA tools defy simple generalisations. It seems that they tend to be specific to particular tools and/or IA systems. Instead of saturating policy makers with information on tools, this pattern of use calls for researchers to adopt a more targeted and 'smarter' promotion of IA tools in practice.

In addition to the research article on IA tools and user needs, a number of recent and interesting publications on IA are briefly reviewed, dealing with issues such as knowledge brokerage, images of IA as present in different countries, and questions whether IA leads to better or to more sustainable policies.

Have a good read! Comments on the current issue, as well as ideas and topics for future issues are always welcome – just drop me a message.

Cheers,



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¹ e.g. Hertin J, Jordan A, Nilsson M, Nykvist B, Russel D, and Turmpenny J, (2006) *An institutional analysis of current uses of ISA – related tools in their 'real world' policy context. Deliverable D2.3 for the MATISSE project.*

² EVIA, (2008) D2.2 Case Studies on implementation of IA at the level of EU MS. Report Prepared for the European Commission.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Survey of User Needs in Impact Assessment by *Camilla Adelle, UEA*

Policy level appraisal or Impact Assessment (IA) is widely seen as a key mechanism to improve the quality of regulations and to integrate different policy objectives (Jacob et al 2008). Over the last decade, IA has experienced an enormous global expansion and is now practiced in 26 of the 30 OECD member countries (OECD 2008). Within the European Union (EU) it arrived on the political agenda of the member states (as well as the European Commission) in the late 1990s. Nowadays, it is regarded as the cornerstone of programmes for better regulation (Radaelli 2005). However, the widespread diffusion of IA has not necessarily produced a convergence in IA practices (ibid). The academic research accompanying the rise of IA in the policy world has shown that there is a wide variety of IA systems, with different institutional set-ups, objectives and cultures (e.g. Jacob et al 2008). Consequently, there is no 'one way' of conducting IA, or even one 'best way'. Understanding the practice and principles of IA requires a full consideration of these differences. This is equally true when considering the use of IA tools in the IA process. The remarkable growth in IA and the growing availability of different policy assessment tools has increased the need for a greater understanding of what affects their supply and the demand amongst policy makers. But while there has been a strengthening of political commitment to improve the evidence base of policy making via formalized ex ante policy assessment, research has already shown that the use of specific tools such as Cost Benefit Analysis or modelling is rather variable. The EVIA project demonstrated that the tools used (and how well they are used) differs widely between jurisdictions (EVIA 2008). Nilsson et al (2008) found that even when tools are embedded in a formal policy assessment system such as IA, their use is differentiated and often very limited, in particular when it comes to more advanced tools. So-called 'simple' tools appear to appeal more strongly to the everyday needs of policy makers than some of the more advanced and complex tools (Hertin et al 2006). Lack of time, data, resources and skills are all factors that are thought to constrain the use of more advanced tools (ibid). It appears, therefore, that the institutionalisation of IA has not led to a concomitant institutionalisation of IA tool use. However, the overall picture of tool (non)use has not yet been fully explored. In particular, more information is needed on users' perspectives – that is the perspective of those officials and other actors that are expected to develop, steer, evaluate and/or undertake IA. This article reports on research for the LIAISE project and forms the most comprehensive survey thus far of user needs and expectations with regard to IA tool use. It focuses on those involved with IA in their country at a strategic level (i.e. those people who champion, oversee, guide, audit or write guidance for IA processes rather than officials who carry out IA). Previous surveys of this kind have been either narrower in focus (e.g. Hertin et al 2006) or in less depth (e.g. EVIA 2008). None have focused on the experience and insights of those people involved in steering IA at a strategic level.

³ The cases selected were: the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Greece, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Spain, Italy, the UK, Ireland, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Methodology

The research reported on in this article is based on a number of country case studies. The 17 country cases³ were selected on the basis of several criteria, including that an IA system (either explicitly or implicitly

tly) was in place, that a representative sample of different parts of the EU were included, and practical considerations such as utilising the research team's existing contacts and language skills.

Two approaches were used to gather data on these country cases. First, a desk-based analysis of relevant IA literature and documents (IA reports, draft and final legal texts, policy documents by the ministry and relevant publications by external stakeholders) provided a broad picture of how IA is conducted in each country. This information was compiled in a standardised template or fiche which focused on several aspects of the IA systems, including: the design and use of the IA system, the quality of IA, its role in the policy making process and issues surrounding tool use. Second, a series of around 10 interviews were conducted in each country with those people who at a strategic level champion, oversee, guide, audit or write guidance for IA processes. A set of standardised questions was used to conduct these interviews. Until this research, the views of these individuals had not been analysed. The existing literature focuses mainly on the needs of 'desk officials' whose job it is to perform IAs.

Results

The Purpose and Context of Impact Assessment

IA systems are either in place or are being developed in all of the 17 countries examined. However, they vary in many (if not all) aspects of their history, form and function, as well as the context in which they operate. While many countries have had an IA system of some form for many years (e.g. the UK, Spain, Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands), other countries have only recently established an IA system (e.g. Ireland, Greece, Cyprus) and some countries are still developing theirs. In countries where IA is more established, it is evident that IA systems are dynamic and change over time, with reforms being implemented every few years to improve the quality of IAs and to keep up with changes in the policy making world.

The main purpose of IA is not always made explicit in the underlying documents of the IA systems. In addition, an IA system can have more than one purpose, and the opinion on what the main purpose of IA is, can differ between actors. However, reducing costs imposed by regulation is the most important driver for the introduction of IA across the majority of countries (e.g. the UK, Cyprus, Poland, Belgium). The implementation of IA in other jurisdictions (such as the lead given by the European Commission) appears to also be a factor for the introduction of some of the newer IA systems (e.g. Ireland, Greece, Poland). While sustainable development or the environment is mentioned in the IA guidance in a number of countries (e.g. the UK, the Netherlands), this is seldom the main purpose of IA and in most countries this aspect of IA is not well implemented compared to economic aspects.

The political and institutional context is important when examining IA systems as the existing policy-making process can have a strong influence on how IA is interpreted and practiced. For example, in countries such as Switzerland where consultation is deep-rooted it can be difficult for actors to see where IA fits in with the existing process of law making. However, while context is important, the system of IA is not determined by the context. IA is very versatile and it is evident that different political contexts have a distorting effect on IA in Europe. This shows that there will be no one set of guidance or tools that will work across all countries or IA systems. Therefore it is important to better

understand the different purposes of IA in different countries as well as the relationship between IA and the political and institutional context in which it takes place.

The Quality of Impact Assessment

Some countries have established mechanisms to ensure the adequacy and the quality of IAs. Most countries have coordination units that provide guidance and coordination. However, formal quality control of the IA reports is established in only a few countries. Denmark, Finland, Cyprus and Greece have no central quality control of IAs. The quality control mechanisms in place in other countries vary in their level of scrutiny. For example, an IA unit in the Prime Minister's office in Ireland attempts to review all IAs for primary legislation but does not look at IAs for secondary legislation. In the UK an external 'Regulatory Policy Committee' was set up at the end of 2009 to review all IAs as they are produced. This Committee is in addition to the Better Regulation Executive, which acts as the coordinator of IA in the UK and writes the IA Guidance. Hence the committee acts as an external scrutiny body in a manner that is similar to the Impact Assessment Board in the European Commission. However, such external scrutiny bodies are not (yet) widespread. In countries where there is little central quality control (e.g. Finland) it is not clear who is responsible for overseeing the IA system. Quality is left to the individual departments or even the policy officer in charge of the IA. Without proper scrutiny there is little incentive to invest time and resources into IA. Wider external pressure from politicians, central government or stakeholders to improve quality is also seen as a factor in some countries. This requires that the IA reports are easily accessible on the internet. Some countries (e.g. Ireland) have had independent and comprehensive reviews of IAs and the IA system, which have contributed significantly to improving the quality of IAs, but such mechanisms are relatively rare in other countries.

Various factors are important in determining the quality of IAs. These include: the timing of the IA (i.e. is it done early or late in the policy making process); the level of political support for IA; the motivation of officials to conduct IAs; the level of skills (especially quantitative ones); the scope of the IAs (i.e. does it focus on the full range of impacts). Political context can also be an important factor in the quality of IA and what is perceived as 'quality'.

There is also a question of 'quality for whom' (Radaelli 2003)? Quality from the perspective of tool developers? Or quality from the perspective of policy officials, or of democracy more generally? If there are no formal criteria for quality, which ones do countries apply? The guidance documents are often used as a basis for developing the criteria but the weight given to various aspects can vary significantly depending on the stated purpose of IA. What is perceived as quality can also vary significantly between actors within a country, as they place different emphasis on different aspects/purposes of IA. While many countries discuss sustainable development in their guidance documents and policy pronouncements, they do not necessarily place much weight on this when evaluating the quality of IA. This has important implications on how much consideration is given to sustainable development issues in the IA process. Standardisation of tools (e.g. Cost Benefit Analysis) can be seen as a way of helping to maintain and evaluate the quality.

Patterns of Impact Assessment Tool Use

The main tools used in IA across the different countries are simple tools such as checklists and questionnaires, Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) and administrative burden assessments such as Cost-Effectiveness Analysis and the Standard Cost Model (SCM). Examples of other tools that are advocated and/or used less frequently include scenarios, Multi-Criteria Analysis, and computer models. The majority of the guidance documents at least mention tools and some guidance documents give in-depth instructions (e.g. the UK) and/or worked examples (e.g. Ireland). The guidance documents in some countries act as simple tools themselves if they contain a number of checklists or are in the form of a questionnaire (e.g. Cyprus). Only a few countries do not advocate which tools should be used (e.g. Sweden, Switzerland, Finland). However, tool use is flexible in other countries (e.g. Italy; Denmark). Which tools are used therefore varies across and within countries, with different departments favouring different tools. Nine countries promote tools in their guidance to policy makers (Belgium, Spain, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, the Netherlands, the UK, Ireland, and Switzerland). Eight countries engage in little or no apparent IA tool promotion (Greece, Finland, Italy, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, and Sweden).

In some countries, ministries are encouraged to develop tools for other ministries to apply. However, in other countries tool use is highly prescribed (e.g. the UK) and there is very little flexibility in which tools to apply or how to apply them. A number of countries also favour economic analysis (e.g. UK, Italy, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Belgium, Poland). This type of analysis can often be alongside the use of simpler tools such as checklists and impact matrices with the results of these feeding into the CBA. Qualitative methods such as Multi-Criteria Analysis are only advocated in a few countries (e.g. Ireland). This is despite the fact that qualitative analysis is commonplace in IAs. In practice, quantification is less common than the guidelines would suggest, and when it is done it is often incomplete or inadequate. This contributes to the mistrust felt by many policy officials towards quantitative tools like CBA. Tools can also be used in analysis preceding or in parallel with the IA, with the results feeding into the analysis later on. These tools are often used by consultants in commissioned reports, which require extra resources as the tools can be quite complex such as Life Cycle Analysis and Material Flow Models.

Improving Impact Assessment Tool Use

The survey revealed that there is an opportunity to both increase the awareness of tools and to support the better use of tools. In some countries (particularly where tool use is more flexible) better awareness of the range of potential tools and what they can do is needed. Tool inventories can help to do this but there are also examples of inventories being underused, rationalised or dropped entirely (e.g. Italy, the Netherlands). In most countries, better training and support of officials is needed to adequately use tools, especially quantitative tools such as CBA and SCM. This goes hand in hand with providing adequate resources and time for tool use. The quality of tool use can also be improved by better guidance (including worked examples), as well as proper scrutiny of IAs (especially by economists). The UK provides

a best practice example in the level of support and scrutiny of tool use (in this case CBA). Desk officers are assigned an economist from their department to assist in the methodology. The results are then peer-reviewed by another economist before being signed off by the Chief Economist and the Minister. This can be an iterative process of checking and revision. In other countries, however, a lack of quantitative skills is seen as a significant barrier to IA (e.g. Ireland).

In addition to, or perhaps because of, the skills shortage there can be a strong cultural reluctance to engage with numbers. It is important to better understand the political, cultural, institutional factors that affect the appropriateness of certain tools (e.g. why certain apparently useful quantitative tools fail to get taken up?). Better communication between researchers and officials on what tools are available and what answers they can help them get is important. In some countries (e.g. Italy) the system is already in close contact with numerous high level experts. A lack of available data is frequently cited as an issue. There was also an interest in developing tools that help in qualitative assessment, for example better tools for integrating different opinions (although many types of Multi-Criteria Analysis already exist). Other areas of interest in tool development include: the better quantification of social and environmental impacts (especially benefits), and making tools more transparent and participatory.

Conclusions

While the formalisation of IA could be seen as an attempt to standardise policy assessment, our survey of user needs and expectations reveals no consistent message from policy makers. Instead it exposes the variation and complex nature of IA systems and user needs across Europe. IA systems vary enormously between countries. The IA system present is not necessarily determined by context, but political and institutional context is apparently having a distorting effect on IA in the different jurisdictions studied. It is therefore important not to 'de-contextualise' IA, especially when considering what might be considered 'best practice' (Radaelli 2005, 742). The variety of IA systems and context means that there is no one 'right' set of guidance or tools, or indeed monolithic measure of 'user needs'.

On the contrary, there are many factors that affect the quality of IA. Tool use (or the lack of it) is just one of these. Therefore a lack of tool use does not necessarily mean that more tools are needed or that they will result in a better IA. Also, a good IA does not necessarily lead to a better policy decision. However, tool use is an issue that most countries struggle with in terms of which tools to apply and/or how to best apply them. Several factors appear to limit the ability of officials to use tools. Some of these, for example a lack of awareness of tools or how to apply them, can be addressed through projects such as LIAISE. However, the level of openness of IA systems to researchers varies depending on the IA system in each country. In general officials can be very concerned about everyday micro-level problems such as a shortage of resources or the low motivation for conducting IA, and also the lack of quality control.

User needs with respect to IA tools defy simple generalisations. It is clear that attempts to 'improve tools' must be aware that users are not monolithic. Therefore, IA tool development and deployment needs to be a very specialised and tailored process depending on the context and the needs of the users, which both vary over time. What is meant by 'improving' IA tools may vary widely depending on the perspective of the user. We recommend developing a set of standard questions for use by researchers when approaching each case of interaction

between tools and users. These could gauge users' views on what tools are currently used, where the knowledge gaps are, and what tool developments are required. These may be different to the tool developers' opinions of research priorities; a negotiated co-development of research and practice may thus be required.

Over the next year researchers in the LIAISE project will be developing and testing an innovative approach to co-develop IA tools with IA users in a series of 'Test-Cases'. These aim to facilitate, and at the same time study, the interaction between users of IA tools and tool developers. It is anticipated that developing tools and procedures for assisting with policy assessments that are specific to each test case will yield valuable lessons for future engagement between researchers and policy-makers, and ultimately help facilitate the 'smart deployment' of IA tools.

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IN BRIEF

Sheate W R, and Partidario M, (2010) Strategic approaches and assessment techniques – potential for knowledge brokerage towards sustainability. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 30, 278-288.

The article analyzes the concept of knowledge brokerage as a means to support evidence-based policymaking. Against positivist assumptions of many assessment techniques that the provision of information will improve decisions, the authors argue that assessments are more likely to influence political decisions if those decision-makers are acquiring knowledge, not just information. Knowledge brokerage therefore aims at encouraging the linkages that ease knowledge transfer. Strategic assessment approaches, such as strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and sustainability assessment (SA), and the techniques they employ (e.g. stakeholder engagement, use of objectives and indicators, etc.), have the potential to act as platforms for knowledge. The article evaluates six case studies of SEA and SA from the UK and Portugal for their knowledge brokerage potential. The cases reveal that strategic approaches provide three main mechanisms through which knowledge brokerage can be promoted: 1) processes, such as SEA, create opportunities for iteration and engagement with diverse stakeholders; 2) fora that provide the means of bringing together stakeholders that represent different types of knowledge, to exchange and transfer knowledge; and 3) techniques that provide the platforms through which knowledge exchange and transfer can be facilitated. The analysis can be seen as a first step to building knowledge brokerage into such SEA and SA approaches and techniques more explicitly in the future.

Dunlop C A, (2009) The temporal dimension of knowledge and the limits of policy appraisal: biofuels policy in the UK. *Policy Sciences* 43(4), 343-363.

How does policy appraisal link to learning effects of policy-makers and institutions? The article starts from the assumption that policy-making and the development of scientific knowledge are not synchronized. This can cause a plurality of scientific recommendations to emerge and, therefore, policy appraisal may lead to greater uncertainty. Consequently, policy-makers are likely to rely on institutionalized ways of thinking even when they do not yield the desired results. The article investigates how this process affects technically complex issues and takes the UK's Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) as an empirical example. It looks at learning-challenges of policy-makers in cases where policy appraisal demonstrates a difference between the goals and potential consequences of a policy. It shows that, on the one hand, single-loop effects can occur (a strategy is changed, but the overall approach to a problem is not questioned), while on the other hand, double-loop effects would be possible as well (learning is expansive and underlying norms and procedures are questioned). The article concludes that in the UK biofuels case, the scientific evidence of possible negative consequences came too late and, hence, the policy-making process had already advanced too far for re-thinking to be possible. To solve these kinds of problems, the article proposes policy-appraisal in a second stage to be undertaken by 'critical friends' whose comments may allow for an alteration of sub-optimal policy processes already in progress. Chief Scientific Advisers within governmental de-

partments can play a crucial role here, as they possess both epistemic credibility and political authority.

Radaelli C, and Meuwese A, (2010) Hard questions, hard solutions: proceduralisation through impact assessment in the EU. *West European Politics* 33(1), 136-153.

This paper deals with the politics of the European Union Impact Assessment (IA) system. The IA procedures were adopted in context of the Better Regulation Agenda. This was an attempt, according to political economists' thinking, by core Member States to increase the political control over the European Commission as a bureaucracy. The core politics of IA in Brussels is generated by 'hard questions' of institutional power (who is in charge of the law-making process?), of intra-organisation control (how to stop fragmentation of the Commission along the DG?), and of competitiveness, which is at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy. This paper argues, where agreement on these fundamental issues of power cannot be found at the level of substantial choices, the IA system is a procedural 'solution' that does not address these issues directly.

In addition to this 'politics determines instruments' argument, the authors hold that the opposite is true as well – instruments trigger their own politics. In fact, the adoption of IA has not erased disagreement on the hard questions, but it has postponed or bracketed disagreement. This has provided a new opportunity structure in which the questions can be re-processed. The authors show that, in the practice of IA in the European Union, there are signs of increased capacities for policy formulation in the DGs and more capacity for the Secretariat General to coordinate policy agendas – an organisational outcome that the authors label as unintended learning. Interestingly, this change has been achieved as a side-effect, by an instrumentation that was not deliberately designed as administrative innovation or reform.

Carroll, P, (2010) Does regulatory impact assessment lead to better policy? *Policy and Society* 29, 113-122.

In his paper, Carroll focuses on regulatory impact assessments (RIA) as a tool to improve the quality of new or amended regulations aimed at strengthening the evidence-base for policy-making. However, the author emphasizes that performance of RIAs has been limited in increasing the knowledge base in policy-making in all jurisdictions. Consequently, factors are identified that lead to a limited success of RIAs. The author's approach, firstly, is to examine the validity of the idea that RIAs are directed at improving the evidence base for policies, also focusing on the motivations of RIA designers. Secondly, studies are systematically reviewed to analyze the actual performance of RIAs in relation to evidence. Constraining factors include: a continuing positivist approach to RIA, drawing too little attention to the weaknesses of the tool; ongoing administrative resistance; inadequate resources to carry out evidence-based analyses; lack of data and technical expertise; inability to learn from previous experiences with RIA; wanting support from high-level policy officials for RIA; as well as the inability of impact assessments to represent political compromises. Carroll concludes that though RIAs might qualify policy-making by pointing to weaknesses of the process – referring especially to the positivist approach – they actually do not lead to increased quality of policies.

Radaelli C, (2009) Rationality, Power, Management, and Symbols: Four Images of Regulatory Impact Assessment. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 33(2), 164-188.

What is Impact Assessment (IA)? The debate on the nature of this instrument in regulatory reform has been lively, but has not led to unambiguous conclusions. This article explores the political properties of IA empirically by investigating the predominant image of IA in six countries; namely, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and the US, as well as the European Union. Four images or ideal types of IA are hypothesized: 'political control', 'rational policy-making/instrumental learning', 'public management reform', and 'symbolic action'. The analysis of the ways the jurisdictions exhibit a fit with one image or another, and whether evidence across jurisdictions corroborates one image in particular, produces the following findings: The public management reform image is the most common across countries. However, New Public Management is not a coherent paradigm, and one should also consider the different administrative reform conditions in the countries, with administrative traditions and styles as an intervening variable. The rational analysis image is not present in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands; the same for the political control image. In these three countries, symbolic action ranks as the dominant motive. The EU reveals a dominance of the rational policy-making image. In the US, and to a lesser extent in the UK and Canada, all images are traceable, suggesting a multi-purpose approach to IA.

Cashmore M, Richardson T, Hilding-Ryedvik T, and Emmelin L, (2010) Evaluating the effectiveness of impact assessment instruments: Theorising the nature and implications of their political constitution. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 30, 371-379.

The evaluation of outcomes of policy interventions and especially their effectiveness has been of increasing interest in the last decades, and has also been issue to substantial changes. The term and the meaning of effectiveness itself has been argued about a lot within the political community. Especially the evaluation of effectiveness is seen as conceptually and methodologically problematic. However, evidence-based policy-making has become more influential when it comes to evaluating effectiveness. With its principle to focus more on 'what works' rather than political beliefs, it has been applied to a wide range of sectors and policies, especially through impact assessment. The article theorizes effectiveness evaluations for impact assessment instruments by examining the politics. Thereby, both political considerations, which are embedded on the design and use of IA instruments, and the implications for evaluation research are analyzed. However, the focus is more on sharpening the theory of effectiveness evaluation rather than the effectiveness of IA tools per se. To tackle the topic, the article firstly explains how the term politics is analyzed and what the fundamentally political characteristics of impact assessment instruments are. Secondly, three analytical examples are used to illustrate a variety of sources and types of political influence. Thirdly, the political constitution of IA and its implications for theory on effectiveness evaluation is analyzed. The article concludes with recommendations for future research and the practice of evaluation.

Nykvist B, and Nilsson M, (2009), Are impact assessment procedures actually promoting sustainable development? Institutional perspectives on barriers and opportunities found in the Swedish committee system. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 29,15-24.

At the national and international level, there is a strong push to promote the usage of assessment knowledge, especially in the field of sustainable development. However, it can be observed that only a very limited number of available impact assessment methods are used in policy-making. This study aims to shed light on the processes behind the limitations of impact assessment procedures. The authors focus on the institutional dimension of this problem and elaborate on the question which institutional constraints limit the usage of impact assessment methods in the Swedish Committees of Inquiry. Their findings suggest that the dominant disciplinary, professional and organisational cultures constrain a more effective use of assessment models. In the case of Sweden, these constraining factors are firstly, the strong culture of consensus seeking and, secondly, the setup of the Committees as extensions of ministries. In addition, socio-economic priorities play an important role as well. The study implies that policy-makers as well as assessors show a lack of knowledge, which limits the inclusion of sustainable development. Therefore, the authors come to the conclusion that strengthening the institutional arenas for social learning is more important to enhance the integration of sustainability concerns, than the development of more complex assessment models.



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