LIAISE

Linking
Impact
Assessment
Instruments to
Sustainability
Expertise

Discussion Paper

Options for the Design of the Front Office Toolbox and the Help Desk

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SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

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Preamble

The following document presents the combined Deliverables 4.1 and 4.3 of the LIAISE Work Package 4. Merging both products into one deliverable document appeared as appropriate because of the close interrelation between the topics and the common deliverable month.

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Executive Summary

The **Frontoffice toolbox** and the **LIAISE Helpdesk** must be considered as two closely related service entities in support of users such as policy makers. Although the toolbox focuses on tools, it should contain relevant information on impact areas, indicators, processes of impact assessment, experts, and examples of good practices. The toolbox will be a web portal, which facilitates a lively interaction between researchers and officers responsible for different aspects of Impact Assessment. The toolbox should provide a range of useful services, which makes it attractive to visit and to utilize at different points of time during an impact assessment.

Each of the databases entails a standardised description with relevant information for the items. The items are linked across the different databases, i.e. a certain model is linked to specific experts, impact areas or good practices of the tool application.

The front office toolbox is closely linked to the **backoffice toolbox**: The back office contains the tools which are at immediate disposal to the consortium or even usable online for the users. The backoffice has the capacities (and the intellectual property rights) to modify tools according to the needs of the policy maker in specific Impact Assessments.

The LIAISE toolbox is complemented by a **helpdesk,** which supports the use of the toolbox in its different functionalities. The helpdesk will be a combination of personal support through office (email/phone) and forum software, which will be utilised by a wider range of experts. The ambition of the helpdesk is firstly, to directly connect users seeking advice with relevant experts on short notice and secondly, to collect as well as make available questions and solutions in the field of Impact Assessment, thereby providing a continuously growing **knowledge database**.

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1 The Front Office Toolbox: An interface between science and policy

1.1 Introduction

The **Front Office toolbox** can be conceived as a science-policy interface. Users should find relevant information to support all tasks and processes of Policy Impact Assessment with a focus on issues of Sustainable Development. At the same time, it should attract scientists to contribute and to make relevant information available to potential users. Although the toolbox focuses on tools, it should contain relevant information on impact areas, indicators, processes of impact assessment, experts, and examples of good practices. The toolbox will be a web portal, which facilitates a lively interaction between researchers and officers responsible for different aspects of Impact Assessment. The toolbox should provide a range of useful services, which makes it attractive to visit and to utilize at different points of time during an impact assessment.

The toolbox will be based on a set of different, though interconnected **databases**:

- Tool-database
- Database on impact areas
- Experts database
- Database on Good Practices of IA

Each of the databases entails a standardised description with relevant information for the items. The items are linked across the different databases, i.e. a certain model is linked to specific experts, impact areas or good practices of the tool application.

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Figure 1 summarizes the basic concept for the infrastructure which will form the LIAISE toolbox.

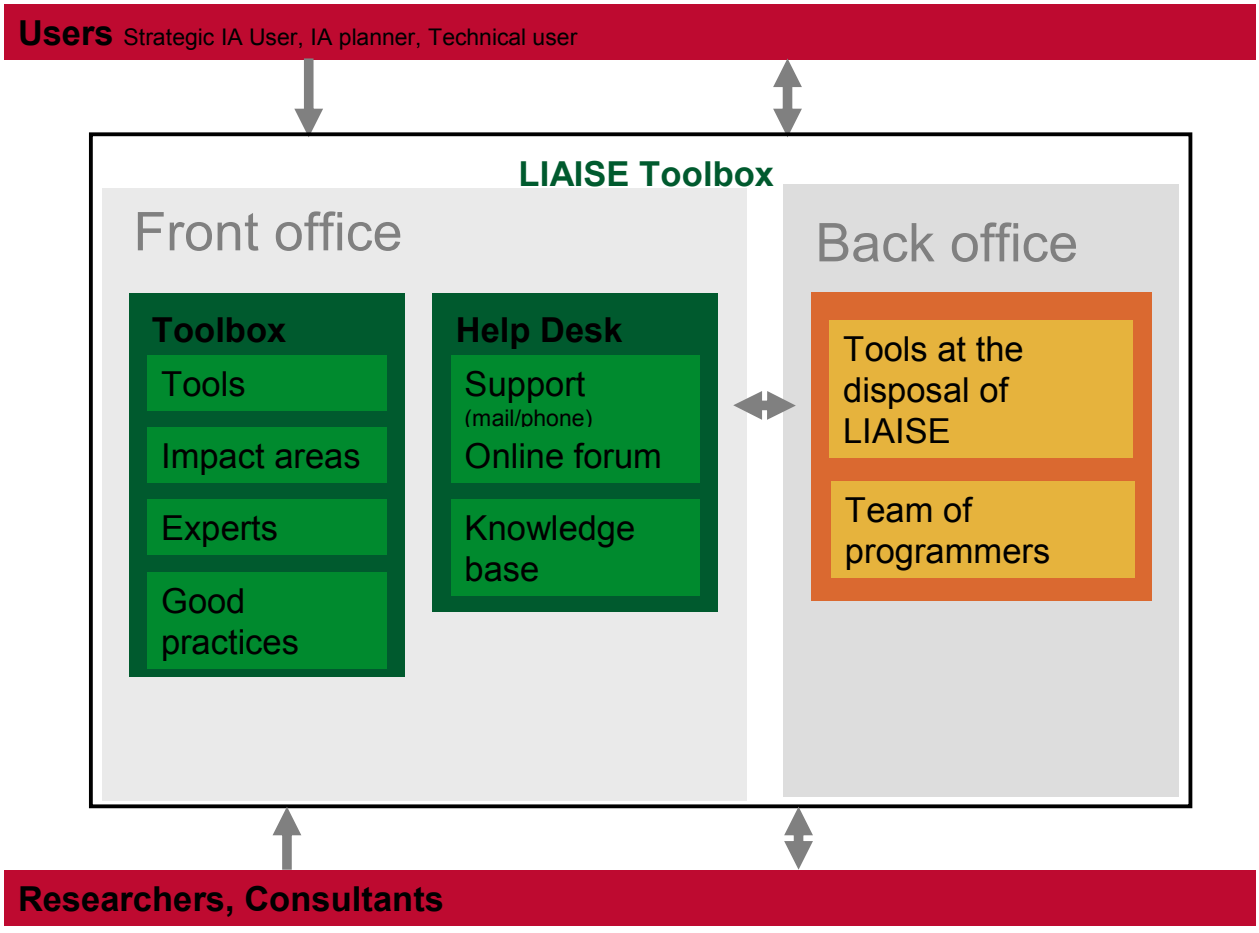

Figure 1: Relationship between Front Office, Help Desk and Back Office

1.2 Target groups

Initially, the toolbox will be designed to support officers in the European Commission in their duty to conduct impact assessments on planned policies. However, the tasks for policy officers in Impact Assessment vary

considerably, dependent upon their responsibilities. Therefore, different types of users and their demands will be considered:

- **Strategic IA user** (e.g. planner of IA systems, strategic planning of policies): The toolbox will provide examples of good practice demonstrating the quality and feasibility of individual IAs. By using the toolbox, strategic users e.g. in support units, will be enabled to point policy officers to reliable tools and examples of their application. Furthermore, the toolbox supports scrutinizing the quality of IAs.
- **IA planner:** Policy officers in charge of the preparation of policies and the planning of related IA will find comprehensive support for the process planning, tool selection, contact information to experts, information on relevant impact areas and examples of good practices of previous IAs. IA planner will be supported through the help desk and – on the basis of an individual agreement – tools can be adapted to the needs of the particular policy case.
- **Technical user:** Policy officers with a background in modelling (e.g. specialists in support units) will find information on recent developments in modelling in their field of expertise.

To fulfil its ambition of becoming a science policy interface, the toolbox should also be open to researchers and consultants offering their tools and services in support of European IA.

- **Researcher:** the toolbox should be an attractive venue for researchers to display their work and their competences. Tools, which are included in the toolbox will be described in a standardised way and will have to fulfil minimum criteria to assure their quality. In later stages, services can be included which are useful for researcher, e.g. funding opportunities, a presentation of IA organisations and projects, etc.
- **Consultants**: Similar to policy officers in charge of the IA planning, consultants will also find support and references for the planning of the IA in the tool selection by providing background information on impact areas. Furthermore, consultants will be invited to upload their studies and their tools if they fulfil specified criteria of quality and accessibility of their services.

In later stages of development enterprises or their associations could be envisaged as an additional user group: Being targeted by policies, companies and their associations might be interested in carry out their own assessments or scrutinizing the quality of IAs that are relevant to their work.

By using the tools from the toolbox, IA disputes with studies and counter-studies can be avoided.

The different user groups will have access to the same data, but it will be displayed differently: First, users can choose between an access as a policy officer or as a researcher (an even more detailed distinction can be considered at a later point of time). Second, different entry points to the toolbox will be offered to the user, i.e. a user with experiences in modelling may choose the tool database as entry point, while a policy officer in charge of IA may prefer an entry via the impact database.

Initially, the toolbox will be designed for European policy makers and their Impact Assessments. However, in later stages, tools can be included addressing the needs of regional, national, sub-national or local policy makers.

If there is demand for a specific toolbox for a national jurisdiction, a localisation of the toolbox can be envisaged. Depending on the requirements, this could include

- a set of national impact areas (i.e. national indicators for Sustainable Development)
- a complementary database of tools used in the country
- a subset of experts for the jurisdiction
- an own entry point to the databases
- if needed a translation of the toolbox (although it would be preferable to keep a single consistent version to save resources)

1.3 Functionalities of the Toolbox

The toolbox should comprehensively support the IA process at all stages, beginning from the description of the problem (i.e. by providing business as usual scenarios for the different impact areas); the selection of relevant impact areas; the selection of tools to assess impacts and to compare options; communication within the services/departments and with stakeholder; quality assurance etc. To provide an added value for these tasks of IA, the following functionalities could be envisaged:

- **Tool selection**: Based on the relevant impact areas, a pre-selection of tools will be supported. As far as possible, tools will be highlighted that support the assessment of tradeoffs and synergies between different impact areas. Furthermore, tools will be offered to aggregate the impacts on different impact areas (both quantitatively and qualitatively), thereby allowing a comparison of options. Additionally, tools will be offered to facilitate the process of communication, to gather data and to present the results of IA. For the selection of appropriate tools, a web site will not sufficient at least not for sophisticated models which require technical knowledge regarding data requirements and the potential outputs. The help desk will provide support for this and will link potential users with experts in the field of either specific tools or for impact areas. In bilateral consultation (e.g. conference calls, workshops), the requirements and options for tools for a certain IA can be discussed in detail.
- **Access to tools:** Tools that do not require detailed knowledge for their operation will be made available for download or accessible online as far as intellectual property rights allow a presentation in the toolbox.
- **Quality assurance**: Tools in the toolbox will have to fulfil specific quality criteria. Preferably, they have demonstrated their usability in past IAs. The use of tools from the toolbox should be seen as an indication of quality. Furthermore, the database on good practice should give examples of high quality in Impact Assessment, thereby providing a bench mark for other IAs. The users of the toolbox will be continuously invited to rate the services of the toolbox, which in itself steadily improves the toolbox.
- **Project/Process planning:** The toolbox should provide an overview of the logical steps in IA. Furthermore, it should support the identification of relevant impact areas to be assessed in the IA. If there is a demand, a basic functionality for the project planning (calendar, tasks, communication tools) for the IA can be included.
- **Library function**: The toolbox hosts a continuously growing library of knowledge relevant for IA. The examples of good practices, the references for the impact areas, the knowledge basis on questions and solutions for IA or the tool descriptions should provide a book of references for all phases of IA.
- **Linking policy maker and scientists:** There are three levels facilitating the interaction between science and policy making: a) the display of tools and relevant knowledge in the toolbox; b) the inclusion

of the expert database and c) the ad hoc linking of IA practitioners and scientists through the help desk.

With these core functionalities the following tasks can be supported (non exhaustive list):

Strategic level:

- ToR writing
- Design of the process
- Good examples to legitimize questions/demands
- Quality management/quality standards

IA planner:

- Tool selection (supported by the help desk)
- Examples/good practice of tool application
- Baseline / BAU scenarios
- Data sets for model use (as far as these are part of the tools)
- Selection of stakeholder
- Public communication
- Guidance on reporting
- Project planning / resource allocation

Researchers

- Uploading and updating tool descriptions by modellers

In later phases of the LIAISE project, the toolbox could also be used for training purposes e.g. on simulated IAs.

1.4 Examples of other Inventories and Toolboxes

In preparation of the LIAISE toolbox, a review of other tool inventories was undertaken in order to learn from previous experiences and to avoid a duplication of work. In particular, the following inventories were reviewed following a standardised template:

- **IA Tools**: The IA Tools website is hosted by JRC / IPTS and it was developed in a FP6 research project. The toolbox is publicly accessible, contains an model inventory (basically economic models funded by the European Commission), a good practice inventory

(examples of good practices for the different steps of IA, IAs are considered until ca. 2005), an impact inventory (standardised description of the impact areas listed in the IA guidelines of the European Commission including links to data sources and links) and a handbook of IA (basically an electronic version of the 2005 guidelines). The toolbox has been used for training on IA within the European Commission. Although IA tools are outdated in many respects (old handbook, broken links, incomplete inventories), the main advantage is that it is tailored to the European system of IA. It provides a good starting point for the LIAISE toolbox. IPTS is willing to hand over the responsibility for IA Tools; however, it has to be decided how future amendments can be made as IA Tools is part of the Europa website.

- **Update of IA Tools model inventory and good practice inventory**: In 2008, IPTS commissioned two studies to Cambridge Econometrics and to The Evaluation Partnership (TEP) to update the model inventory and the good practice inventory. The results of these studies are available, but have not been integrated in the online version. Both inventories are now up to date and much more comprehensive than the current online version. The integration in the LIAISE toolbox is possible with limited efforts.

- **Sustainability A Test**: SustATest was a FP6 project. Rather than focusing on specific tools, SustA Test provides an overview on methods and families of tools for all steps of the IA process. Compared to IA Tools, the approach is broader and more conceptual. The mapping of different methods and tools for IA and their description could be integrated in a LIAISE toolbox.

- **EEA model inventory**: The European Environment Agency published a report in 2009 with an inventory of tools in environmental assessments. A selection of tools is described in detail. There is a considerable overlap with the updated IA Tools as the EEA report was used for the update. The descriptions could be included in a LIAISE toolbox. Furthermore, the typology of thematic foci developed in the report can be implemented.

- **TESS**: TESS is an ongoing project (FP7) coordinated by University of Thessaloniki (member of LIAISE consortium). TESS provides a website for EIA, SEIA and IA tools with an environmental focus concentrating on the local level. The description of the tools can be implemented.

- **EUROHARP**: Europharp was a FP5 project to develop tools for the assessment of nutrient losses into water. The project developed a toolbox with models relevant for this issue area.

- **Good practice inventory of the European Commission:** The European Commission has published a collection of examples of IAs on its web pages, which might serve as reference for the different steps of IA. An advantage is the regular updating of the IAs. The application of tools and the reference to sustainable development is not a main motivation of this inventory, but it covers broader aspects of IA and it is up to date. It should be discussed with SecGen if a more structured approach in describing, analysing and displaying good practice in IA is preferable as it is the case in the updated IA Tools.

From the review of other IA tool inventories, the LIAISE toolbox can make extensive use of existing typologies and inventories. The LIAISE toolbox should be linked as much as possible to existing toolboxes and in particular, should integrate the knowledge of inventories that otherwise are at risk of becoming "orphan toolboxes" because of a lack of maintenance (as IA tools) or an end in funding (like Sustainability A Test). LIAISE should not only collect the knowledge on single tools, but should also integrate previous projects on tool inventories.

Based on the goals and functionalities as outlined above and based on the review of existing toolboxes and inventories, the following plan for the implementation of a LIAISE toolbox is proposed.

1.5 Implementation

The toolbox should be operational within the first year of LIAISE. In its first version, it might be composed of the following:

- a **database of tools:** This database will contain tools described in a standardised manner. The database will be composed of a) the tools which are described in the revised IA-tools version and b) the list of tools available in the LIAISE consortium. If available through the Commission, a list of tools which are in use in the Commission services could be added later. The description of tools will follow the reference model, which is developed in WP3. However, for tools which are only described in the toolbox, but not maintained in the backoffice, only a reduced set of information is required. The available tool descriptions will be sent out to the research groups which

developed the tool and they will be invited to update the information. To avoid outdated or orphan tools, the invitation to update the information will be sent out after a specified period of time (e.g. 2 years) if there was no visible activity.
Some tools which are easily accessible and which do not require technical knowledge will be hosted in the toolbox and will be open for use by the policy officers. Figure 2 illustrates the different categories of tools which will be included in the toolbox. Hence the database on tools will include three groups: 1) tools for which a limited description is available, 2) tools which have a full description according to the reference model and which are available and accessible to the consortium and 3) tools which will be made accessible to be used by the policy makers.

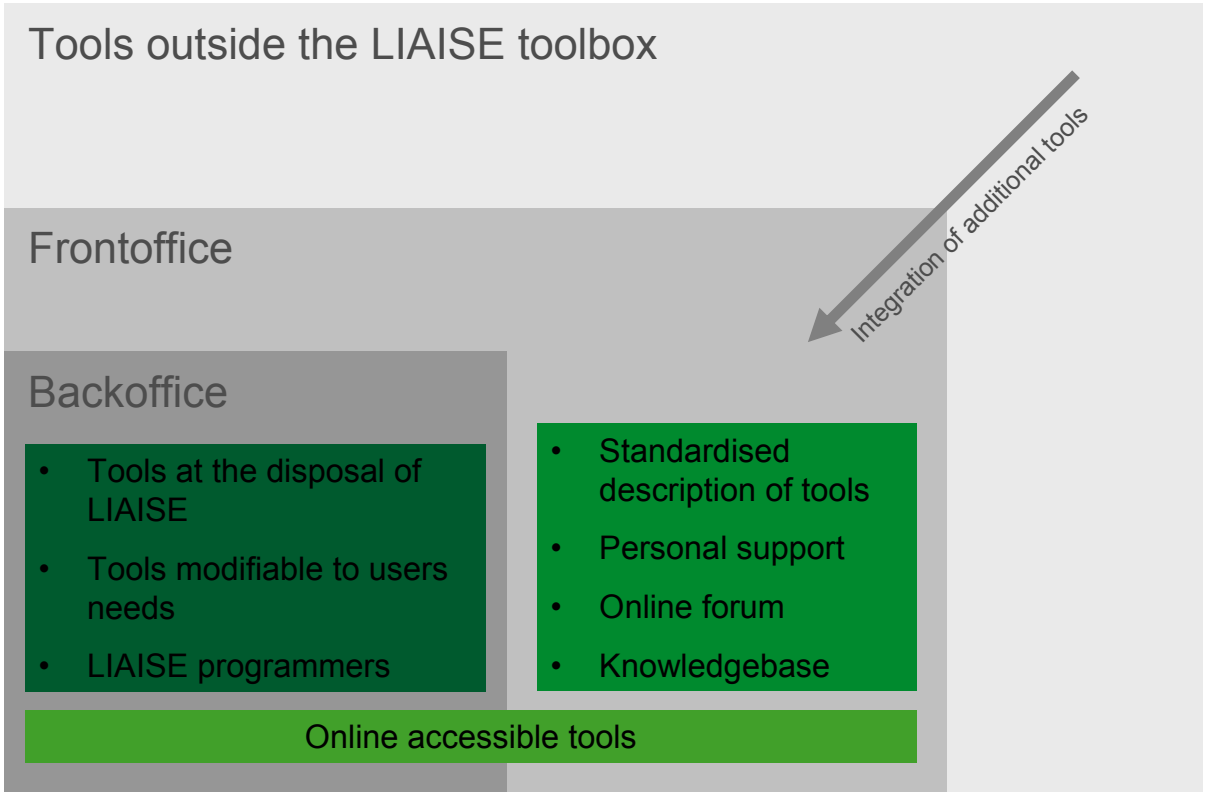

Figure 2: Different categories of tools to be included in the LIAISE toolbox

- The tool description will include relations to the other databases on impact areas, experts and good practices of their application.
- a **database of impact areas:** Following the structure of 2009 IA guidelines, the impact areas will be described in a standardised way. The description will include a short summary of related policies and links to respective Commission services. In later stages, additional

impact areas might be included as well, e.g. national systems of sustainable development indicators.

An important feature of the description of the impact areas will be a collection of business as usual scenarios and references to relevant journal articles.

- a **database of experts:** Beginning with the LIAISE team members, a database of experts will be developed that have competences in either tools or in specific impact areas. The exact terms of references for the inclusion in the database will be determined at a later point of time. The database of experts is not meant to replace the help desk. The list of experts should be open beyond the LIAISE consortium and it should be attract researchers and consultants to become listed. However, a minimum set of quality criteria (e.g. tool developer or relevant publications in peer reviewed journals) will be demanded.

- a **database of good practices**: This database will be based on three sources: a) the updated good practice inventory of IA tools, b) the Commission examples of good practices and c) a database of academic case studies on IA, which will be developed in WP1. Given the multitude of different sources and the different owners and purposes of the databases, a minimum set of common aspects will be identified in the description.

An important aspect will be the definition of quality criteria for the entries in the database, especially when an extension is planned beyond the consortium and the IA Tools inventories. For this, a close collaboration with the team from WP5 will be sought. If the toolbox contributes to the definition of quality criteria for tool use in Impact Assessment, it is important, that the quality criteria are transparent for the different types of user.
For the setup and the maintenance, the toolbox will be structured according to thematic foci. Within the consortium, the responsibility for different thematic foci will be shared depending on the expertise in the relevant field. The respective partners will be invited to contribute tools, knowledge on the impact areas and serve as experts.
The different databases will allow different entry points to the toolbox, depending on the interests and needs of the user:

1) A ***thematic*** entry point starts with the impact areas organised by thematic foci, the hierarchy of the impact areas in the IA guidelines or other systems of indicators/impact areas. The user will identify relevant issues, receive support in development of business as usual scenarios and will find tools that assess the impacts of planned policies.

2) An entry point which focuses on ***tools*** is directed to more sophisticated users. Users will receive background information on the capabilities and requirements of tools to support IA in a given problem.

3) An entry point focusing on ***processes*** starts with the logical steps of IA and offers tools as well as information on each of the steps. For this part of the toolbox, the Sustainability A Test will be an important source, as it provides a broad overview on different frameworks and concepts for IA that can be used for the planning of the process. If demanded, this could entail tools to support project planning, i.e. a calendar, task list, communication tools.

The user should be enabled to choose the entry point on its own through the menu or by answering simple questions ('what do you want next…').

- Figure 2 illustrates the different foci points of the toolbox, it should be noted, however that all data will be accessible for every type of user. The different entry points are different ways to present the data, and it should be possible at any point of time to change between different databases, or to explore the content by general keyword search functionalities.

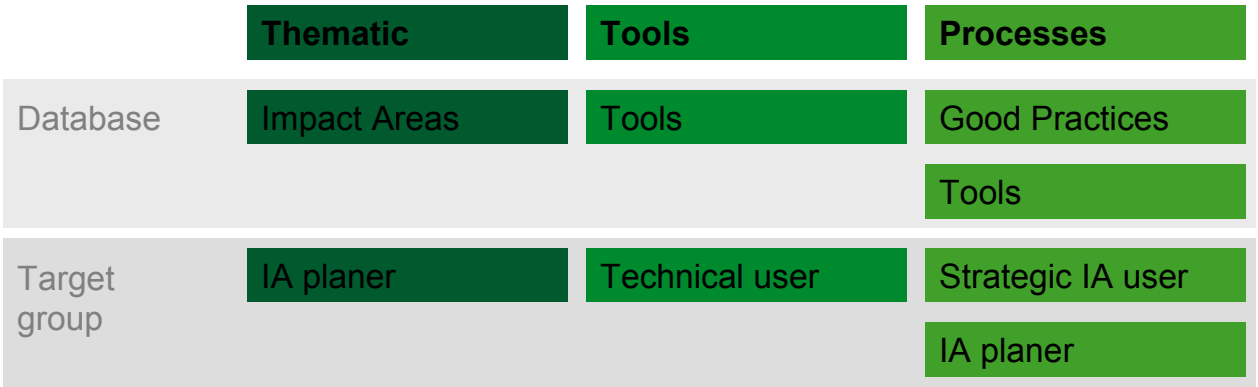

Figure 3: Different foci points of the LIAISE toolbox

The toolbox will be programmed in a content management system with a server hosted by Alterra. The CMS will allow a management of access rights, e.g. modellers might be allowed to change their own model descriptions; partners responsible for a specific thematic focus will have access rights to the respective models, impact areas etc.
An important issue for the implementation is the relation to IA Tools: IA Tools hosted by the JRC/IPTS is well established, mentioned in the IA guidelines and used for training purposes. The above planned LIAISE toolbox could start with IA tools but would entail major changes. It is open to

discussion if these changes should be included in the official version of IA Tools operated by the IPTS. It would be resource intensive and time consuming for all participants to negotiate every single change to be implemented in the official version. One option is to take the current IA Tools webpage from the web once an operational version of the LIAISE toolbox is running. Thereby, the control over the content will be handed over to the LIAISE team. A different option could be to have two versions running: A more experimental toolbox under the auspices of the LIAISE team, and e.g. an every six month updated officially approved version under the responsibility of IPTS. With every update, an appointed officer of the Commission could decide which new elements should be included into the official version. From the point of view of the consortium, it would be preferable, if an officially approved version is maintained on the European website, e.g. by SecGen or by JRC/IPTS. However, this should be agreed upon in the PAB and in bilateral discussions.

2 The Help Desk

2.1 Goals

The helpdesk of the LIAISE toolbox is composed of different complementary elements. Initially, it focuses on supporting the use of the toolbox and its elements through different support levels. Depending on demand, it can be extended to a comprehensive support for the overall process of IA.
As there is no individual, even no research institute that has the competences to provide the expected support for all tools and for all impact areas, the task of the helpdesk is primarily to match IA users with relevant experts as quickly as possible. This may be achieved by different means of communication all of which should be utilised and tested: a) a telephone and email address should provide quick and personal assistance, b) a forum software enables simultaneous communication with a large group of experts, and c) a knowledge database will provide a stock of knowledge based on previous requests for support.
Different support levels can be provided on the various families of tools in the toolbox: The full accessible tools within the auspices of the LIAISE network will have the most comprehensive support, possibly even including programming tasks. For tools which are only described in the toolbox, but which are developed and accessible only by researchers outside the LIAISE consortium, the possibilities for support are rather limited.

The helpdesk staff will closely collaborate with WP6 – test cases. On the one hand, users that contact the help desk may be potential candidates for a LIAISE test case. On the other hand, the WP6 team could provide the most comprehensive support for all aspects of an IA. Testing the LIAISE competences including the toolbox should also link back to improvements in the toolbox and the services of the help desk.

2.2 Implementation

The helpdesk will be implemented together with the toolbox in the first year of the LIAISE project. It entails the following services:

1) Personal support: A phone number and an email address will be made available during normal office hours to provide personal contact. The help desk staff will have a basic training in Impact Assessment and will have an excellent overview of the toolbox. The ambition is not to provide technical support for individual tools or expert knowledge on specific impact areas. Instead the help desk staff should be able to support the usage of the help desk and to forward technical questions to the appropriate experts.

2) Forum software: Users will be invited to post their questions in a forum software, which is open to other users and experts. The questions can be discussed within the forum. The discussion threads will be kept available online, thereby steadily increasing the stock of knowledge.

3) Knowledge base: For typical questions in relation to the different aspects of IA, files with procedures and recommendations will be made available in a database.

The responsibility for the personal support is with Freie Universität Berlin. It can be expected that answers on the forum software will be posted by the whole LIAISE team. Experts from outside the consortium and in particular researchers which develop tools hosted in the toolbox will be invited to join the forum discussions. The help desk staff will moderate the discussion if needed and order the contributions to the relevant sub sections of the forum.

An important task of the help desk will be the support of tool selection and usage. The toolbox may provide a pre selection based on the planned policy and its expected impacts. However, for sophisticated tools it will be necessary to link early on potential users and experts to discuss the appropriateness of a tool for a specific IA problem. The help desk should be able to establish the necessary contacts on short notice.

It should be explored as to how far IPTS or other units from JRC would be willing to take over an active role in providing services in the help desk. This could be realised by subscriptions to the forum software, by naming experts for the expert database or even by taking over the responsibility for certain thematic foci or specific tools.
The articles for the knowledge database will be provided by the experts for the thematic foci and by owners of the various tools. Generic questions and answers on the toolbox will be prepared by the help desk staff.
The users will be invited to rate the different contributions (postings, articles of the knowledge database) in regard to their usefulness. This will contribute to the quality assurance and it will allow for a continuous learning on the needs of users.

2.3 Durable Provision of Services

The aim of LIAISE is to develop an infrastructure for the support of IA, which provides a durable service also beyond the duration of the Network of Excellence. This requires the continuous maintenance of the databases that form the LIAISE toolbox. The tool descriptions have to be updated, new examples for good practices included and the links to experts must be maintained as well as the information on impact areas.
Similarly, the help desk services should be provided beyond the FP7 funding. Therefore, during the project, it will be explored 1) what services are actually in demand and 2) which models ensure their funding in discussion with the Policy Advisory Board. It is conceivable that the services can be maintained by a new contract, by handing back the responsibility to the Commission (e.g. to IPTS), by the researcher and consultants offering their services through the toolbox or by collecting fees from individual users. A detailed planning for this will be undertaken in WP5.It will be particularly documented what services are demanded from the helpdesk, which provides a basis for the training of responsible staff.

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