

Introduction

In the second half of the 1990s, the scientific SEA debate was acknowledged to have significantly failed to address the role of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in decision-making processes (Kjørnø and Thissen 2000). Policies, plans and programmes are based on political decisions, and an efficient SEA must therefore refer to the specific logic of decision making.

This book introduces the Analytical Strategic Environmental Assessment (ANSEA) approach, taking a step in this direction. It collects the results of a two-year project financed under the Fifth Framework Research Programme of the European Union. The ANSEA project develops an approach to environmental assessment based on decision-making sciences to ensure the integration of the environmental dimension into decision-making processes. The project aims at providing a top-down deductive approach to environmental assessment of policies, plans and programmes in order to integrate environmental protection objectives and measures systematically into strategic decision making. For this purpose, the ANSEA project covers a broad set of issues related to several disciplines such as decision theory, policy analysis and environmental assessment. The approach developed is designed to be applied to a broad spectrum of planning instruments that range from local to national scale in different sectors (from agriculture to telecommunications). It therefore results in a broader and more abstract assessment methodology.

The key point of Analytical Strategic Environmental Assessment is the shift from an analysis of the environmental consequences of a decision to an analysis of the decision-making process. The focus is on the priorities, issues and values that govern decision making. The objective of the ANSEA project is to provide a complementary and decision-centred approach to the assessment of policies, programmes and plans (PPP).

So far, the project seems to have developed a conceptual platform on which a decision centred on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) might be further developed. At the same time, it has pointed out some theoretical issues that this new approach to SEA should deal with, highlighting open questions for further research. The outcome of the project is a serious attempt to link the environmental assessment theory with decision theory and policy analysis.

The ANSEA approach is based on desk research drawing on *ex-post* analyses of finalized decision-making processes. In an *ex-post* evaluation the approach was found to be a useful and successful methodology for providing

environmental values in decision making. In the future, further pilot studies of real decision-making processes will have to test its concepts and procedures to make it a fully integrated instrument.

The ANSEA approach has been developed at a time when the practice of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is growing and extending to an increasing number of applications. In June 2001 an EC Directive was adopted, Directive 2001/42/EC, for the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. Its full and coherent implementation within three years represents a crucial step for the future development of the environmental-related policies of the Member States. In this context, the definition of a transparent and systematic approach to Strategic Environmental Assessment and of useful tools represents a high priority. Further knowledge and approaches to SEA are needed to respond to such legislation and to achieve a better integration of environmental protection objectives. In this perspective, the ANSEA approach is an invitation to open a more extensive discussion on environmental assessment, decision-making theories and policy analysis. This could lead to a new way of thinking that could contribute not only to environmental assessment, but also to the design of environmental policy.

This book is in three parts. The first part is devoted to the development of the conceptual background of the ANSEA approach. It locates and attempts to clarify the contribution of the ANSEA approach to the current state of the art. It is a review of the different decision theories and policy analysis streams.

The second part of the book presents the practical outcome of the ANSEA approach, which is the ANSEA methodology. The aim of this part is to clarify how the ANSEA concepts could be integrated in real assessments of PPPs, and it introduces a sequence of seven methodological steps as a possible framework for the assessment of the decision-making process.

The third part of the book includes two explicatory examples of the ANSEA approach. These examples are based on the information collected and processed in two of the eight case studies developed within the ANSEA project. They analyse the significant environmental implications of specific decision-making processes through the step-by-step application of the ANSEA approach.

The editors