

Experience of Strategic Environmental Assessment in regional land use planning in North Jutland County in Denmark

(*Anna Studsholt*, Regional Planner, North Jutland County in Denmark gave the seminar presentation. This paper is a short summary, made by *Tuija Hilding-Rydevik*, on the North Jutland experiences based on Anna Studsholt's presentation and research reports covering the presented North Jutland case study.)

This paper describes briefly the experiences from a case study on implementation of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in the regional land use planning process in the North Jutland County in Denmark. These experiences are expected to give input to the discussion on implementing SEA in the regional development planning context either in regional development plans in general or in the context of Structural Funds Programming.

The case study was conducted during the years 1995 – 1997 and was done in co-operation between the Planning Administration in North Jutland County, the Danish Ministry of Environment and Energy and the EIA Centre at Roskilde University, Denmark. The case study was part of a research project and was financed by the former Ad hoc group for EIA under the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Danish Ministry of Environment and Energy. The research project, including the case study, is described in : Elling and Nielsen 1996, Elling 1998 and Elling 1999.

Planning and impact assessment in Denmark

Denmark covers 43 093 km², has 277 municipalities and 14 counties (amt in Danish). Two of the municipalities have county status. According to the Danish Planning Act, every county has to prepare a regional land use plan. The Regional land use plan gives the frame for the future town development, over all transport structure, preservation of land and natural resources, recreation, tourism and the location of major establishments and activities. The planning horizon is 12 years and the plan is revised every fourth year. Regional plans have legal implications for land use planning at the municipal level.

One government tool, concerning regional development and in order to bring a higher degree of co-ordination to sub-national policies is to encourage production of Regional Development Plans as a general framework for bottom-up initiatives within the regions (Aalbu, Hallin and Mariussen 1999).

Legal SEA demands in Denmark exist only at the national level. Since 1995 SEA of new acts and other governmental proposals has been mandatory. The requirement of EIA was introduced by a circular to the Planning legislation in 1989 (revised in 1999) and concerns only projects. According to the legislation, the environmental assessment of large-scale building and engineering projects will be assessed according to the EIA procedure in connection with regional land use planning and reviewed by the regional authorities.

Research project

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In 1995 the research project on *SEA in regional planning* (Strategisk miljøvurdering i regionplanlægningen) was started. The aim was to develop methods for SEA of regional plans and to test them in a case study in order to get practical experience. The case study experiences were evaluated and reported separately in order to give a systematic basis for other case studies on SEA in the counties. The project was divided into five parts:

- Reporting of international experience and experience from other case studies on relevance for the project.
- An Environmental Assessment of the existing regional North Jutland plan adopted in 1993.
- The development of a method for SEA of regional plans based on the assessment of the 1993 plan.
- A trial run, a case study, on SEA as an integrated part of the revision of the 1993 plan in order to test the developed method. This was done during 1995 – 1997.
- An evaluation of the experiences of the case study.

Details concerning the design of the research project, the methods used and the case study can be found in Elling 1996 and Elling 1998. The presentation here will focus on the results from the evaluation as described in Elling 1999 and by Anna Studsholt at the seminar.

Experiences and conclusions

Anna Studsholt had been working with this project at North Jutland County and it seems there were some interesting experiences made. The planners concluded that no new knowledge was produced through the SEA but the planning process became more clear. From the politicians point of view it was concluded that they got better information as basis for choices. NGO's experience was that they should participate early in the process preferably already in the scoping stage. As a whole it seems that a better regional land use plan was produced. Lessons learnt was for example that SEA must be integrated through the whole planning process and that there should be an assessment of the planning objectives and strategies even if this is a difficult task. The question of the relation between the regional land use plan and the structural funds process was raised during the seminar. Anna Studsholt answered that every project in the structural funds programs is screened by the people working with the land use plan. But it also happens that the structural funds people come to ask for help with analysis of environmental impacts at terribly short timeframes.

Elling (1999) made an evaluation of the Jutland case study based on a number of interviews with planners and politicians that took part. Conclusions were that there was an agreement on the need for SEA in the regional land use planning. And that barriers for implementation of SEA is not a matter of methodological difficulties. But in order to have an impact on the plan SEA must be integrated both in the process as in the final planning document. One of the planners also pointed out (Elling 1999, p 29) that it is important to have a professionally broad SEA team. If you have a professionally narrow SEA team then you will get an environmental assessment with a narrow scope and this will not benefit the planning process. These results from the interviews support the view of Anna Studsholt, that the usefulness of SEA in the North Jutland case was that the process enhanced the possibilities to inform politicians and the public. Two of Ellings conclusions are:

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- The implementation of SEA introduces a new important measure, a new yard stick, besides the economic measures, that can be used for the whole land use plan. This implies that, in practice, the environmental dimension will be parallel to the economic dimension.
- The implementation of SEA highlights the actual political and democratic character of the planning process.

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