



## IAIA10, Sustainability Assessment with SEA, 9 April 2010

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### Abstract Description

Switzerland intends to introduce an impact assessment which combines the requirements of a sustainability assessment with the strategic environmental assessment (SEA). This is the answer to a parliamentary motion titled "Better coordination between environmental protection and spatial development". The impact assessment will be carried out in two stages and will be applicable for structure plans of the cantons. The first step encompasses the overall assessment of the structure plan. The second step will examine the impact of infrastructures in more detail.

### A Situation in Switzerland

- In the Sustainable Development Strategy (Guidelines and Action Plan 2008–2011)<sup>1</sup> of the Swiss Federal Council it is mentioned that **Sustainability Assessments** (SA) should be used in the case of relevant projects to reduce conflicts between different objectives and make the best possible use of synergies between the target dimensions of sustainable development. The goal must be to harmonize framework conditions for all of the assessment methodologies used. The agencies have to draft and develop the necessary principles (e.g. sector-specific criteria and indicators, more detailed assessments in specific areas), and have to make them available as support tools. Different SA have been carried out on federal, state and commune level.
- While **Strategic Environmental Assessments** (SEAs)<sup>2</sup> are compulsory for EU Member States under the terms of the corresponding directive, Switzerland is still evaluating them in more detail. Furthermore the Protocol on SEA to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Kiev Protocol 2003) has not yet been ratified by Switzerland. There is only one single canton in Switzerland, Geneva, with an existing legal base and directives for SEA. In some other cantons SEA is applied for a few plans on voluntary base.
- There are no legislative directives for SA or SEA in Switzerland.
- Switzerland intends to introduce an impact assessment which combines the requirements of a SA with the SEA. This is the answer to a parliamentary motion titled "Better coordination between environmental protection and spatial development"<sup>3</sup>. One intention for this political mandate is the wish to increase the legal certainty for projects, for instance that a new shopping centre can be built in a zone which is designated in the structure plan for traffic intensive installations. Politicians

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Development Strategy: <http://www.are.admin.ch/themen/nachhaltig/00262/00528/index.html?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> Die Strategische Umweltprüfung (SUP): <http://www.bafu.admin.ch/uvp/01065/index.html?lang=de>

<sup>3</sup> Motion, Bessere Koordination von Umweltschutz und Raumplanung:  
[http://www.parlament.ch/d/suche/seiten/geschaefte.aspx?gesch\\_id=20043664](http://www.parlament.ch/d/suche/seiten/geschaefte.aspx?gesch_id=20043664)

hope that with an impact assessment on the level of a structure plan projects have better chances to pass the subsequent EIA.

## **B Relationship between impact assessment, sustainability assessment, SEA and EIA**

The relationship between the instruments impact assessment, sustainability assessment, SEA and environmental impact assessment (EIA) as it is perceived in Switzerland is shown in Figure 1. The sustainability assessment provides a comprehensive view of sustainability issues and therefore also examines the impact on society and the economy. The sustainability assessment aims to balance the three dimensions of sustainability and identifies trade-offs and proposes solutions to minimize them. It sensitizes the responsible authorities to cross-sectoral thinking. The SEA is limited to the assessment of environmental concerns (including health). The SEA analyses them in depth and can therefore contribute to relieving the EIA on project level. The impact assessment (IA) encompasses the sustainability assessment and the SEA. All the above mentioned assessment tools are integrated into existing planning procedures.

The goal of joining SEA and SA is to have just one new instrument to introduce. This is much easier to achieve than having to persuade politicians to adopt two new instruments. Our main goal is to reach a legal base for impact assessment for plans and programs.

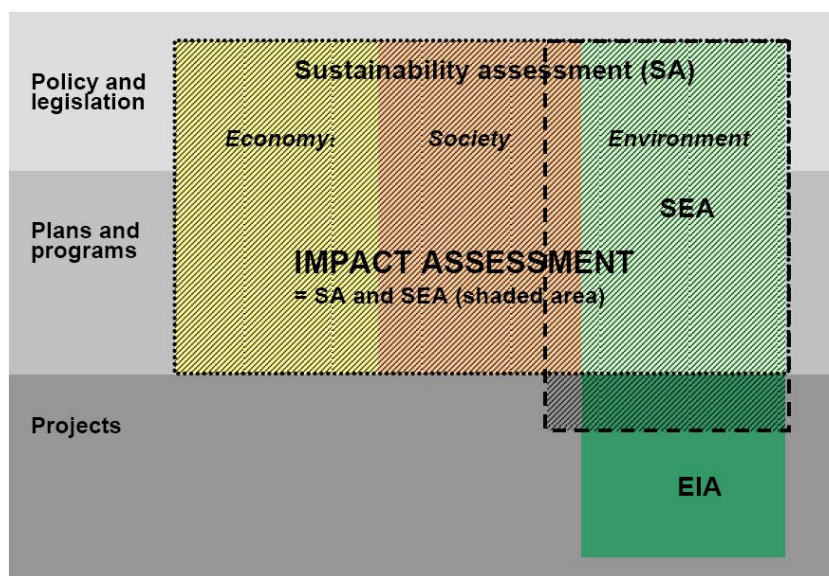


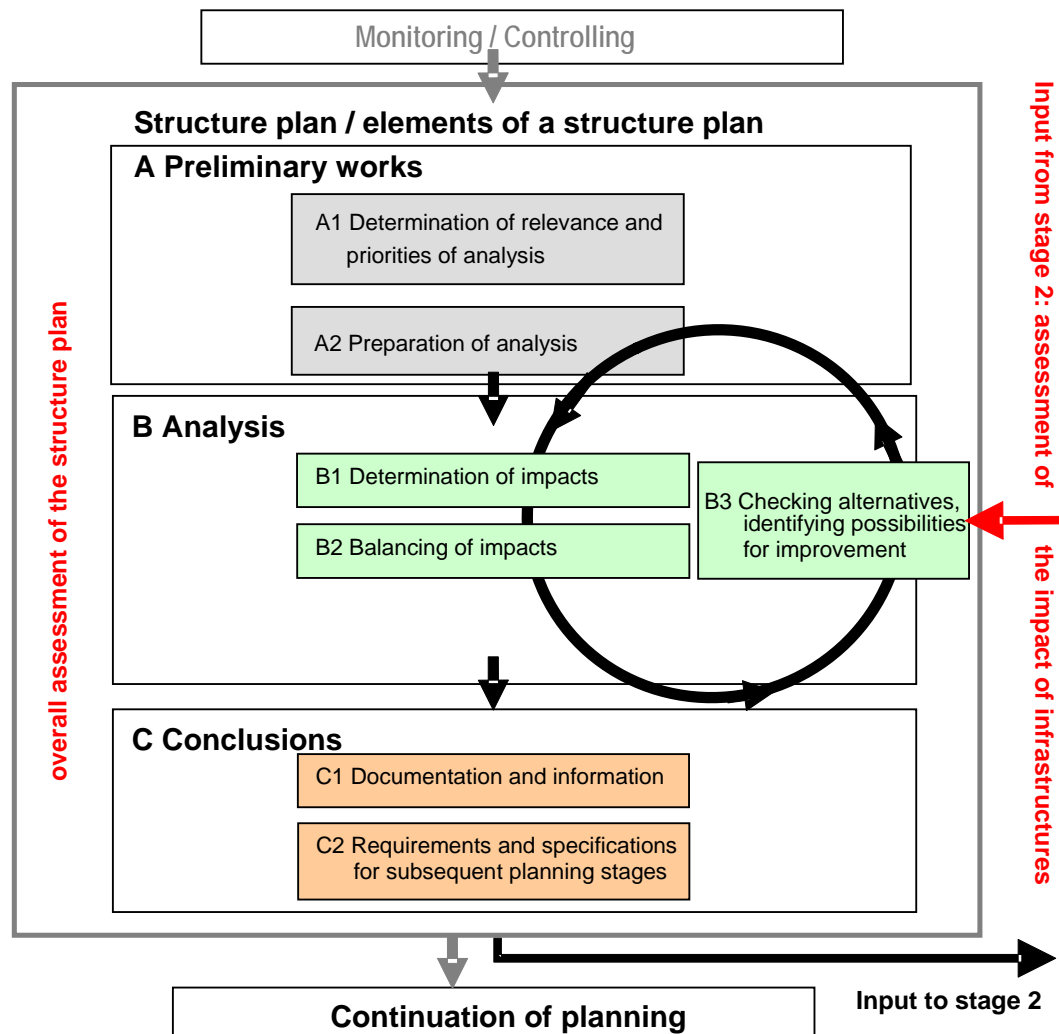
Figure 1: Positioning of the various methods

## **C Impact Assessment (IA) for structure plans in two stages**

The proposed method for impact assessment will be carried out in two stages and will be applied for structure plans of the cantons. The first stage sets out the overall assessment of a structure plan. This stage starts at the beginning of the process, when the aims and general guidelines are defined. The second stage includes the evaluation of important or conflicting structure plan projects, such as traffic-intensive installations. This stage considers the infrastructure projects and other elements of the structure plan at a more detailed level and defines their impact more precisely.

A draft of the method for the overall assessment of a structure plan has been worked out (including a checklist in an Excel-Tool) and is being practically tested right now. The methodology for the second stage of the assessment will be available in a few months and will subsequently be undergoing practical tests and later be revised.

### Procedure of stage 1: Overall assessment of a structure plan



### Principles of the proposed overall assessment:

- **Process oriented:** Ideally, the overall assessment will be designed in a way that the dialogue and the iterative process with the leaders of the structure plan is supported.
- **Implementation oriented:** An overall assessment can be integrated directly in the project management (monitoring, controlling, evaluation). This allows a continuous improvement of a structure plan regarding its sustainability.
- **Comprehensive:** Although the method proposes quantitative approaches, it also allows qualitative assessments. This should provide the fullest possible range of effects.
- **Flexible:** The proposed method specifies the procedure and minimal standards. It allows therefore enough leeway with regard to the operational procedures.
- **Compatibility:** The overall assessment should not lead to a parallel or duplicate assessment of a structure plan. It should complement or build on other assessment instruments.
- **Transparent:** An adequate documentation ensures that the results are reproducible and the process remains transparent.

### Experiences with the first stage of the method

- The objectives of a plan are often formulated very generally and are too vague for an assessment. The more substantial a statement in a structure plan is, the more useful the results of the assessment will be.
- Sometimes it is not clear whether there is a link between a proposed measure and a criteria of assessment, even if one can be assumed. For example, it is not sure if a “mobility strategy” actually has an impact on criteria “economic innovation”. A vague description of presumed effects, does not satisfy the scientific prerequisite. To say “the effect is unknown” is not satisfying either. Thus, the tool obtains the character of a guessing game.
- It is often difficult to find real alternatives to the higher-level objectives of a structure plan. Even the option “What will be without the structure plan” is sometimes not tangible enough and remains hypothetical.
- Even the application of the proposed simple tool is quite time-consuming. If the evaluation is to be comprehensive – which is necessary – the costs quickly become quite substantial.

### Second stage: Assessment of the impact of infrastructures of the structure plan

The second stage of the proposed method includes the evaluation of important or conflicting projects contained in the structure plan, such as traffic-intensive installations. The second stage of the methodology is in preparation.

On the one hand, it appears that this second stage is easier to handle than the first because the projects and the elements of the plan are better defined at this level. On the other hand it is necessary to examine the probable compatibility of the projects with legal requirements (particularly in the environment) in order to ensure that the projects can later be realized.

<h3>D Potential benefits of the method</h3>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The impact of the content of a structure plan is of essential interest. It is important that differences between the plan’s content and the goals of sustainability are clearly pointed out.</li> <li>- Structure plans should be increasingly used as strategic planning instruments which define the frame for the future development. If the content of these plans is well justified and comprehensible regarding its sustainability, the plan will be better accepted.</li> <li>- The instrument can point out conflicts of aims among the three pillars of sustainability (economy, environment and society) and suggest possible solutions to these conflicts, improvements and alternatives.</li> <li>- The implementation of optimized plans should result in a reduced use of resources and deliver an important contribution for supporting the transition to a Green Economy.</li> <li>- Impact assessments should also be applied to so called “stabilization programs” in times of financial crises, where they could propose adequate projects with a positive impact for a Green Economy. In Switzerland projects undergo the same procedure – regardless whether they are part of a stabilization program or not. The only difference lies in the shorter deadlines for projects of stabilization programs.</li> <li>- For reasons of legal security of investment a deeper appreciation of environmental issues in spatial planning is urgent. It should be avoided that a subsequent EIA shows that a proposed site for a facility (e.g. shopping mall) is not possible for environmental reasons or leads to restrictions for the project that are so severe that the realization is not of interest for an investor anymore.</li> </ul> |
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