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Right or just? Assessing and addressing social impacts in Dutch road planning

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Introduction

- The relationship between road planning and neighbourhood characteristics, like socioeconomic status (SES), is little investigated.
- Aim:
explore the relationship between socioeconomic status of local residents and the planning of road infrastructure projects.
- Method:
 - Quantitative analysis on SES and highway projects
 - Qualitative follow-up via in-depth interviews to explore how the influence of SES works out.

MAIN MESSAGE

One of the goals of EIA is to incorporate environmental issues into the decision-making process.

After all, the environment cannot speak for itself.

In this line of reasoning, social effects should be taken into account as well, as residents with a lower socioeconomic status could be disadvantaged or less equipped to speak for themselves.

Background

- Construction of infrastructure can lead to (political) controversies.
- Participation just an ‘empty shell’?
- Mismatch between participation and resident’s experience.
- ‘Participation elite’.



The role of a higher socioeconomic status

Residents with higher socioeconomic status:

- are better informed on a project and their rights;
 - have a better network, with short line to local politics and politicians;
 - have more interest in a project, increasing participation;
 - are more assertive and empowered.
- This changes the discussion and can set the agenda.
- They could experience more benefits of participation – their efforts pay off better.



The role of a lower socioeconomic status

Residents with lower socioeconomic status:

- could be less equipped (in connection to being informed, network, interest and empowerment) to participate;
 - might be out of sight for the project organisation.
- Special attention should be given to communication, fairness and inclusiveness.
- Residents with a lower socioeconomic status should not be disadvantaged by their education or income.
- They are double impacted, as they are often already in a vulnerable position (cumulation of effects).



An opportunity for EIA?

- SES plays a role in the planning and participation process.
- However, SIA not a standard and legally required procedure in the Netherlands (and many other countries).
- Expand the scope of EIA.
- Social aspects more prominent in the planning process:
 - Attention for low-SES groups in the planning and participation process
 - Implement Social Impact Assessment (SIA) in the EIA system to carefully address social effects
- International perspective and reflection on the theme of SES and road planning and EIA.

Thus, making EIA more inclusive and just.

Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments via chat in the IAIA21 platform.



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