

Exploring pluralism – different stakeholder expectations of the value of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

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Motivation

The paper focuses on the high profile SEA conducted for renewable energy in SA, undertaken over a two year period from 2013 to 2015. Decisions around the SEA could potentially influence the energy mix of SA with profound direct and indirect implications for national, regional and local economies and interests.

Problem Statement

This paper compares expectations about value by different stakeholder with the perceived realization of value, within the context of South Africa's national level renewable energy planning where SEA has been well established and is being applied to prominent high level strategic decision making involving a broad range of stakeholders.

Methodology

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a well-established form of EA, now applied in more than 60 countries world-wide. To date SEA performance evaluation is based on quality, effectiveness, success, and follows a deductive research approach by measuring preconceived and purposefully designed performance criteria. The main aim of this research is to explore pluralism in SEA by identifying different stakeholder expectations of value. South Africa is identified as an ideal context because of well-established SEA practice, since the mid-1990s and its requirement to involve a broad range of stakeholders in the SEA process. In particular, the recent application of SEA to South Africa's national level renewable energy planning provides a specific SEA case study with the necessary complexities and broad stakeholder involvement.

Results

A total of 21 different VEs were identified with government raising eight, industry ten, Conservation related organizations six and IAPs seven VEs, with some overlap between them, reflecting a definite plurality in expectations between the different stakeholder groups. The Government, industry, conservation bodies and I&APs' strong and weak stakeholder specific VEs are unpacked in the paper to analyse the expectations of the various stakeholders' groups in terms of what the SEA could and should have achieved. The outcome of the analysis also determines to what extent certain stakeholder groups agreed on different VEs and the realised expectations on the value of the SEA in this particular case study.

Conclusions

The paper demonstrates the different expectations of the four stakeholders' groups through the SEA process for renewable energy in SA (e.g. government more concerned with process and mandate while the industry is more concerned with cost, efficiency, certainty) and explores pluralism in SEA by identifying different stakeholder expectations of value.