



# Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal

ISSN: 1461-5517 (Print) 1471-5465 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tiap20>

## Editorial

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To cite this article: Thomas B Fischer (2020) Editorial, Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal, 38:3, 179-180, DOI: [10.1080/14615517.2020.1761115](https://doi.org/10.1080/14615517.2020.1761115)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14615517.2020.1761115>



Published online: 05 May 2020.



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EDITORIAL



## Editorial

Dear Readers,

I'm writing this editorial in week 5 of 'lock-down', – whilst trying to combine home office for two with home-schooling and childcare. I'm fully aware, though, that this is currently a very privileged situation to be in.

Most countries globally are currently fighting to contain the spread of COVID-19 to something (remotely ...) manageable (for their respective health systems), trying to keep the number of associated deaths as low as possible. For most – like me – these are unprecedented times.

Whilst – for the time being – most countries are (luckily) successful in managing to keep essential and basic services running whilst prioritizing the protection of human lives, the big question for most of us is 'what next' when infections are reduced to levels where the spread of the virus is seen to be 'under control', i.e. if, on average, each virus-hit person infects fewer than one other person (something already achieved by some countries). How should we go about reinventing our economies in order to avoid further negative destabilisation of societies and reduce socio-economic damages whilst trying to avoid further waves of infection? Also, how can we avoid a situation where the damages from lock-downs could be greater than the damage done by the virus itself? I'm thinking in particular of those health impacts that are numerous and varied, including those that are mental health related (e.g. anxiety and fear of the virus itself, as well as existential threats due to economic hardship and depression), along with -issues, such as domestic violence, people avoiding going to hospitals for other necessary treatment for fear of infection and others.

In addition to the challenges we currently face, a myriad of other challenges is now ahead of us. Some of them will be related to repairing damage, whilst others revolve around the question of how we can make our societies more resilient to pandemics and disasters. In this context, it would be a grave error simply going back to 'business as usual' or using predictable reflexes, such as reducing environmental standards in order to achieve quicker economic (growth) recovery, with potentially serious long-term damages. Whilst there are no easy answers, crises usually also provide for opportunities to making things better. Some of our economic practices are inherently non-resilient and unsustainable. 'Just in time' production processes, for example, lead to materials being in transit, rather than being in stock. In a COVID-19 world this decreases

resilience of economies – and societies. Also, more regional produce is likely to mean greater resilience than if most food produce comes out of a complex chain of production processes that involve lengthy transportation through e.g. numerous countries. Issues are clearly complex, though, and there are no simple answers. Also, contexts differ and what is right for one country may not be right for others, based on e.g. cultural and other differences. This is where we, the impact assessment (IA) community, can help our respective societies. IA inherently aims at not just focusing on the obvious, direct effects, but also on impacts that are indirect and / or hidden. Future strategies that are fed and influenced by an IA philosophy are therefore highly likely to be more sustainable, leading to greater resilience.

IA can help a lot in improving preparedness for pandemics. It appears that those countries particularly hard hit had either reduced or (more or less) abolished their pandemic preparedness strategies over recent years or had created 'just-in-time healthcare' systems. This is similar to what has been observed with regards to preparedness for disasters, for which there is a growing IA literature (see e.g. Kelly 2002; Olshansky and Chang 2009; Liu and Duan 2010; Tajima et al. 2014; Nijenhuis and Wahlstrom 2014). Whilst a scopus search of 'impact assessment' and 'pandemic' resulted in 31 hits on 22 April 2020, none of the associated publications deal with 'impact assessment' as understood by the community which IAPA represents. There is, therefore, a lot of space for activity and action!

Subsequently, eight papers are presented to you in this issue of IAPA, including by authors from Canada, Japan, South Africa, the UK, Switzerland, Ghana, Mozambique, the Netherlands and Brazil. Issues covered include climate change, EIA, HIA, sustainable road planning, and SEA. Furthermore, practices covered are from Canada, Indonesia (two papers), South Africa, Wales, the Netherlands, Brazil and the African continent.

In the first paper, Katja Hetmanchuk of Concordia University, Canada, considers the intention and implementation of climate change mitigation in Canadian environmental assessment. Reflecting on 15 projects across five Canadian jurisdictions she finds 'that well-developed intentions by EA authorities did not necessarily result in proponents following guidelines for [climate change mitigation ...] consideration in their EISs due to the absence of regulation or clearly defined policies'.

In the second paper, Ali Rahmat Kurniawan, Takehiko Murayama and Shigeo Nishikizawa from

Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan provide for a qualitative content analysis of EIA in Indonesia, focusing on nickel smelter processing. Describing numerous challenges in this system which was established 36 years ago, they recommend 'political reinforcement of the will of the government to establish sustainable policy in terms of budgeting, human resources, and procedure of decision-making process in EIA'.

Next, RC Alberts, FP Retief, C Roos, DP Cilliers and M Arakele (all North West University, South Africa) reflect on the 'fundamentals of EIA through the identification of key assumptions for evaluation'. Applying theory of change method to the South African EIA system, they identify 19 key assumptions underlying EIA. The authors 'recommend the testing of these assumptions towards a better understanding of the fundamental nature and purpose of EIA as a policy implementation instrument'.

In the next paper, Liz Green (Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit; WHIASU), Benjamin J Gray and Kathryn Ashton (both Public Health Wales) consider how HIAs can be used in Wales to implement sustainable development goals in practice. In this context, the authors describe an HIA undertaken on a proposed major electricity cable connection development. How this HIA was the catalyst for considering and implementing the Welsh Government's Well-being Goals (which enshrines the UNs Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within it) in practice is discussed.

In the fifth paper, Mirko S. Winkler (University of Basel), Philip B. Adongo (University of Ghana), Fred Binka (University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ghana), Fritz Brugger (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), Serge Diabougba (Research Institute of Health Sciences, Burkina Faso), and Eusebio Macete (Manhiça Health Research Centre, Mozambique) report on a 6-year project on how HIA can promote sustainable development. This aims at informing and facilitating a national and international policy dialogue on whether current African approaches to impact assessment promote sustainable development.

Next, Gede B. Suprayoga, Patrick Witte and Tejo Spit (all Utrecht University, the Netherlands) explore how to cope with strategic ambiguity in planning sustainable road development. In this context, they look at how economic and environmental interests in two highway projects in Indonesia can potentially be balanced and how interests and interpretations on project goals of different stakeholders can potentially be reconciled, applying a Multiple Stream Framework (MSF) approach. They conclude that the integration of interests needs a 'window' that presents itself through participation of wider stakeholders and political supports. Policy entrepreneurs have an important role to play.

In the next paper, Robin Schwemmler and Paolo Perona (both University of Edinburgh, UK) highlight

action and environmental component interactions, using a network theory approach. They adopt this theory as a methodology to obtain quantitative information that can be inserted in EIA. Discussing 'results from EIAs related to water projects and other case studies, [they show that ...] different complexity helps to appreciate the general applicability of the method'.

Finally, Cristiano Vilardo, Emilio Lèbre La Rovere (both Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), as well as José Eduardo Matheus Evora and Marcelo Montañó (both University of Sao Paulo, Sao Carlos Campus, Brazil) report on 'environmental assessment and offshore oil and gas planning in Brazil'. They explain that SEA-type processes have been ongoing and that a simple consultation process has been in place for the last 15 years which was able to steer oil and gas exploration away from sensitive areas. Whilst the current government decided to ignore the established consultation process and the ongoing SEA-type process, there are various initiatives aimed at preserving 'the recommendations from the previous consultation process [illustrating ...] the relevance of environmental/impact assessment'.

Enjoy reading!

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