Change agents to close the gap between impact assessment science and practice

One of the challenges facing impact assessment is finding ways to work in research and practice that allow appropriate action and critical interrogation of action to enable and support sustainable change.

Change agent is seen as a way to close the experienced gap between science of IA and practice of IA. It is closely linked to current societal needs and undertaken in cooperation between science and practice. It is in this investigation understood as a combination of Mode 3 research defined by Kurek et al. (2007) and a normative framework as described by Jamison (2001).

To make green knowledge through SEA, and impact decision making, science and practice needs to be connected.

Case 1 concerns the first generation of SEA in relation to the national energy infrastructure in Denmark (gas and electricity).

Case 2 concerns SEA of mega industry in Greenland in a system with no legislation or guidelines in place.

Case 3 concerns the Danish process of preparing river basin management plans and SEAs of these (implementing the EU Water Framework Directive).

Investigating change agent potentials and roles

References:

Change agent as a mode of knowledge production

Mode 1: Classic research
Knowledge is produced solely by researcher
Goals and methods of knowledge production are defined solely by researchers
Knowledge production is independent of practice in terms of economy and information

Mode 2: Entrepreneurship
Knowledge is produced mainly by researchers
Goals and methods of knowledge production are defined mainly by practice
Knowledge production is dependent in terms of economy and information – between researchers and practice

Mode 3: Change Agents
Knowledge is produced in cooperation between researchers and practice
Goals and methods of knowledge production are ongoing negotiation between researchers and practice
Knowledge production is an interdependent relation between researchers and practice

The three investigated cases are cooperations between Aalborg University and external organisations, which are characterised by interdependence on economy, information exchange and engagement. At the same time, the setup of the cooperation gives the researcher organisational autonomy.

The investigation of the three cases also identifies risk and weaknesses of the approach: The external organisation needs backing from the entire organisation to fully benefit from the research; contextual changes such as change of organisational tasks may hinder the impact of the research.

The investigation also shows that Mode 3 research is not dissociated from Mode 1 and Mode 2 research. Rather the experience is that a choice of mode suited for the specific phase of research makes it possible to utilise the advantages of each mode.