

IMPACT ASSESSMENT – FIT FOR THE FUTURE!

PROFESSOR LONE KØRNØV, MAY 2023

The Danish Center for Environmental Assessment
(DCEA), Aalborg University

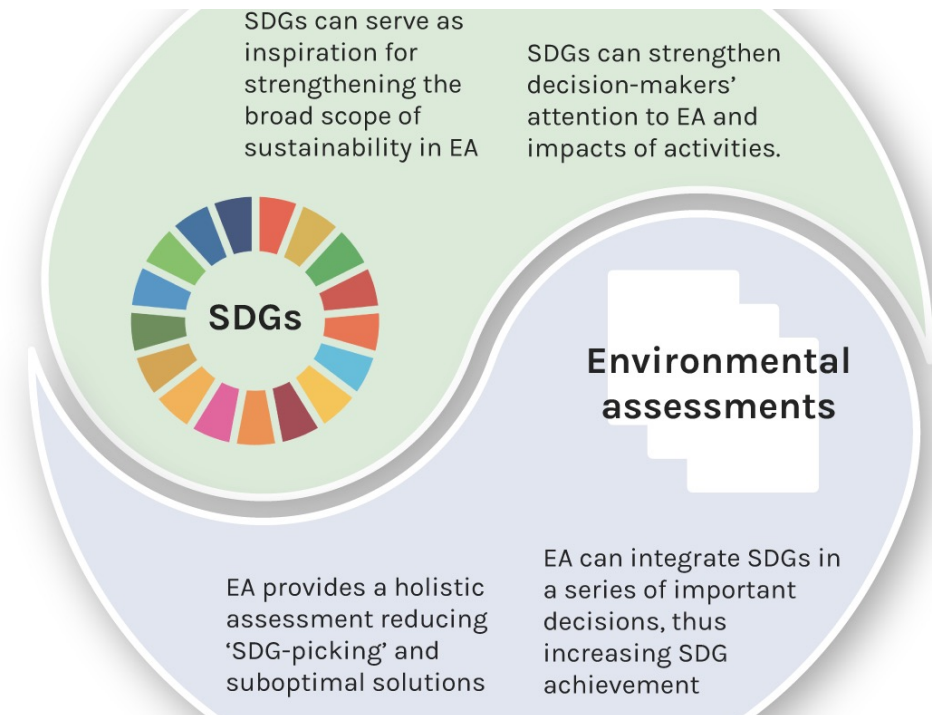


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Point of departure: EA is relevant, necessary and relatively fit

- Build upon a **broad concept of environment**; implement a range of EU policies and help avoid trade-offs and support synergies
- Supporting **changes** and **early integration** in decision-making
- Supporting **transparency** and **participation**
- Despite **strong legal discourse**, important **voluntary EA practice** is emerging – beyond the formal scope of legislation
- **Linking of SDGs and EA** for mutual benefit is slowly emerging

- **But....**



Key-note focus

Fit for what?



Who and how fit?



Fit for which future?



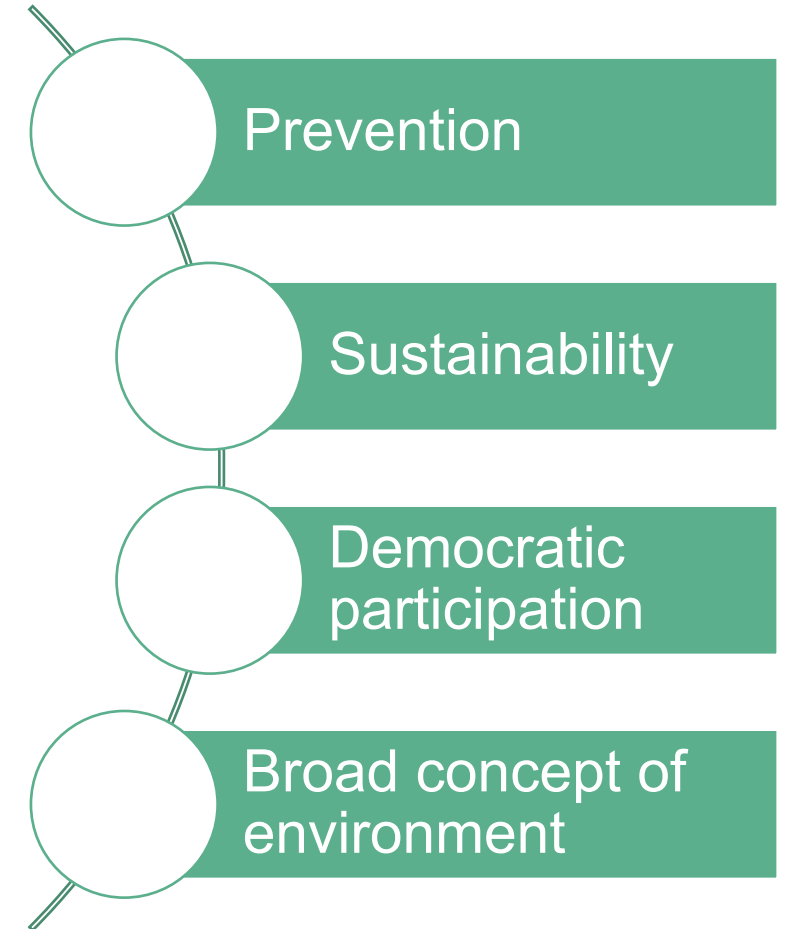
Fit for what?

Fit for the objectives of EA

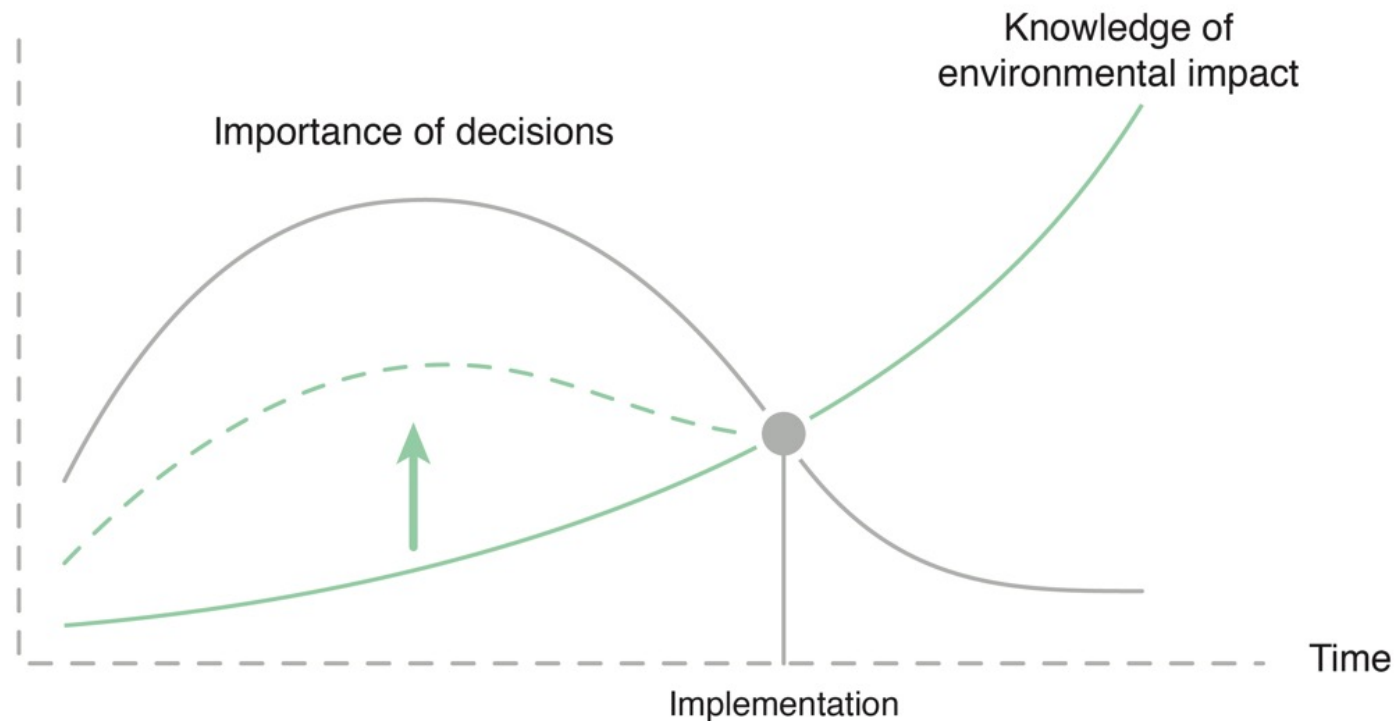
“The objective of this law is to provide for a **high level of protection of the environment** and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes and permission to projects with a view to **promoting sustainable development**, by ensuring that an environmental assessment is carried out of plans, programmes and projects, which are likely to have significant effect on the environment.

The objective of an environmental assessment is that, with the **involvement of the public as early as possible** and before the authority makes a decision on the plan, programme or project, account is taken of the likely significant impacts of plans, programmes, and projects on the environment, including **biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationships between the above factors.**”

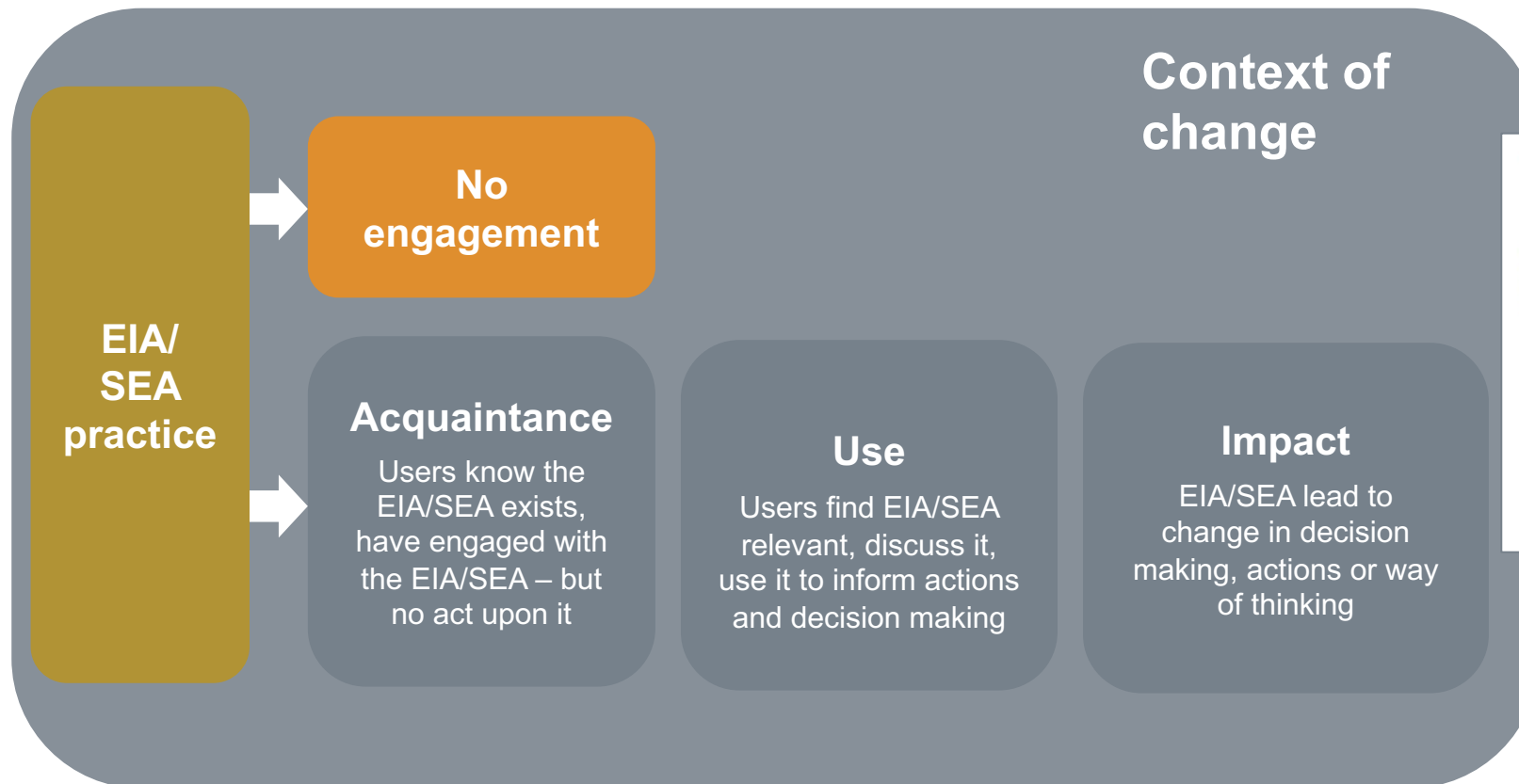
(Danish EA law, own translation)



Environmental Assessment is a change agent



Fit to bring EA-into-change and create impact?



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SEA as a change agent: still relevant and how to stay relevant?

Lone Kørnøv

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Fit for current and future trends

- ▶ Climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion
- ▶ Social and economic trends
- ▶ Emerging technologies (e.g., AI)
- ▶ Technological advancements and acceleration of renewable energy
- ▶ The competition for land
- ▶ Simplification initiatives



RE acceleration & the competition for land

- ▶ Increasing land competition can cause various environmental impacts
 - ▶ Biodiversity loss
 - ▶ Decrease in cropland for food production
 - ▶ Direct and indirect land use change CO₂ emissions
 - ▶ Impact on local communities

140%



Simplification

- ▶is high on the political agenda
- ▶can lead to an EA practice coming closer to or further away from the objective of the EA regulation
- ▶can mean different thing

Simplification of environmental and other impact assessments – results from an international online survey

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ABSTRACT

Results from an international online survey on simplification efforts in environmental assessment (EA) and other types of impact assessments (IAs) are presented. The survey, which was conducted between July and October 2022, captured responses from 45 participants who reported on developments in a total of 26 EA/IA systems. Whilst in about three quarters of these systems simplification efforts are either currently underway or planned, in particular with regards to reducing costs and time necessary for EA/IA, opposite developments were also reported on in two-thirds of the systems, including an extension of existing requirements, such as the consideration of further aspects in EA/IA and the coverage of additional actions subject to assessment. The findings are a reflection of the increasing complexities of the contexts within which EAs/IAs are applied and highlight the need for further empirical research on simplification efforts.

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Unfolding simplification beyond drawbacks: types and reasoning for simplifying environmental assessment

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ABSTRACT

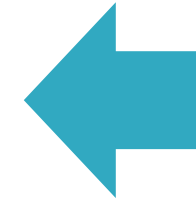
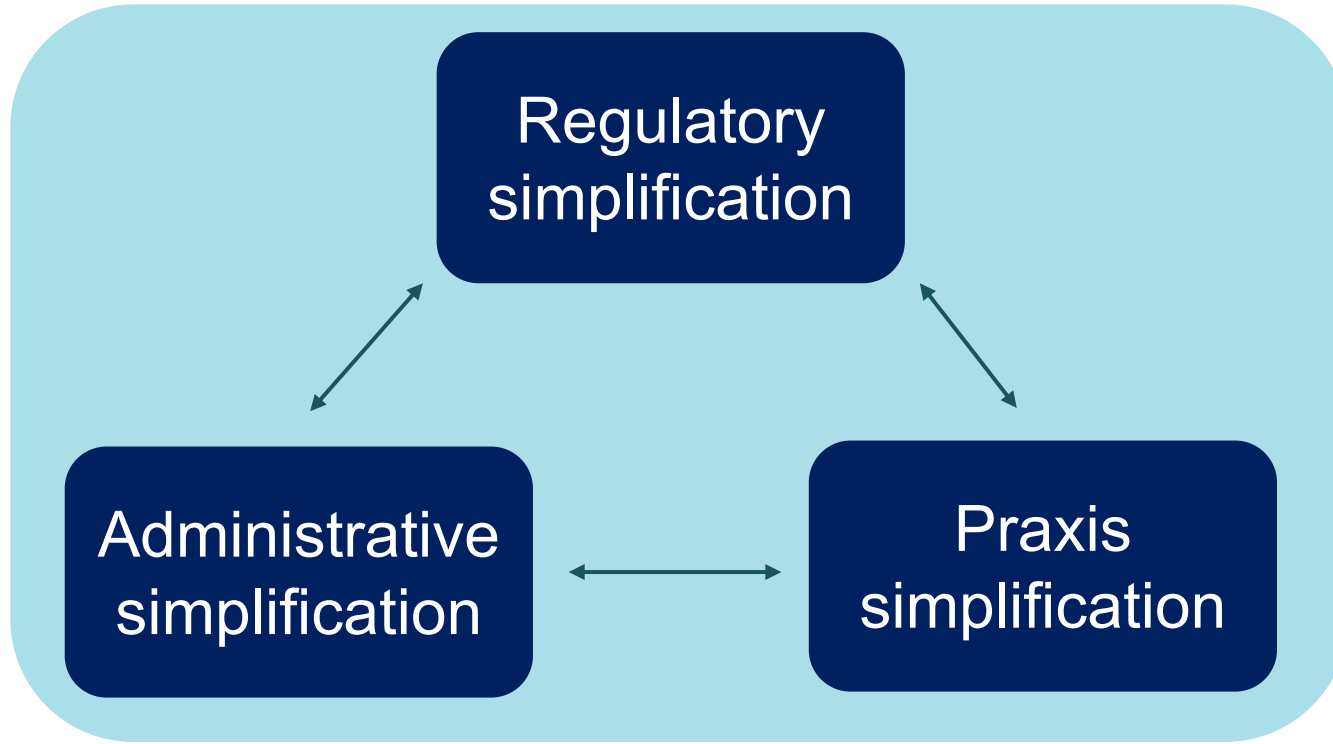
The need for simplifying Environmental Assessment (EA), and potential that simplification holds, has not only been raised by policymakers but also by scholars. Despite recent years' focus and increased push for simplifying EA world-wide – hereunder argued because of the need for accelerating climate investments and green transition – and the fact that simplification is not a new agenda, studies exploring types and effects of simplification remain scarce. Although there is potential in simplifying EA, several concerns have also been raised, including the risk of 'oversimplification.' This letter outlines different reasoning behind simplification of EA and further presents a simplification triangle distinguishing between three interdependent types of simplification: Regulatory, administrative, and praxis. The reasoning and categorization of simplification is illustrated and discussed through four Danish cases, which reveal simplification as a multifaceted set of processes for which we need a more precise terminology. The reasoning and types of simplification presented in this letter may offer a basis for communicating the nature of the simplification processes that the EA may be facing – or needing.

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- Reasonings:
1. Increased efficiency
 2. Increased quality and effectiveness
 3. Reduced complexity

Making sense of EA simplification (‘Simplification triangle’)

Case 1

'Committe for simplifying and modernizing EIA rules' (2012-2015)

One law for EIA and SEA

Unified digital portal for EIA application

Thresholds values

Mandatory scoping

Case 2

'The Law Compass' (2015-2017)

Support to having one EA law (and for more resort)

Integrate Habitat Directive in the EA law

Case 3

'Thresholds values for EIA' (ongoing)

Thresholds for EIA and SEA

Case 4

'Digitalizing EA' (2020-2023)

Store EA reports and suppl. data on public platform

Open access of EA relevant baseline data + expand with new data

Datamine in past reports for future EA practice

Integrate SDGs for more objective-led EA

Situating the four cases in the simplification triangle

	Administrative simplification	Regulatory simplification	Praxis simplification
Efficiency	3 4	2	4
Effectiveness and quality	1 4	1	4
Complexity		1 2 3	

Simplification of EA can also have risks



Reduced scrutiny



Limited public input



Weakened protections



Increased risks

”There is a need to be aware of and avoid oversimplification, where simplification brings us away from what EA is supposed to contribute” Kørnøv and Lyhne, 2023

And at the same time not miss the opportunities to bring us closer

Who to be fit – and how?

'The tired cyclist'



© The Danish Center for Environmental Assessment, AAU
Illustrator: Anton Malnkjær Møller

Effectiveness and Tour de France analogy

- Cyclist: EA practitioner
- Captain of the team: EA project manager
- Team of cyclist: environmental/sustainability specialists
- Manager of the team/The Directeur Sportif: competent authority
- Sponsors of the team: Decision-makers among the developers and authorities
- Audience: Public and stakeholders in the planning process
- The General director of the Tour de France: Regulators and guidance providers
- The Tour officials and secretaries: Quality assurance institutions and mechanisms governing EA implementation



Actors involved in the EA process

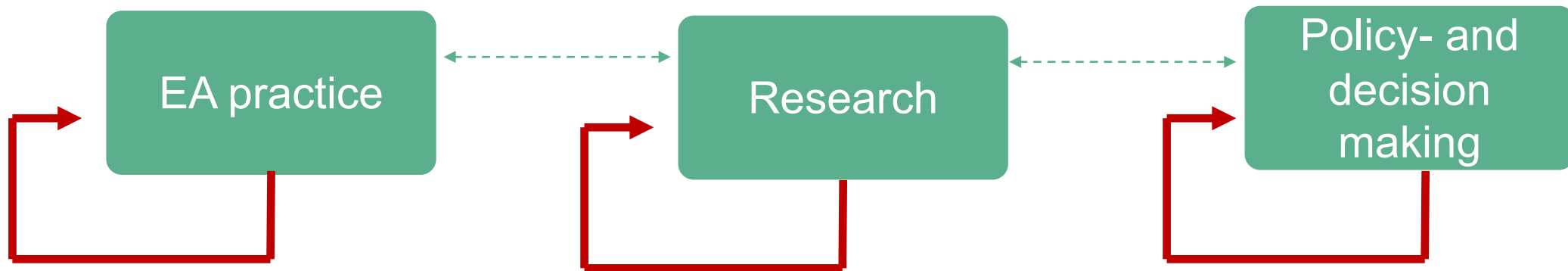


Everyone is a change agent

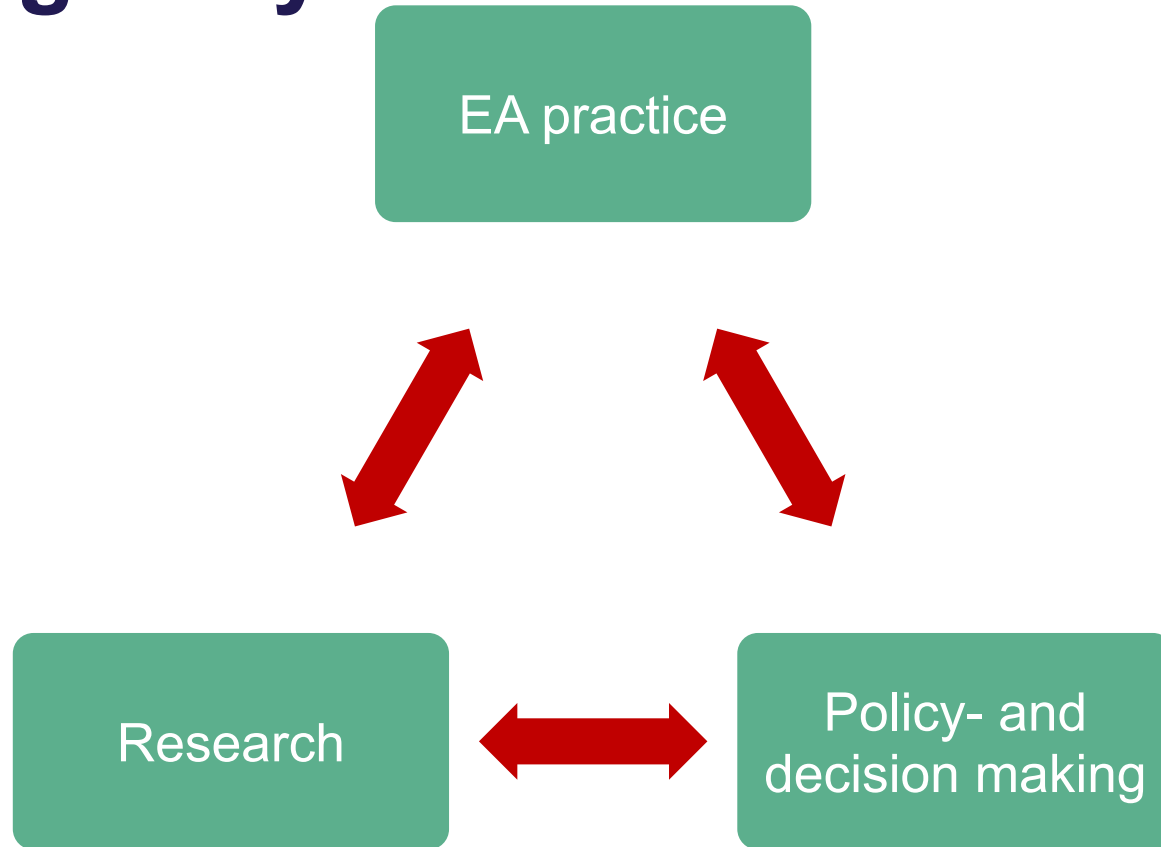


Change
generators

Change agents with de-coupled strategies?



Connection for agency



Two illustrative cases of change agency through collaboration

Case 1: The *DREAMS* project

Digitalizing environmental decision support

► Mission-driven

- Utilizing the potentials of digitalization and developing novel open-access tools
- Supporting private and public actors in improving their environmental assessment practice and thereby promoting a more sustainable development
- Aim to enhance both efficiency and effectiveness – partly by simplifying

► Value-creation through broad partnership with authorities, developers, consultants and researchers



[LINK to video](#)



Case 2: Annual 'Environmental Assessment Day

- Goals
 - enhance the effectiveness of EA practice and create a common arena to overcome some of the barriers for effective EA and develop innovative approaches to practical EA challenges
 - support mutual learning and build capacity among all participants
 - create a basis for further collaboration
 - strengthen practical perspectives in research



Benefitting both research and practice

EA-Day to promote benefits for practice in terms of research	EA-Day to promote benefits for research in terms of practice
Researchers are facilitators of knowledge sharing among actors by organising EA-Day	EA-Day to provide inspiration for new research projects
EA-Day as an opportunity for practice to be inspired on future developments by research presentations	EA-Day as an opportunity for researchers to be updated on new developments in practice and legislation
EA-Day provides a platform for practice to get an external view on current quality of EA practice through research presentations	EA-Day to identify new areas for applications of research
EA-Day provides a platform for development, among others due to neutral overview provided by research	EA-Day to serve as a reality-check for research

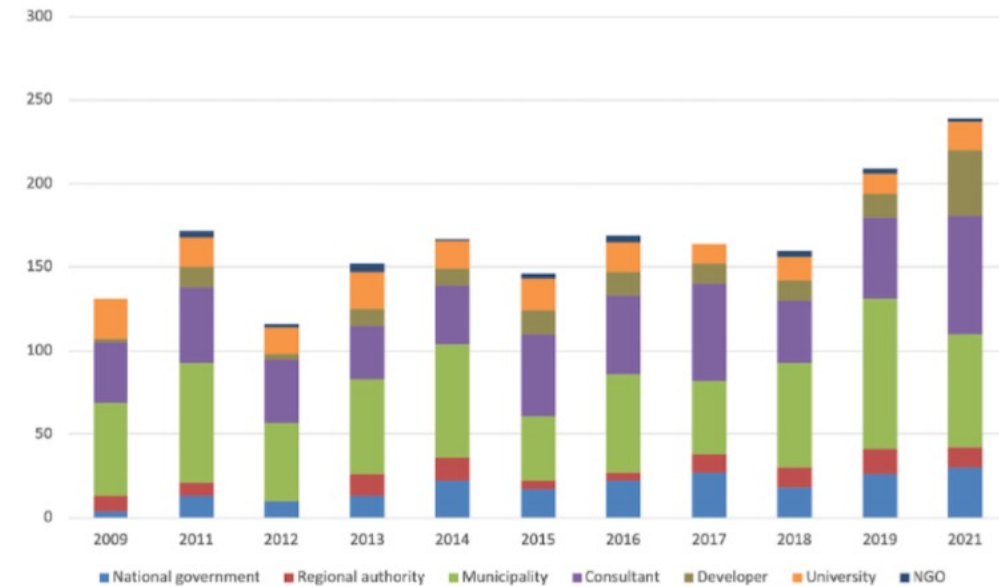


Fig. 2. Total number of participants distributed on types of organisations. Note that 2010 and 2020 are missing, as explained in section 3.1.



Collaboration through environmental assessment networks: Co-creating space and cultivating a joint learning mindset

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability challenges tackled in environmental assessments (EA) call for transdisciplinary cooperation linking research and practice in a joint change agency. This article explores the researcher's agency through the development of an EA network that seeks to support collaboration between researchers and practitioners, mutual learning, and change with a view to sustainability. We are conducting a case study of 'The Environmental Assessment Day' (EA-Day), an annual Danish conference that has been held for 10 years and attracts representatives from public and private organisations relevant to EA. The article is centred around the questions: How and why has the EA-Day network developed, and with what value creation for individual participants and for the general Danish EA practice? A mixed-methods approach is utilised to garner insight into the role and effects of the transdisciplinary conference. The results show that EA-Day is characterised by many different organisations giving presentations and a strong network of participants. The results also reveal how EA-Day provides an important platform for mutual inspiration and the qualification of research and practice. The results are relevant for all actors interested in networks and conferences in the EA field, and especially those interested in how to promote collaboration between research and practice.

The need and challenge to stay fit and relevant as a change agent

Conclusion:

The needs and challenges to stay relevant and fit

1. Decide to be relevant and a change agent – and take the leadership
2. Keep the intention of EA, and the Directives, at the forefront.
3. Simplify in a way which can lead to an EA practice coming closer to the objectives of EA
4. Support a sustainable acceleration of RE
5. Critically embrace emerging technologies
6. Reflect upon what kind of change agent you are - and who the other change agents, you engage with, are
7. Foster collaboration



**Thank you for
listening!**