Change Agents & Impact Assessment

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Change agents to close the gab 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.

Survey at IAIA Geneva conference

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<th>Mode 1</th>
<th>Mode 2</th>
<th>Mode 3</th>
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<td>Researchers</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
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A simple survey of modes of knowledge production at IAIA Geneva conference indicated a widespread self-image among practitioners and researchers of engaging in mode 3 knowledge production.

Investigating change agent potentials and roles

Cases

**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).

Potentials for research and practice

- Access to people, processes and information by participation gives possibilities for testing hypothesis.

- "The strength is that SEA theory is challenged by reality's diversity of asymmetrical courses and sudden political and strategic changes." (Head of Section, Energinet.dk)

- Ownership of outputs of autonomous research where the organisation may work as a platform for disseminating research results to society and other practitioners.

- "[It] have had great impact for progress and development of the specific SEA, that Anne has 'rafted over the water' in different matters." (Head of Department, The Greenlandic Self Rule)

- Dialogue on direction of research and continuous "reality-check" of the research in the interaction with practitioners.

- "Sanne gets input for understanding everyday life and problems of the practitioners. Thereby, the research study adjusts to a more societal beneficial approach." (Head of Department, Rambøll)

- Giving advice: The researcher keeps an academic distance in advising the organisation with professional input.

Role of researcher

- Helping out: The researcher is a "critical friend" trying to change the system from the inside.

- Taking side: The researcher develops a kind of partnership with the society against impacts of industry.

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.

References: