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Strategic Environmental Assessment policy as an instrument for sustainable development achievement: issues and perspectives for Ukraine

Introduction. Last decade people often hear such term as *sustainable development*. According to a sociological investigation for the ordinary Ukrainian people this term associates only with Western countries environmental policy, "Green party" and slogans of lots environmental NGOs, that try to create an environmental consciousness in people's mind.

One point four percentage of Ukrainian citizens are members of different environmental NGOs, it is the third place after Religious and Youth NGOs. But why so few people who know what really sustainable development is and how Ukraine could achieve it? What instruments Ukrainian policy-makers, governmental organizations and NGOs have in order to approach Ukraine to sustainable development?

People should not create a bicycle! Because such instruments are already exist and one of the most efficient among them is *Strategic Environmental Assessment*. People simply have to study how to use and apply it in Ukraine - country in transition, using the experience of Western countries.

The main aim of the present paper is to show an importance of Strategic Environmental Assessment application on the way to sustainable development achievement all over the world and particularly in Ukraine.

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainable Development: definitions, role, importance.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) can be defined as the formalized, systematic and comprehensive process of evaluating the environmental impacts of a policy, plan or program and its alternatives, including the preparation of a written report on the findings of that evaluation, and using the findings in publicly accountable decision-making [9].

Also policies, plans and programs (PPPs) are generally all described as strategic they are not the same thing and may themselves require different forms of environmental appraisal. A policy is generally defined as an inspiration and guidance for action, a plan as a set of coordinated and timed objectives for the implementation of the policy, and a program as a set of projects in particular area. Policies, plans and programs may be spatial (e.g. global, national, local or regional), sectoral (e.g. transport, mineral extraction, renewable energy), or indirect (investigation, education, development, privatization).

In theory, PPPs are tiered: a policy provides a framework for the establishment of plans, plans provide frameworks for programs, and programs lead to projects. In practice, these tiers are amorphous and fluid, without clear boundaries.

SEA plays a very important role not only in the environmental policy and management but also in the all main spheres of people's life. It allows define the main positive and negative issues that could give realization of some policy, plan or program. It is important to note, that it takes into account possible environmental impact as well as socio-economic impact.

SEA application in the elaboration of PPPs allows predict the further socio-economic and environmental development of a country, region or territory (it depends on their spatial characteristic). It is particularly important to direct the development of some region into the mainstream, stream that leads to sustainable development - the main goal in the development of Ukraine. Strategic Environmental Assessment is an instrument for the management of development.

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Sustainable Development can be defined as multi-level manageable process of coevolution of nature and society with active public participation aimed to provide a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature of present and future generations on the base of protection and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage [10].

Sustainable development strategy adopted by UNCED, Rio de Janeiro, 1992, is a constructive response by society on information on deterioration of all natural life - support systems under human stress. Sustainable Development is an integral, humanistic concept considering welfare of human beings as the aim of sustainable development strategy, environmental as its base, economy as an engine of development.

Sustainable development has different spatial levels as well as PPPs: global, national, local or regional.

At the global level, the following main goals may be formulated: conservation of the biosphere stability as a basis of life-support systems for man and society; reproduction of natural resources; reduction of regional socio-economic disparities.

At the national level, the main goals are security of citizens and the State; economic development; solution of environmental problems; ensuring social justice.

At the local or regional level, the main goals may be following: to ensure welfare of population; to create the favorable life conditions [10].

To achieve all these goals at all levels different mechanism should be used, which may be ranked in the following way: political (for instance, international regulation and management); environmental (providing of the environmental assessments); juridical (international treaties and conventions in the field of environment and development); economic (general policy of regional groups of countries to protect their environmental and economic interests).

Sustainable development plays a very important role in man's life, because as an experience of the past shows, development based on subjugation and consuming does not lead to the sustainability but leads to the degradation and deterioration of human environment in future. Therefore, having analyzed the past and the present day's situation in environment, economy and social life people come to thought that development based on the sustainability is the only one possible way of human being and evolution. Sustainability is a driving force for the further development of humankind.

An importance of sustainable development strategy is enclosed in its "universality". It means that countries that have different levels of development could use it, applying the different mechanism for its realization, depending on the velocity and level of their development.

Strategic Environmental Assessment as an instrument for sustainable development achievement.

Strategic Environmental Assessment is relatively new instrument in environmental policy and environmental management. Directives 85/337/EEC and 97/11/EC both apply to project level of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) only. An additional proposed SEA Directive is currently under consideration, which if adopted will require member states to apply environmental assessment process to certain types of development plan, notably land-use plans. In some countries, such as Netherlands and the UK, similar requirements have already been included in national legislation or procedures. The proposed Directive falls well short of extending EA to all strategic policies, plans and programs. Nonetheless, the proposal reflects a growing international awareness of the contribution that SEA can make to sustainable development objectives [1].

After the 1992, Rio Conference on Environment and Development the SEA was recognized as a central step in the achievement of sustainable development.

SEA practice has expanded techniques and principles to more strategic actions: the greater incorporation of environmental concerns in PPP decision-making, the mitigation of PPPs adverse environmental and socio-economic impact, greater transparency and public involvement, all used for PPPs with a clear authorization stage, in an attempt to lead to more sustainable practices. The USA system and the proposed EC directive are examples of such a "consent-related" or "incremental" SEA approach (Figure 1).

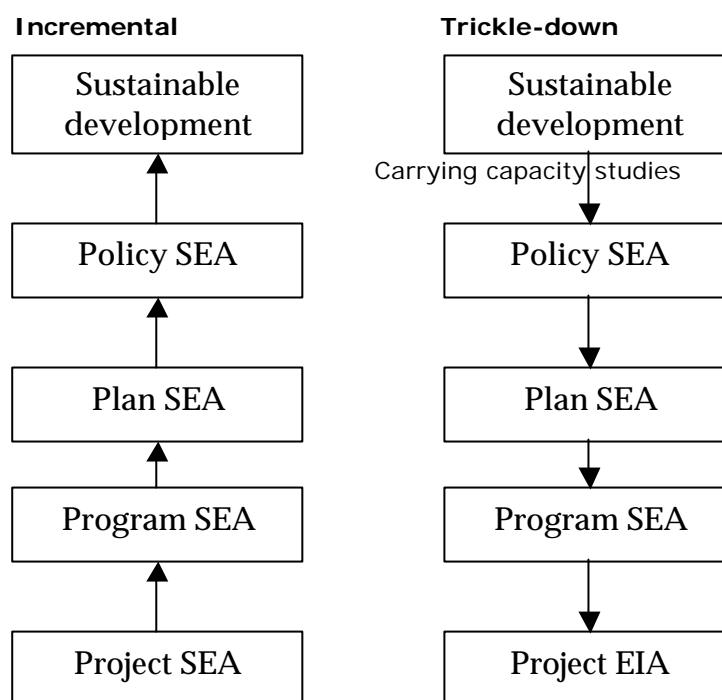


Figure 1. Incremental vs. trickle-down system [9].

Therivel et al. suggest that a “trickle-down” approach to sustainable development could involve:

- A commitment to the objective of sustainable development;
- A determination of the parameters within which sustainable development is to be achieved (e.g. area, resource, time);
- A determination of carrying capacity within this parameters;
- SEA of all relevant PPPs using alternative development scenarios which do not exceed carrying capacity;
- Choice of one scenario that optimizes socio-economic factors;
- Environmental Impact Assessment of individual projects within the constraints set by the SEA;
- A monitoring program that would give feedback to modify any/all of the above steps.

Sadler and Verheem are less deterministic and probably more practical. They suggest that a sustainability-based approach to SEA involves refocusing SEA process towards sustainability assurance rather than towards impact minimization, and they propose a “proactive, forward looking approach that focuses on maintaining environmental bottom lines”. This could be achieved through precautionary principles, the no-regrets policy and the application of simple sustainability tests [9].

SEA is one of the most direct and effective ways of ensuring that human activities are carried out at a level that environmentally sustainable.

Strategic Environmental Assessment could be applied at the each main level of sustainable development. Table 1 shows the main goals of sustainable development and possible application of SEA as an instrument for their achievements (could we apply SEA partly or as full-scale procedure in order to achieve these goals?).

Table 1

The goals of sustainable development and SEA application.

Goal	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<i>GLOBAL LEVEL</i>	
Conservation of the biosphere stability as a basis of life-support systems for man and society	***
Reproduction of natural resources	***
Reduction of regional socio-economic disparities	**
<i>NATIONAL LEVEL</i>	
Security of citizens and the State	**
Economic development	**
Solution of environmental problems	***
Ensuring social justice	*
<i>LOCAL LEVEL</i>	
Ensuring welfare of population	**
Creation of the favorable life conditions	***

***-full-scale SEA application; **- partly SEA application; * - no SEA application.

SEA application at the each level could bring huge investments to the sustainable development. Therefore, policy makers should not ignore an excellent possibility to use it as an efficient instrument in the elaboration of practical steps for the achievement of sustainable development.

The issues of SEA application as an instrument for sustainable development for Ukraine.

Ukraine is the most vulnerable countries in the world on complexity and acuteness of economic, environmental and social problems. The one of the ways of these problems solution is transition to sustainable development.

At present time, society develops according to the laws of interorganization in the most cases. The attempts of scientific organizations of society were fallen. Nevertheless, as experience show, the development of socio-political and environmental formations in the Western countries as the elemental process of development is not acceptable from the economic, social and environmental sides. The third way of organization is necessary. Organization that bases on the system of strategic planning, assessment and decision-making. Strategy leading to sustainable development.

The first step to sustainable development has been done by Ukraine in 1996 when it began to develop the conception of sustainable development relatively to Ukraine. Having analyzed 11 years of Ukrainian independence, we can observe many positive moves towards improvements in environmental policy, economic and social field. For instance, the beginning of environmental policy and management integration to the strategy of socio-economic development; the progressive reformation of environmental legislation and steps for its harmonization with European one; active participation at the process "Environment for Europe" and in many international environmental conferences etc. Nevertheless, despite all positive moves Ukraine has been done only several steps to the achievement of main goal in comparison with developed countries and countries in transition. The USA, Netherlands, New Zealand and UK all these countries used SEA as tool for the sustainability achievement and proved its efficiency on practice. However, despite all positive sides of SEA application Ukraine can not use Strategic Environmental Assessment as a standard, widespread procedure exact, because most of the western methodologies do not work in Ukraine properly.

There are set of general issues that serve as obstacles for SEA application in Ukraine:

- i. *Specific way of Ukrainian environmental policy and management development.*

Until 1991, Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union and up to that time, USSR law regulated all issues of environmental protection. The introduction of Environmental Assessment in the Soviet Union in 1985 has resulted in the development of two substantial regulatory systems, which are still being used in Ukraine. There are the

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system of State Ecological Expertise (SEE) and the system of Assessment of Impact on Environment (OVOS) [2]. These systems could not be called as tools of environmental management, but they are tools of traditional "soviet" environmental policy. These regulatory systems are based and focused not on effective laws, regulations or assessment of the project etc. but only on the project papers. The assessment of PPPs was not even foreseen. The Environmental Assessment (EA) process has been used in a number of western countries since the early 1970s as an instrument of environmental regulation at the planning stage of economic activity. It seems that the interval in fifteen years between EA adoption in Western countries and in USSR is not so large but the results of this time difference could be observed now. Since 1970, day by day Western countries had developed EA methodology, tools for its application, legislative background etc., so when sustainable development conception has been adopted they begun to apply different kinds of assessment (Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment) as an instrument for sustainable development achievement at once. Ukraine has not possibility to develop EA system in its own way. That is why present days' Ukrainian environmental policy and management need to be reconsidered and developed in accordance with international standards.

ii. *Relevant methodologies are underdeveloped.*

Long time Ukrainian environmental policy developed under the pressure of 'soviet' laws and regulations. It means, that present one has been started to develop only ten years ago. Now, it is orienting on western countries' environmental policy and standards. However, some attempts to copy out and apply western regulations and standards exactly were fallen because Ukrainian environmental policy is still use old methodologies and standards.

In addition, relevant progressive ones develop enough slowly in accordance with legislative and normative reformations.

iii. *Old 'soviet' mentality of the most Ukrainian policy-makers.*

In Ukraine, we can observe very strange 'struggle'. The struggle between environmental protectors from both sides. However, from the one side of barricades are the governmental decision-makers in the field of environment from the other one are leaders of environmental NGOs. Each side tries to achieve one main goal: to protect the environment and approach to sustainable development. Nevertheless, each one perceives the other not as assistant but as enemy, who create obstacles. In most cases, it connected with such factor as "fighting of generations". Because generally staffs of the most NGOs are young, critically minded, progressive, with knowledge of western style and rules of work leaders. Leaders who know what to do and how to do. Most of Ukrainian governmental leaders have grown in environment that was very different from the present. They have written laws, regulations, and methodologies, managed and controlled an environment in other -strong command system. For them it is not so simply to be flexible, to work efficiently in the new conditions, listen younger leaders and to create new legislation that will foresee introduction of such progressive methods as SEA. Therefore providing of a joint meetings, debates, round-tables help to shorten a gap that exists between governmental policy-makers with old traditional 'soviet' mentality and leaders of a new formation. Such gap creates the serious obstacles for the achievement of main goal.

iv. *Lack of strong democratic traditions.*

Lack of democratic traditions could be considered on the example of public participation in decision-making process. For instance, the documents, related to public participation in State Ecological Expertise exist, but they do not work in full measure. Out of 51 articles of Ukrainian law on ecological expertise, only five related to public ecological expertise. In the law, we can observe the items about possible methods of public opinion expression, but documents and regulations on procedures that related to practical questions are absent. For example, about availability of state structures where public could send their proposals and notes. Generally, most of Ukrainian procedures on prevention of environment are open outside but inside there are many inconveniences that create a bar for public participation. Often such bars are the reasons according to which public does not want take part in the decision-making process. The deficiencies in environmental legislation and weakness of state sector are one of the most significant difficulties in Ukraine. Not only practical activity is underdeveloped in Ukraine but also there are lots of gap in the field of theory. In Western countries legislation provides the public participation on early stages of activities (on strategic level), when possibilities

exist for examining of different variations and seeking of the best decision. On the strategic level of any activity, public participation will be the most effective. Public involvement in the discussion of the PPPs on the early stages of its development guarantees decision of some issues in time and the different contradictions diverting allow hasten the PPPs realization. Beside, public involvement on each stage of PPPs development improves possibilities for its financial support because many investors, particularly international financial organizations put a great attention to the public opinion. Therefore, it is necessary for Ukraine to develop the democratic traditions. In addition, public participation is one of the tolls for their development, particularly in the frame of SEA.

The issue of public involvement reflects another key principle of sustainable development, regarding the equity of development. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration states that environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all citizens, who should have appropriate access to environmental information, and participate in the decision-making process. The worldwide trend in SEA system away from total reliance on professional expertise and towards greater involvement of the public represents increasing implementation of these principles.

The perspectives of SEA application as an instrument for sustainable development achievement for Ukraine.

There are exist several levels on which SEA could be introduced into Ukrainian system of environmental, social and economic regulations (Figure 2). In practice, the tiers between all these levels are fluid.



Each of these institutions can take part and make its own contribution to the SEA introduction, application and implementation (Table 2).

On each of these levels, broad public gets the possibility to participate in the environmental policy and management process and contribute to the sustainable development achievement.

Table 2.

Outputs of Ukrainian institutional organizations to the introduction and development of SEA system.

Institutional organization	Outputs to the introduction and development of SEA system
Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection of Ukraine	Creation of the Institute of Environmental Policy; Elaboration of the legislative background and regulations for the SEA introduction; Development of mechanism for SEA application in Ukrainian environmental policy.
Local authorities	Providing of access to the materials on environmental policy; Creation of special Department on the transition to the sustainable development.
Environmental NGOs	Providing of informational resources and services; organization of the round-tables, debates, public participation activities, training courses on sustainable development and SEA.
Environmental Faculties of Ukrainian Universities	Elaboration of the special courses on SEA, sustainable development in Ukraine and in Western countries; special research providing; participation in projects connected with transition to sustainable development.

Conclusions.

Despite of all obstacles step-by-step movements have been done by Ukraine to the SEA introduction into the environmental policy. However, it is necessary that all these progressive steps do not remain at the level of foreign grants accomplishment and aid agencies recommendations fulfillment.

At present time of its development, Ukraine aspires to enter to the European Union. One of the main conditions is harmonization of Ukrainian environmental legislation with the European one. It means that on this stage of development Ukrainian policy-makers should put a great attention to the problems of transition to sustainable development and alteration of the national system of Environmental Assessment. Because these processes are closely related to each other. Restructurisation of Ukrainian Environmental Assessment system up to the level of world standards it is such necessary step, that help Ukraine to achieve sustainable development and find a compromise between socio-economic and environmental development.

Current international trends in Environmental Assessment practice indicate an increasing of SEA application as an instrument for sustainable development achievement. In both developed and countries in transition improvements in SEA process are needed if the aim is to be achieved more fully. If the current trends continue, the contribution that Strategic Environmental Assessment already made to sustainable development goals is likely to increase still further.

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