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Quality of Cultural Heritage in EIA; twenty years of experience in Norway

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to clarify and discuss how quality, relevance, attitudes, beliefs and transfer value act as underlying driving forces in the development of the Cultural Heritage theme in EIAs. One purpose is to identify and discuss some conditions that can better environmental assessment in order to increase the significance of EIA in decision-making with regard to Cultural Heritage.

The main tools used are different research methods designed for analyses of quality and quality changes, primarily based on the relevant opinions of 160 people occupied with Cultural Heritage in EIA in Norway. The study is based on a review of 40 types of EIAs from 1991 to 2000, an online questionnaire to 319 (160 responded) individuals from 14 different backgrounds, and interviews with three institutions in Sweden and Denmark.

The study confirms a steadily increasing quality on EIRs over time, parallel with an improvement of the way in which Cultural Heritage is treated in EIA. This is supported by both the interviews and the qualitative comments regarding the survey. Potential for improvements is shown to be a need for more detailed background material as well as more use of adequate methods.

The survey shows the existence of a wide variety of negative views, attitudes and beliefs, but the consequences of this are difficult to evaluate. However, most certainly, negative attitudes and beliefs have not been powerful enough to be detrimental to the quality of Cultural Heritage component, as nothing in the study indicates that negative attitudes and myths are undermining the system of EIA.

The study shows the importance of having on-going discussions on quality and quality change over time by people involved in EIA, and how this is a necessary condition for successful implementation and acceptance. Beliefs and negative attitudes can also be a catalyst for developing better practice and advancing new methodology. In addition, new EIA countries must be prepared for several years of development and improvements after implementation. This is important in order to gain acceptance from the bureaucracy, especially from the Cultural Heritage authorities and local population.

1. Introduction

Environmental assessment practice in Norway was first introduced in watercourse legislation. During the 1970s and 1980s a great number of environmental reports were worked out for hydroelectric projects (Kværner et al., 2006). From 1991 concrete projects in all major developments (e.g. road- and rail building, wind farms, mining, harbors) were subject to EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment). Among several different technical theme reports, Cultural Heritage represents one topic in wider environmental analysis which also includes natural environments, landscape, outdoor life, pollution, social impact etc.

There is considerable disagreement on the quality and the significance of Norwegian EIAs regarding the Cultural Heritage topic. In several cases, it is obvious that this is causing some negative effects like mistrust, skepticism and uncertainty in the predictions. Over time this may cause decreasing confidence with regard to predictability in EIA. Further, such deterioration can have an influence on the Cultural Heritage topic with regard to decision-making on higher levels (policy decisions and environmental discussions). Therefore it is important to examine the validity of negative attitudes and beliefs towards Cultural Heritage reports and methods in an EIA setting.

These observations and thoughts are a product of my experience as a Cultural Heritage specialist over many years. Holding a wide variety of different occupations has allowed me the position of a participant observer. My background is archeology, and I have experience with the bureaucracy, private companies and the university. Over the last 20 years I have gained experience on EIA as a practitioner, a developer of methods and a researcher.

International quality studies on EIA and EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) are numerous and extremely varied. One approach is to examine the effectiveness related to whether something works as intended and meets the initial purposes (e.g., Sandham and Pretorius, 2007; cf. Cashmore et al., 2004; Fuller, 1999; Retief, 2005;

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Sadler, 1996; Weston, 2000; Wood, 2003). The EIA report (EIR) is frequently used as an indicator of quality (Sandham and Pretorius, 2007; cf. DEAT, 2004; Fuller, 1999; Leu et al., 1996; Sadler, 1996; Wood, 2003). Papers on the evaluation of EIA system performance over time are also available (e.g., Barker and Wood, 1999; Glasson et al., 2005). The classic example of a checklist for the quality of the EIR was established early in the 1990s by Lee and Colley (1992). This system of quality assessment is used worldwide, and has set a standard for evaluation on EIS.

It is rare to find more specific discussions or studies on quality and effectiveness with regard to the Cultural Heritage topic. Certainly some studies on how the Cultural Heritage subject is treated in EIA do exist (e.g., Jerpåsen et al., 2008; Jones, 2010; King, 2000; Teller and Bond, 2002). However, current research within the field is almost non-existent; nevertheless, limited studies have been carried out and are of interest. One example is some reflections from the Planarch regional studies giving a "satisfactory-rating" on the quality of the Cultural Heritage component in EISs (Jones and Slinn, 2008).

There is therefore a need to discuss what "good quality" in EIA means in the context of Cultural Heritage. Checklist studies on EIR are only one way of determining this, and just a part of an evaluation on quality in EIAs. Thoroughness and the scope of the work are just as important: Is sufficient field work carried out? What about the study of sources? Is this study adequate and profound?

There is generally a knowledge gap regarding which mechanisms determine quality of thematic studies and reports (EIR) concerning Cultural Heritage. Several questions are pressed forward: Is it possible to improve major aspects of quality? How do attitudes and beliefs play a part? What happens to the quality over time? Is there any transfer value from Norwegian policy and practice studies to other countries?

One purpose of this paper is to discuss some conditions for bettering environmental assessment in order to increase the significance of EIA in decision-making with regard to Cultural Heritage. Incorporating different research methods designed for analyses of quality, and based primarily on the relevant opinions of people occupied with Cultural Heritage in EIA in Norway, the study will discuss findings, attitudes and applicability. The methods used are reviews of early EIAs, a survey and interviews.

The aim is to clarify and discuss how quality, relevance, attitudes, beliefs and transfer value act as underlying driving forces in the development of the Cultural Heritage theme in EIAs.

1.1. Backdrop

In order to get a better understanding of the current problems, it is necessary to know how EIA and Cultural Heritage are treated in Norwegian laws, policy and practice. The EIA, as a planning system in Norway, is a tool (among several) for protecting Cultural Heritage. There is a long Norwegian tradition of integrated heritage legislation, influenced and upheld by a scientific discipline developed through generations of landscape archeologists and ethnologists from the beginning of the twentieth century (Lindblom, 2010).

The Cultural Heritage Act of 1978, which replaced older Acts of 1905 and 1951, is the main legal tool in Norway for protecting archeological monuments, sites and buildings (Government.no, 2009a).

The act defines, after an amendment in 1992, Cultural Heritage sites as "all traces of human activity in our physical environment, including places associated with historical events, beliefs and traditions" (Government.no, 2009a, Section 2). According to this definition, the whole country can be seen as a Cultural Heritage site, but protection is restricted to selected sites. All traces from prehistoric periods and the Middle Ages, that is pre-1537 for archeological sites and pre-1650 for standing structures, are according to the law given automatic protection (Jerpåsen et al., 2008).

In addition, Norway has a special act for indigenous people, assigning automatic protection to Sami Cultural Heritage sites older than 100 years. Moreover, all physical remains older than World War II on Spitsbergen (Svalbard), a northern island group under Norwegian sovereignty, are also automatically protected by law.

The Norwegian Planning and Building Act of 1985 (and later 2009) regulates, among other things, spatial management and land use. The act institutes a two-tier planning system of county plans and municipal master plans under the control of the elected county and municipal councils, respectively. Broadly speaking, this act is generally regarded as the infrastructure in the Norwegian rule of planning (Government.no, 2009b).

Before the introduction of EIA in 1991, the Cultural Heritage in Norway was taken care of by regulations in the Cultural Heritage Act. That is the reason why the archeological heritage and only the oldest buildings were focused on in spatial planning and development. Cultural monuments and buildings after 1650 had earlier suffered from weak protection. However, a growing practise, caused by the introduction of EIA, opened for a better conservation of these more modern monuments. Besides, the EIA regulations promoted the understanding of monuments in a larger context, and cultural settings and cultural landscapes therefore had better conditions for protection after 1991.

The Norwegian EIA regulations are in compliance with European standards. It is clearly put forward which plans are obligatory with regard to these regulations. There also exists an evident separation between EIA and SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment), as Norway SEA is addressed to policies, plans and politics; and not to concrete development (Lund-Iversen, 2009).

From 1991, the Norwegian EIA system has treated Cultural Heritage as an independent topic. Cultural environments and natural environments are regarded as equal, with the same possibilities for protection. This is mainly caused by two conditions: the powerful Cultural Heritage position within Norwegian legislation, and the fact that the Cultural Heritage is subjected to the Ministry of the Environment and not to the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs (Lindblom, 2010).

It is against this backdrop that we have to view the Norwegian Planning and Building Act and the practice of EIA and SEA with regard to the Cultural Heritage practice.

2. Research methodology

The research is based on methodological triangulation. Several methods, both qualitative and quantitative, are used to give a reliable, detailed and balanced representation of the results.

2.1. Review of EIAs

Initially, a selective literature review of relevant policy, directives and research was completed. Subsequently, in order to gain an insight into earlier Norwegian EIA practice and EIRs with regard to quality, a review was undertaken of final reports as well as thematic reports on Cultural Heritage (generally called "Cultural Monuments and Cultural Environments") produced between 1991 and 2000. EIAs after 2000 were not included in order to limit the review to the period of early implementation; and before the preparation, templates and EIRs become so standardized that differences are insignificant. There is also a predominance of analyzed EIAs between 1991 and 1995, motivated by the intention to achieve a thorough knowledge of the commissioning phase.

To get an exact understanding of the earliest period (1991–1995), 28 types of EIAs were thoroughly reviewed. The study included large private and public developments as well as smaller ones. To obtain satisfactory representation, different cases such as road constructions, railroads, airports and industrial and commercial buildings including