

*From: Regional Development Programmes and Integration of Environmental Issues: - the role of Strategic Environmental Assessment. Workshop proceedings edited by Tuija Hilding-Rydevik. (Nordregio WP 2000:9)*

## **Welcome**

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This seminar is organised by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and Nordic Centre for Spatial Development in close cooperation. Our common goal is to develop and implement strategic environmental assessments (SEAs) as an instrument to be used to predict environmental impacts before coming to decisions about plans, programmes and policies. In our vision environmental issues will be just as important in the future as economic issues are in the present. The use of SEA will give us the possibility to describe environment impacts in the same way economic issues are being described today.

To get that possibility we have to develop SEA as an instrument and, according to my opinion, also develop and strengthen the environmental impact assessment (EIA). Here, I would like to give you some short notes on the work SEPA has done this far, and will do in the future.

During the 70ties EIA did not exist as a concept in Sweden even though we were familiar to the term and what it meant. The term SEA was not used at all. The law from that time asked for some investigations, although those cannot possibly be called regular EIAs. However, we did make some EIAs, more or less on a voluntarily basis. One example from that time is the cooperation between SEPA and the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, where we studied the impacts of building a road between Kiruna and Riksgränsen.

In 1989 and 1991 the demand for EIA became confirmed by the laws in Sweden. This decision was based on an analyse made by SEPA and the Swedish Board for Housing, Building and Physical Planning on the prerequisites and forms for a systematic use of EIA as decision-making basis in matters where a step or activity was supposed to cause an essential impact on environmental conditions and management of natural resources.

With the aim of developing the EIA-instrument SEPA has edited some reports, for example "Environmental Impact Assessment in the Environmental Protection Act and the Nature Conservation Act" and "Boken om MKB", the latter together with the Swedish Board for Housing, Building and Physical Planning. Still we know that we have to do more of evaluating and developing EIA.

In the middle of the 80ties we realized that impact assessments had to be implemented very early in the decision-making process. We started to talk about "systems EIA" and traffic issues were in focus, e.g. the necessity of first having a discussion on what kind of transport modes that needed to be built out, before deciding how to build them.

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In recent years, the demands for SEA have grown stronger. A directive on SEA is expected to be taken by the European Commission within one year or two. In Sweden different sectors of the society have got legal demands to take environmental responsibility. Thus SEPA, in cooperation with other agencies, tries to develop and stimulate methods and ways of working with SEPA. We have been in contact with not only representatives for the traffic sector, but also those from sectors of water, nuclear power, forestry, fishing and local procurement and physical planning with the aim of informing about SEA and encourage the use of it.

In the last two years, we have also tried to use SEA in the economic sectors. Thus we are interested in using SEA in assessing Local Investment Programmes, Regional Growth Agreements and the Structural Funds of the European Commission. Recently we edited the report "Environmental Profile on the Structural Funds Programmes" where we propose to use SEA to give environmental aspects a better position.

Both for EIA and SEA it is of importance not only that assessments of impacts are plain and made at an early stage, but also that environmental qualitative objectives are put in action. SEPA is currently working with these commitments. We will continue to identify the stages where important decisions are taken and work for the use of SEA within all sectors of the society. We believe that this will bring forward environmental issues, stimulate discussion and generate alternatives on how environmental, economical and social activities can lead to a sustainable development.

I believe that this seminar will contribute to our work. A warm welcome to all of you and especially to our guests from abroad.