

Environmental Concerns during the Single Programming Documents (SPD) Process – Ideas from The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA)

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Impressions from the actual SPDs

To minimize the differences in economic development between different regions, the European Union has created Structural Funds to give support to selected areas. In Sweden there are today 11 areas getting economic support from the Structural Funds. They include areas covered by Objectives 2 (areas with industry in recession), 5b (rural areas in recession) and 6 (scarcely populated areas). In all of them, environment as well as equality is pointed out as horizontal goals in the Single Programming Document (SPD). These SPDs are formulated individually for each one of the different areas. Horizontal goals are to be taken into account in assessing every single project applying for economical support.

Every SPD includes a description of the state of environment. In a few of them, special environmental measures can be found and may even form a sub programme. In most cases, however, environmental aspects play a modest role and are not integrated into the programmes. Environment is most often seen as an obstacle, not as a resource that can create jobs. Even if there are many good examples of projects with an environmental profile, my main impression is that the level of environmental ambition is reactive - projects may not infringe against the law – rather than proactive, conceived using the environment as a resource for development. There are many explanations for this fact: the programmes were formulated in a very short time, the directives did not stress environmental aspects extensively, and the connection between such aspects and regional development is a new topic.

Both the Amsterdam treaty as well as the Cardiff process has strengthened the EU environmental position. Will this contribute to a better environmental profile in the SPDs for next programme period, 2000–2006?

Regional growth agreements

For quite a number of years there has been a flow of money from the national government to regions in Sweden aimed at supporting regional development. The support is considerable, amounting to SEK 19 billion per year (as compared, for instance, to SEK 2.5 billion per year contributed by the Structural Funds for the same purpose). Funding has taken many different forms; most recently, in order to increase efficacy, the Swedish government has offered all 21 county administrative boards responsible for administering funding the opportunity of negotiating a specific agreement on future economic support, so-called “Regional Growth Agreements”.

It should be kept in mind that the overall aim of this support is to create economic growth and new jobs – it is not environmentally targeted support. The Growth Agreements will serve as the basic material from which SPDs for the next Structural Fund period will be written. Work on drafting the agreements started in late 1998. The directive for elaborating them contains merely a single line concerning the environment, stating that sustainable development should be taken into account. Apparently the increased emphasis on environment in the Amsterdam treaty was not strong enough. Although previously we had no possibility of participating part in the work done in the regions on the agreements, in this case they were sent to the government and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency was invited to analyse how the aspects of environment and sustainable development have been treated in the agreements. Some of the criterias in the Handbook introduced by Kevin Bradley earlier today were used as the basis for analysis.

From reading 15 of the draft agreements I have gained the following impressions:

- As a whole, there is more environmental thinking and consideration of sustainable development in these agreements than in the current SPDs.
- In very few cases, environmentalists have played an active role in formulating the drafts.
- Currently fashionable buzz-words, such as IT, education, Baltic development, are common.
- There are vast differences between individual drafts. Some of them just mention sustainable development and add nothing more, while a few have integrated sustainable development in the draft in a very creative way.
- In some drafts environment is not envisaged as a handicap or an obstacle, but as a driving force in job creation.

Later this week a report on our analysis will be submitted to the undersecretaries in the ministries as a basis for their negotiations with the counties. Following those negotiations, the drafts will be completed on regional level and returned to the government in November 1999.

SPD:s for the next SF programming period

The government will soon decide on the organisation of SPD work, at least for the Objective 1 area in the northern part of Sweden. Responsibility for elaborating the SPDs will rest with the county administrative boards. The work will be done in the summer and early autumn, which means there is no time to waste. We have to start now, if we want to have any sort of impact on the programmes. There is close cooperation between the Agency for Antiquities and Cultural Heritage and the Agency for Housing and Physical Planning. Together these three agencies have produced a report “Environmental Profile on EU Structural Fund Programmes”, where we suggest that Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) be used when elaborating the programmes. I am eager to stress that a lot of ideas are taken from the EU Handbook

In creating an environmental profile for the SPD-programmes, I want to stress some important features:

- Sustainable development creates jobs.
- A programme with an environmental profile supports sustainable development.
- SEA is a tool for achieving an environmental profile on the programme.
- Both criteria and indicators should be defined.
- Competent staff is needed.

In the report, we recommend the use of five steps in the SEA-process:

1. Make an assessment of the environmental situation.
2. Decide on objectives, targets and priorities.
3. Make an environmental assessment of the draft development proposal and its alternatives.
4. Decide on environmental indicators.
5. Integrate the results of the assessment into the final decision.

We recommend using indicators very similar to those we have found in the Handbook:

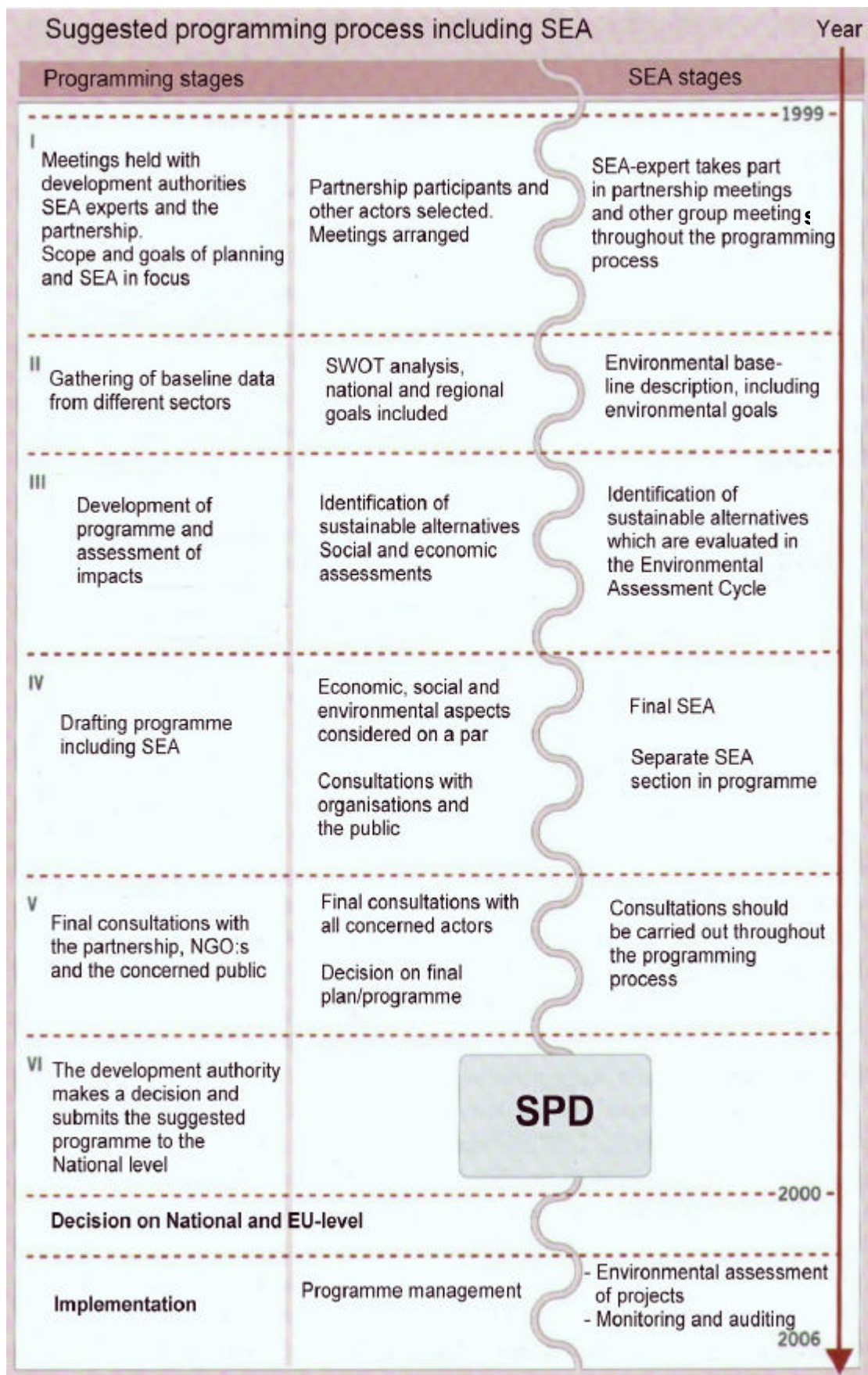
- Minimize use of non-renewable resources.
- Use renewable resources within their limits of capacity for regeneration.
- Environmentally sound use and management of hazardous/polluting substances and wastes.
- Conserve and enhance the status of wildlife, habitats and landscapes.
- Maintain and improve soil and water resources.
- Maintain and improve historic and cultural resources.
- Maintain and improve local environmental quality.
- Protection of the global and regional atmosphere.
- Develop environmental awareness, education and training.
- Promote public participation.

In our booklet we also suggest a programming process including SEA (Figure 1).

As a concluding remark, I want to stress that our agency has a responsibility for developing SEA, but we want to do this in close cooperation with other authorities and research institutions. Once we have an EU SEA Directive, our agency will have to elaborate guidelines for SEA. To me the work with SEA in the SPD process will serve as an excellent opportunity for developing and refining SEA techniques.

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)*

Figure 1. Programming process (Source: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 1999, Eng. version: J. Schmidtbauer)



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