



Human Impact Assessment

<http://info.stakes.fi/iva/EN/index.htm>

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Social Impact Assessment – a Help in Multi-sector Collaboration

The Ilomantsi social welfare and health care team has adopted a new approach to implementing the objectives of preventive social and health policy by incorporating the social dimension in urban planning. Meanwhile the various branches of the administration are learning to work together and to assess the social impact of measures.

"Multi-agency work has supported the view that team work across the professional borders may be the way to work in the future," says Riitta Renfors, a social worker in Ilomantsi. "Our project has proved that by pooling our know-how we can find new ways of working and new partnership practices. The different visions, options and their comparison have introduced new methods into Ilomantsi's town planning. Together with the head of geriatric work in Ilomantsi Ms Renfors has been taking part in a new kind of land use planning. The social perspective was incorporated in physical planning of the environment in Ilomantsi by means of social impact assessment."

Social impact assessment (SIA) is a multidisciplinary process that identifies and evaluates the effects of a project, plan or programme as an aid to decision-making. It was initially one of the consequences of the Act on environmental impact assessment (EIA), but is now spreading to take in both the land use planning covered by the Building Act and the preparation of statutes, plans and programmes.

The experience of SIA so far gained by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) has been of the development of plans and co-operation in the field of social welfare and health care in, among other things, the planning of land use, neighbourhood improvements, welfare for the elderly and mobility policy. Although environmental impact assessment was originally devised as a means of evaluating the physical environment and projects, the process can be applied to the development of the administration and to decision-making of all kinds.

Representatives of social welfare and health care in Ilomantsi have participated in the work of the committee responsible for land use planning, to begin with as outside experts but later as members of the committee itself. Riitta Renfors describes the SIA work done by the committee as follows: "The collaboration over land use planning has pinpointed the operational and economic impact of decisions made by the various administrations and built up a communal vision of the challenges that will be facing us in the future. The alternative visions have taught us how to assess different solutions and their foreseeable consequences."

As regards the development of the administration, SIA is a useful tool for multisector, pluralistic planning for the future. Unlike the assessment methods used before, SIA is concerned with looking ahead, with predicting the outcome of measures and the involuntary effects of decisions. In other words, it is forwardlooking and applies to plans still in the making.