

# IDENTIFICATION OF HUMAN IMPACTS



## Only identified impacts are included in the assessment

All decisions, plans and programmes have impacts on people. It is important to know what the impacts are, how significant they are and how many people they affect.

In this way we can forestall, or alleviate, undesired impacts. By identifying impacts we can see their good and bad points and choose the option most likely to help us achieve our objectives.

It is important to identify impacts when we want to participate in the decisionmaking. Identification of impacts is affected by our values and our conception of people. That is why it is important for as many persons as possible - experts from the social welfare and health sectors included - to take part in the discussion on the impacts of decisions.

### Identification of impacts has to be case sensitive

A number of check lists are available for identifying impacts in practical planning work. The danger of these check lists, however, is that they are gone through mechanically, excluding any impacts that cannot be identified. The resulting analysis is necessarily restricted in scope.

All human impacts should be understood as something unique arising from a specific place and time, each one of which must be identified on a case by case basis. This identification depends on the angle from which we view the impacts. For ease of identification, impacts are classified in various ways.

#### Impacts on humans can be:

- impact on need for services
- impact on well-being and experienced health
- impact of natural and built environment on people

#### Objectives:

Impacts can also be examined through the setting of objectives. Objectives can be set for the environment or conditions and the assessment looks at how these objectives have been achieved.



## **Categories to help the identification of human impacts:**

- 1) Division into **social impacts** and into **health impacts** (as referred to in the Health Protection Act)
- 2) Division into **quantitative** and **qualitative** impacts:
  - A. Impacts on need for services, perspective of society (can often be measured and therefore quantitative):
    - e.g. -living conditions: housing, availability of services, employment
    - demographic changes: changes in size and structure of population
    - public and private resources: services, business life, the economy and land-use
  - B. Impacts on well-being, perspective of the individual/community (qualitative):
    - e.g. -changes affecting various groups/life situations (children, the unemployed, cyclists etc.)
    - changes in amenities, social relations, perceptions, experiences, fears
    - social dimensions of impacts on natural environment
- 3) **Direct** impacts (e.g. being forced to move, employment, exposure) and **indirect** impacts (e.g. children taken into care, crime, morbidity)
- 4) Impacts can be identified by looking at **whom and what they affect**:
  - A. population groups (e.g. women, children, the elderly, home care assistants, farmers, the unemployed, wheelchair users, cyclists, public transport users)
  - B. areas (geographical areas, "people on the other side of the road")
  - C. time ("future generations")
- 5) **Check lists** as a tool:
  - A. Impacts on way and quality of life, e.g. daily opportunities for living and moving around, social relations, satisfaction, safety, perceptions of health and safety
  - B. Impacts on living conditions, e.g. housing, availability of services, employment
  - C. Demographic changes, e.g. resettlement, changes in size and structure of population
  - D. Impacts on public and private resources, e.g. services, business life, the economy, land-use
  - E. Social dimension of impacts on natural environment, e.g. experience of nature, noise and emissions, opportunities for recreation.

## How to identify impacts?

Sound basic knowledge and participation support the identification of impacts.

It is not wise to rely solely on impacts identified by experts. Ignoring nuisances or fears experienced by residents may hinder planning at a later stage.

Experts are, however, needed as representatives of the "common interest", of weak population groups or of future residents.

There are various methods of acquiring a wide diversity of information:

Surveys, interviews, secondary data (statistics, maps, newspapers), active observation (public information sessions, residents' meetings, walks), participation (experts, public information sessions, cooperation groups); visualization.

The checklists are only one tool; they should be complemented by other methods.

Information can also be found from Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) working groups, residents, local representatives of social welfare, health, culture and business sectors, expert institutions and networks, earlier assessments.

## Impacts on needs for service

Human impacts expressed as a need for services include those affecting health, living conditions (housing, availability of services, employment), and the population (changes in size and structure). Such impacts, e.g. atmospheric pollution, noise, drinking water- or soil-borne diseases or the risk of them, can usually be clearly measured.

These impacts can be seen as changes in public and private resources (services, business life, the economy and land-use). They are often referred to as socio-economic impacts. Characteristics of this - often societal - perspective are the direct nature of the impacts and the fact that they can usually be measured.

## Overall perspective on impacts

Impacts on well-being are often qualitative and indirect. The impacts of the individual or community may focus on specific groups of people (e.g. farmers, ethnic minorities, wheelchair users, cyclists, pedestrians, public transport users) or life situations (children, young families, the elderly, the unemployed). Human impacts may take the form of changes in amenities, social relations, perceptions, and experienced safety or health.

Changes in the subculture, beliefs or values of a community along with changes in the coherence of the community or its manner of acting are also social impacts. These kind of social impacts have dear connection on social and mental health, that are considered important in the broad concept of

health. The boundary between social and health impacts is, however, fluid. That is why when talking about these two sets of impacts we can use the wider term human impacts.

Profiling the sphere of influence of an impact and defining the geographical area of impacts may be important for identifying social impacts and their targets. Social impacts may also be distributed unequally in time. Some may be only temporary, e.g. the nuisance caused by construction work, whereas others may only be experienced by future generations.

The assessment process in itself has an impact on local residents; it may arouse resistance, fears or hopes, even if the human impact is not assessed or participation does not occur.

### **Environment has impacts on humans and vice versa**

Ecological impacts of the built environment or, say, traffic also have a human dimension. When, for instance, the assessor of impacts on the natural environment measures emission levels, the assessor of health impacts measures exposure to emissions. The assessor of social impacts, on the other hand, analyses how emissions are experienced and how they affect amenities.

The social dimensions of impacts on the natural and the built environments can also be examined separately from the human point of view. The impact of the natural environment on people is often more straightforward, but the chain of impacts works the other way round, too: the social environment affects the built and the natural environments.

### **Impact identification process**

1. various sources for human impacts (check lists, investigations, surveys, interviews, EIA reports, expert networks)

2. preliminary impacts identification and profiling by assessment team/experts

3. review and completion by object of impact (residents, clients, employees etc).

