

Paper title: Evaluating policy plans in the light of sustainable development: a multi-method approach in the case of the strategic traffic mobility plan for the city of Antwerp, Belgium

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Sustainable development receives increasingly attention from policy-makers on different levels of government. The concept stresses the need for a holistic approach by which ecological as well as social and economic concerns are to be integrated within the strategic policy and program objectives and related decision-making. However, these three policy fields, being considered as the pillars of sustainability, also reflect different sets of values to be balanced.

This complexity also affects evaluation of policy from a sustainability perspective. How can the three policy perspectives be integrated into the evaluation approach? At first sight, there are several general options available.

A first way of dealing with the different angles is to integrate them in a single method approach. Therefore the different policy perspectives are translated into evaluation criteria and the evaluandum - a policy plan, program or project- is judged upon these criteria. An important aspect and challenge for using a suitable technique in this respect, e.g. multi-criteria analysis, concerns the weighting of the different criteria.

A second option is a multi-method approach. Here different evaluation techniques are used for each of the policy perspectives involved. Different policy sectors have developed different evaluation methods which can be most appropriate in order to judge from the respective point of view. However, the important question then arises whether and how the results of the different methods can be combined in an accurate manner to inform the decision-takers in a coherent way.

A third option can be called a multi-stage, multi-method approach. It starts with the former option where different techniques for each sectoral policy perspective are used. In a second stage the results of these evaluations are balanced and brought together by another specific technique in order to obtain an overall judgment from a sustainability perspective.

This paper will map out and elaborate the three stated approaches. Also, we will examine a case study which illustrates the second approach. In Belgium the Flemish state government designed a strategic traffic mobility plan for Antwerp, Belgium's second largest city. The objective of this plan is threefold: it aims to guarantee the accessibility of the city and its harbour, to improve the livability, and to enhance traffic safety in a sustainable way.

Within the planning stage the government also commissioned an ex ante evaluation. This evaluation consisted of a strategic environmental assessment, a cost benefit analysis and a social impact assessment. These three evaluation components reflect the three pillars of sustainable development.

The paper will examine the application of the three methods in the case study. Also it will explore how and to what extent the results of the three methods were combined or integrated into an overall judgment. Within this meta-evaluation of the approach used, we will highlight advantages and strengths as well as disadvantages and weaknesses. Based on this, the paper will also deduce critical success factors with regard to the relevance and influence of this evaluation approach for policy making in the context of sustainable development and a structural complexity with many actors involved.