



Policy Brief 4: Integration and synthesis

This *SustainabilityA-Test* policy brief has been developed in conjunction with the so-called webbook, a website summarising the project's integration and synthesis. The webbook provides an internet-based catalogue of tools for integrated assessment (available via www.SustainabilityA-Test.net).

The project SustainabilityA-Test to scientifically underpin the use of assessment tools

The purpose of *SustainabilityA-Test* is to scientifically underpin the use of assessment tools in integrated assessments of policies for sustainable development. These tools comprise all kinds of tools used to carry out assessments (evaluations). Examples are not only model tools, and cost-benefit analysis and participatory tools, but also tools that frame integrated assessments (so-called assessment frameworks), including the European Commission's impact assessment procedure.

Interviews with EC desk officers suggest that tool information could be useful

A number of interviews were held with desk officers from the European Commission during the project to identify their hands-on experience in putting the concept of integrated assessment within the European Commission into practice. These interviews suggested that desk officers are often not that familiar with the tools, in particular not with the pros and cons of them. The results of this project, presented in the *SustainabilityA-Test*'s webbook, can help in filling this gap. Even if such information may not help desk officers to actually apply the tools, it is important that they have the knowledge source to learn about each tool.

Table 1: Tool groups and their roles in the different phases of an integrated assessment for sustainable development

| | Phase I Problem analysis | Phase II Finding solutions | Phase III Analysis | Phase IV Follow-up |
|---|--|--|--|-----------------------|
| Participatory tools | Problem framing | Support scenario building | Providing the context for and improve robustness of MCA, CBA and CEA | Quality assurance |
| Scenario tools | Providing the future perspectives to problem framing | Visioning (including uncertainty analysis) | Reference for the application of other tools | - |
| Multi-criteria analysis tools (MCA) | - | Definition of criteria | Compare different alternatives | - |
| Cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and cost effectiveness analysis (CEA) tools | - | Definition of criteria | Compare different alternative | - |
| Model tools | Supporting problem framing | Supporting scenario construction | Full characterization of scenarios to enable comparison | Ex-post assessment |
| Indicator tools | | | | |

About 40 tools peer reviewed and grouped

Among the many available tools, the project identified and analysed about 40 of them, grouped into seven tool groups. The strengths and weaknesses are described for each tool, along with the capacity of the tools to address the various issues relevant to sustainable development. Some of the operational characteristics of the tools such as time and resource needs are also outlined. All tool descriptions have been peer reviewed by project and external experts. The tool information is available via the webbook, which is designed to be easily completed and update in the future.

Possible roles for tool groups in assessments

A literature study into the use of tools in integrated assessment has resulted in an overall framework for the tools, focusing on the role of each of the seven tool groups in integrated assessments. Table 1 shows this framework, which is a simplified representation of four generic phases of integrated assessments of policies for sustainable development and the tasks to be done. This table can be used to find a particular tool group that could support a certain task within an assessment.

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Criteria developed to help to choosing which tool to select within a tool group

Selection criteria have been developed to aid in finding a suitable tool within a tool group. The selection criteria vary for each tool group. The criteria could be taken into consideration when deciding which tool within a tool group to use.

A case study to enhance the tool analysis and understanding

To enhance the tool analysis, a *SustainabilityA-Test* case study was undertaken to identify the role that tools can play in integrated assessments. This was done by investigating how tools could have been applied in a real policy case – the development of the Biofuel Directive and the Energy Crop Premium Regulation – and examining how tools and tool combinations could have been applied. The case study facilitated a more direct comparison of the usefulness of tools in integrated assessments for sustainable development. It has also led to several observations on the use of tools in integrated assessment (see the separate policy brief on the 'Case study'). The case study observations formed the cornerstone for the overall conclusions drawn from the entire project.

Integrating and synthesising the project's results

The results of the project were integrated and synthesised on the basis of three recurring themes listed below. In this way the overall framework, the case study and the messages from the interviews with desk officers could be integrated. The three recurring themes are:

1. Making tool combinations
2. Covering impacts with tools
3. Communicating tools and tool results.

Making tool combinations could be useful

An integrated assessment for sustainable development could take advantage of tool *combinations*. This is because the different tasks that have to be done within an assessment are served by using different tools. These combinations could require tool linkages (i.e. technically linking tools, e.g. by building complex integrated assessment models), but this is not always necessary and desired. This is because tool linkages are not always easy to make and, in some cases, the linkages lack transparency. The latter in particular could be problematic for policy makers. The practical potential of combining tools is largely unexplored and could be significant.

Selecting the impacts to be taken into account could be supported by participatory tools

Selecting which sustainable development aspects to assess in an integrated assessment (e.g. choosing from a long list of possible impacts), which could be considered part of an integrated assessment itself, is often supported by participatory tools. This in general strengthens the assessment. An integrated assessment for sustainable development requires in most cases both quantitative and qualitative information, since not all relevant aspects of sustainable development can be quantified.

Communicating clearly about tools could help assessments

Most assessment frameworks (like Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment) have a lot in common. Rather than stressing the differences between the various assessment frameworks, the scientific community could probably help the policy-making community more by explaining better how they

complement each other. The explanation should show also that frameworks essentially reflect common sense on how to carry out assessments, guiding assessors through an assessment process, while taking due account of the knowledge and information available. Frameworks can support policy-making and avoid frustrating decision makers.

Lastly, communication within the scientific community on tools and their use can be further improved to help in deploying tool combinations.

Tool information could help to further improve assessments

There are many tools that can help in the process of integrated assessment. It appears that there is a need to know how they work and what they can deliver. Such knowledge could contribute to making more use of (combinations of) existing tools in integrated assessments, and thereby enhance the scope and the quality of assessments.

The webbook developed in this project can help to clarify the role of tools in an integrated assessment, providing scientifically underpinned and peer reviewed, easily accessible information about these tools to increase tool use and support use of tool combinations, both for the scientific and policy-making communities.

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