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Location: Kutaisi, Georgia

▶ European ECO Forum
SEA Excellence centers:

Research-Intellectual Club “Dialogue of Generations”, Georgia

In November 2021 “Dialogue of Generations” finalized their work on pilot SEA report, developed with the support of Resource & Analysis Center “Society and Environment”. For the purpose of pilot SEA we chose a city development strategy. Our work continued for three months and involved four experts in all relevant areas. Our team held about 30 meetings to familiarize with planning document, identify relevant data and researches.

SEA in Georgia

The reform of the environmental assessment system in Georgia began in 1996. The country has made significant progress in implementing comprehensive EIA and SEA systems in 2013-2017. With the signature in 2014 of the Georgia-EU Association Agreement, certain obligations were taken in the field of environmental protection in Georgia, including in the field of environmental assessment. In 2017, a new Environmental Assessment Code was adopted, which was an important step towards the creation of modern EIA and SEA systems in Georgia.

The Code has incorporated the requirements of the Espoo Convention and its SEA Protocol, as well as EU directives on EIA and SEA into the national legal framework.

Main conclusions and recommendations

The process of working on the pilot SEA turned out to be challenging and interesting. Difficulties were related to little experience with strategic environmental assessment in the country. It should be noted that although EIA is widely used in Georgia, only a few SEAs have been carried out in the country (according

to our knowledge, only two). Therefore, the advice and recommendations given by the project experts turned out to be useful and necessary. The work also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the planning document. The work done has shown the need to revise and correct the planning document itself.

In accordance with Article 27.7 of the Environmental Assessment Code, the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture of Georgia and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Protection of Georgia are preparing recommendations during the SEA process, which should be taken into account when approving the strategic document. However, the planning document we chose for our pilot SEA was not subject to these steps, yet. This complicated our work.

It is also important to note that pilot SEA enhanced capacity of involved experts, including national experts, and raised awareness of SEA.

Main challenges

01 Collecting the required data

Data collection process faced two difficulties: (a) the absolute absence of certain research and data, and (b) lack of access to existing data.

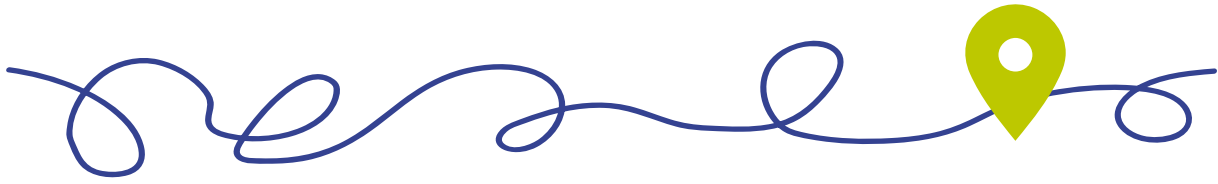
It should be noted that the planning document itself also contains little research data on several important sectors that should have been reflected in the urban planning document. These are the state of the atmospheric air, water resources, water supply and the state of sewerage and wastewater management, waste management.

In the process of collecting information, the team had to carry out extensive work to find other documents, get acquainted with master plans and studies of adjacent cities and thus establish data for the city in question.

Much of the data was also taken from private databases of experts involved in the assessment.

For atmospheric air, the data on the agency's website was available only until 2017, and access to the latest data was offered only upon payment.

Access to groundwater data also posed challenges. Groundwater monitoring resumed in the country in 2013. The monitoring network is being modernized gradually. Currently, monitoring is carried out at 33 stations in Georgia. But the number of observation stations and the data obtained are insufficient for an accurate assessment of the quality and quantity of groundwater.



Another example is the health impact of water pollution by chemicals. The national system for the detection and investigation of diseases, including intestinal infections caused by water pollution, is not functioning properly. The National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, which studies the spread of the disease, plans to improve its monitoring system by 2022. Accordingly, the exact data could not be reflected in the planning document due to the scarcity of their availability.

02 Lack of clear provisions on SEA

General guidance on the use of SEA in practice in Georgia was prepared in 2016. However, it requires revision and clarification. Specific requirements for the compiler need to be identified. After reviewing the two available SEAs in Georgia, we found certain discrepancies in both specific chapters and in the use of the methodology.

We believe that the government needs to revise the SEA regulation, which will make it easier for the public to understand and evaluate the document. In addition, from the examples already available, it can be judged that a lot of misunderstandings between the drafters of the SEA and the society were caused by discrepancies among the experts. For many of the available strategic framework documents, no SEA has been carried out and therefore it creates difficulties for the implementation of various projects. In such cases, the suspension of work or the withdrawal of the investor from the project are frequent.

It should also be noted that within the framework of this pilot SEA, the existing list of questions and chapters also raised questions when writing the assessment document. For example, under a specific chapter, the authors meant one thing, while the expert recommended writing answers from a different angle. Such discrepancies between the project pilot SEA and the existing examples of SEA in Georgia also took place, which served as a good opportunity to track the problems of discrepancies and recommend developing both the regulations and terms of reference for SEA.

03 Lack of terms of references

The issue of terms of references is important. We assume that any company (supplier) will face such difficulty and will have to work on the SEA according to the document. In our work, we encountered difficulties associated with this. Discrepancies that arise during the drafting of the document will be resolved in the case of a scrupulous schedule of the terms of reference, which will also facilitate the understanding of the document by interested parties during public hearings.

04 Methodology



While working on the assessment document, we faced the problem of using a methodology that could show a complete picture of the current situation. However, in the SEA reports we studied different methodologies were used. The problem was that there were no instructions for their use, and the proposed methodologies themselves did not give a complete necessary picture - they contained either too generalized or insufficient information. It should be noted that with the help of an expert involved in the project, it was possible to partially solve this challenge.

Additional recommendations

01 Strengthening the capacity of SEA-related planning authorities

The agency responsible for preparing the strategic document has a responsibility to ensure that SEA is carried out in accordance with the Environmental Assessment Code. Therefore, it is imperative that it has tasks related to SEA, such as selecting SEA experts, liaising with the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture and other government agencies in the SEA process, taking into account the advice and recommendations proposed in the SEA, etc. and the capacity needed to complete this work. Activities to raise awareness of SEA (e.g. small workshops and dissemination of information materials) and training for planners can be provided.

02 The availability of funds for the SEA

It would be useful to allocate appropriate funds from the budget for the planning authorities for the implementation of the SEA. Therefore, it is important that access to appropriate resources is guaranteed. It should also be noted that the cost of SEA increases with the involvement of international experts, which is quite possible with the little experience that a country has in preparing SEA.

03 It is important to hold joint meetings to exchange experience between experts, as well as to search for new best methodologies for analyzing certain areas

04 Effective public consultations

Online public hearings in pandemic times, on the one hand, facilitate the involvement of stakeholders and expand the geography of the participants, but at the same time do not provide the same effective involvement of the local community. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account new challenges and conduct both online, hybrid and physical meetings to ensure maximum community involvement.

About organisation

Research-Intellectual Club “Dialogue of Generations” (RICDOG) wants to create a space where people of different ages will have a harmonious relationship with each other. Our mission is to resist the alienation between generations and gain our knowledge, skills and experience exchange on which our joint participation in any activities will be successful. We encourage everyone to be active everywhere and always, in order to have successful present and future generations and create healthy environment.



Web-site: <https://ru.ricdog.org>

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