

Opportunities to improve the sustainability of policy and development in California is possible through better integration of urban planning and environmental assessment. A comparative analysis of environmental planning practices in Pakistan, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and California is given. The author recommends that a stronger and more sustainable regional approach in California may be obtained by integrating environmental factors earlier in the planning and development entitlement processes.

Cities and regions are the major focal point of economic production and resource consumption as well as the source of many environmental, political, and socioeconomic problems. Planning as a means to achieve balanced development within a country has been accepted by almost all nations who support different urban planning and land use regulations at various levels of government. The interrelationship between economic, social and political forces, and the physical environment, as well as the need for an integrated planning approach is recognized as the only way to improve quality of life and avoid environmental problems. As responsibilities for planning and environmental assessment are shared among the various levels and agencies of government, environmental management programs are instituted to reduce negative effects of development on the environment.

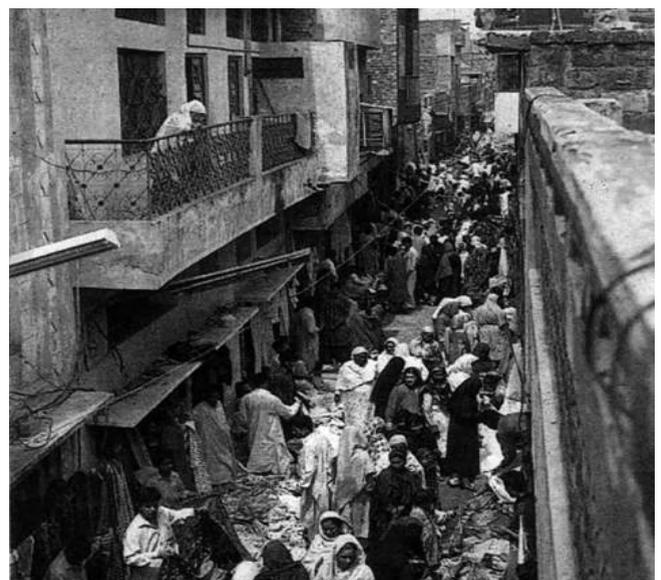
The concept “environment” stands for a comprehensive and dynamic system composed of a complex set of different but interdependent elements aggregated in components identified as physical, ecological, social, economic, institutional, and political. Thus the overall complexity and comprehensiveness of environmental systems can be best dealt with through a broader planning approach that is integrated and encompasses social, economic, and ecological issues in a sustainable policy and development framework.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) refers to either a formal or informal decision-making process for evaluating the possible risks or effects of a particular action on the environment. Whereas land use planning is a common term for physical resource-based planning. While land use planning is mainly biophysical in character, with more or less consideration given to linkages to economic, social, and environmental issues, the integration of the land use

planning process to EIA will ensure that environmental concerns are accounted for at all levels of planning. Within this perspective, sustainable development is that which meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations, through integrated processes that are interdependent with the environment.

An Integrated Process for Environmental Impact Assessment and Urban Planning: Case Studies

Next I will briefly present a comparative analysis of planning and environmental practices in Pakistan, the United Kingdom and New Zealand and consider the state of integration of E
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*Residential encroachment in a commercial street, open drains and waste polluting a river in Pakistan.
(Photo: I. Qamar)*

Pakistan

In Pakistan, planning is influenced by the British system. The overall structure of planning follows a hierarchy of national, provincial, and local levels and seeks to integrate land use planning and environmental assessment with socioeconomic planning through national five-year plans. Zoning and subdivision control is weak at the local government level and, therefore, does not effectively protect or maintain the land's natural resource value. The arrangement of government into line ministries charged with promoting development in their own sector is counterproductive to sound land use planning and, to a greater extent, for environmental assessment.

There is also a top-down environmental management approach with the national government providing EIA guidelines specific to each project. For example, there are guidelines specific to major chemical and manufacturing plants, industrial estates, major roads, and so forth. EIA was initiated through a formal legislative framework for both public and private developments. The concept of environmental protection is well recognized in the mandatory EIA system. Overall, EIA and planning systems are parallel processes in Pakistan. An attempt at integration was made via the Environmental Protection Act in 1997, which requires environmental assessment of housing estates and new town development.

In Pakistan, EIA should be integrated into the existing decision-making procedures of government authorities. To improve environmental assessment and land use planning, a regional planning exercise could be carried out jointly by the planning staff of more than one local council with technical guidance from provincial planning departments.



*Open drains and wastepolluting a river in Pakistan.
(Photo: I. Qamar)*

This would give local government agencies in metropolitan areas more autonomy and control. After plans are adopted, they should be monitored and revised regularly.

United Kingdom

Britain has a long history of planning, and national planning legislation is applicable to the whole country. Departments of the central government have control over local governments and are responsible for ensuring that land use policies are carried out by local governments.

The principles of the British planning system are based on a top-down hierarchical sequence of plans. Hence, British planning is more controlled at both the national and local level, and land use is more regulated. Britain initially rejected an environmental protection system such as the National Environmental Policy Act in the United States because planning acts in Britain already required documents equivalent to an Environmental Impact Statement. Theoretically, EIAs were built into the planning system, and particularly, into planning consent procedures.

As a result of the requirements of the European Community Directive in 1985, EIAs have been implemented through a range of regulations and orders (about 20 in all) because certain types of project effects lie outside the scope of existing planning legislation.

New Zealand

New Zealand has two levels of government—national and local. Local government includes regional and local councils. It provides the best example of an integrated system of planning and environmental assessment through mandatory regional policy statements and district plans.

In 1973, the Commission for the Environment devised procedures for EIA for government projects. EIA was introduced in 1974 with the publication of Environmental Protection and Enhancement Procedures but did not yet have statutory status; the system was more project-specific. A new environmental policy with a focus on resource management and sustainability of natural and physical resources was passed in 1986. In 1988, the Resource Management Bill was introduced to integrate impact assessment into planning.

Reforms of the Natural Resource Management Act (RMA) of 1991 caused a radical departure from the former system of planning and environmental protection, resulting in the repeal of 20 major statutes.



City skyline, New Zealand. (Photo: I. Qamar)

The RMA placed the natural environment at the center of the planning process, making it an integral part of the process instead of requiring a separate EIA process at the end of the planning process.

California

In California planning is mandated at the state level and carried out at the local level. Although planning for housing development is mandated by the state, there is no requirement that housing actually be developed, resulting in long-distance commutes to affordable housing in outlying areas. Although major urban growth as resulted in the development of regional cities, regional government agencies have relatively little influence over local planning and development approvals.

The State government policies, regulations, and direct spending are key drivers on most issues requiring local and regional solutions. The State has a hodge-podge of governmental rules, fiscal policies, and institutional frameworks that often discourages regional collaboration among local governments and rarely encourages regional approach.

California has taken major steps in the development of environmental assessment at the land use planning level. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) dates back to 1970. Consideration of project alternatives and mitigation measures to reduce significant environmental impacts are required. Public participation in the environmental assessment and the involvement of interested parties are mandatory for the CEQA process.

In California, air pollution, land use patterns, work commutes, affordable housing, natural resource conservation, watersheds, and economic activity all span beyond local government boundaries.

Local governments typically work to protect their existing neighborhoods and tend to contribute to, rather than resolve, regional planning issues. In addition, local governments lack the legal, financial, and political means to fully address these regional issues in an integrated manner. There is an increasing awareness of regional problems and several cities have undertaken downtown mixed-use redevelopment and transit-oriented development. This remains the exception rather than the rule.

For California, regional and local governments should expand funding for programs that offer collaborative planning, for both multiple stakeholders and multiple issues, to achieve environmental conservation and development goals on a regional scale.

Strategies for Integration in California

The level of application and development of urban planning and EIA varies greatly from country to country depending upon the policies and administrative practices of the country. The situation concerning the application of environmental assessment procedures to planning practice varies widely in the selected countries and states. Planning history, levels of application and concepts of planning that drive planning practices are further key issues that contribute to these variations.

The opportunities for integration of environmental assessment exist at some planning levels in some countries following legislative and administrative reform. Although legislative policy and administrative and decision-making barriers continue to exist and need to be overcome, the integration of environmental assessment into planning is inevitable. Even the modern developed countries have not yet been completely successful in achieving this integration.

As California sets a course into the new century, it is increasingly clear that many of the State's pressing policy challenges call for solutions that are regional in scope. To resolve these issues, a path of integration is depicted in the following Figure. These include legislative and administrative reforms, a more efficient decision-making process, strengthening regional agencies, fiscal reform, and better integration of planning and environmental review with more consideration of environmental factors during plan and project design.

California's economic, demographic, and geographic diversity presents an opportunity to invent a new social and

economic order that celebrates complexity and diversity and that builds self-governing mechanisms appropriate to this new challenge. Recognizing it as an important public challenge, a regional strategy is recommended for California, which bridges the State mandates and existing local control. In addition to resolving structural impediments, the State should expand funding for programs for collaborative planning on a multi-stakeholder, multi-issue basis, to improve the integration of environmental assessment and urban planning and achieve sustainability goals at the regional as well as local levels.

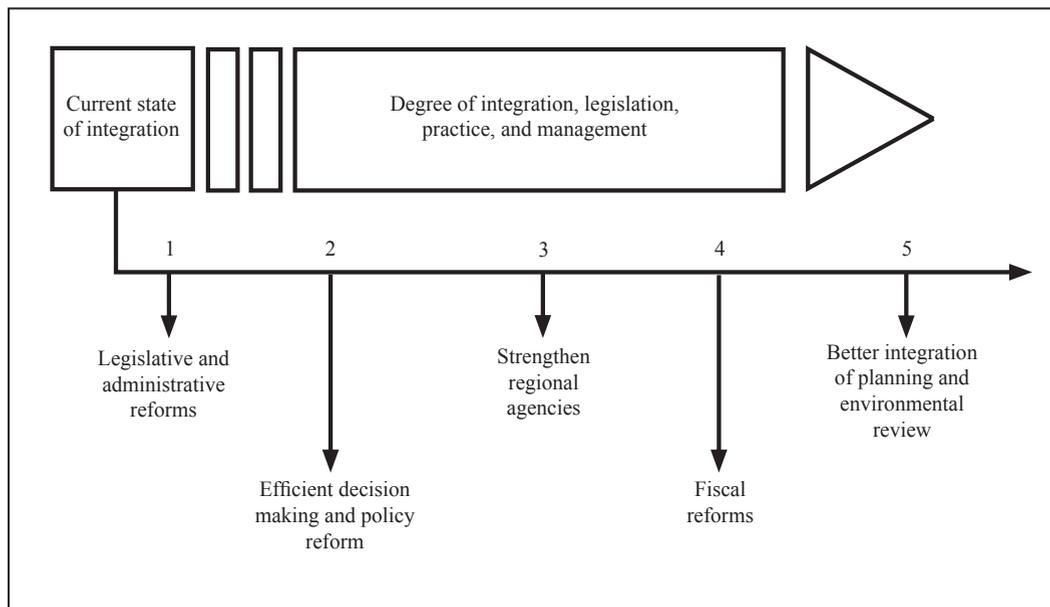


Fig. 1: A path for integration in California environmental planning