



Social Impact Assessment

Description

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is the process of analysing and managing intended and unintended consequences of planned interventions on people. The process combines social research, public involvement, planning and management of social change, and focuses on affected individuals, groups, and communities. It can be applied to tourism development projects, land-use planning for tourism, programmes such as species protection, local area plans and tourism policy. The SIA process usually has a focus on bringing about a more sustainable human environment.

How and when tool is used

The SIA process typically incorporates scoping, profiling or base-line studies, the projection of effects and weighing up of alternatives, and monitoring and evaluation as listed below. Social effects are described according to type, scale, degree, duration, likelihood and distribution across geographical areas and groups within society. The projection of social effects usually includes consideration of mitigation possibilities for any significant effects, and effects should be considered both pre and post mitigation.

Elements of the social assessment process as applied to tourism are:

- *scoping of key issues*, such as employment, training, workforce, housing, accommodation needs, tourist expenditure, host community perceptions of change, cultural effects, and wider environmental concerns. Processes of consultation are developed, and data needs established;
- *profiling of host communities* including previous cycles of resource use and economic development, tourism developments, host community and destination cycles, and levels of carrying capacity and critical resource constraints, infrastructure, and social structure and demographics;
- *profiling of visitors* including domestic and international visitors and trends, origins, demographics and typical segmentation of the visitor market, transportation and typical routes, expenditure, accommodation preferences, activities and levels of specialisation;
- *development and assessment of alternatives* in the context of a [community tourism strategy](#) 🌱, [regional and district tourism plans](#) 🌱, local and regional social, environmental and conservation policies, and [structure plans](#) 🌱;
- *assessment of effects* of the selected alternative during both development/construction and operation/implementation.

Within this process, monitoring and evaluation of social impacts is required in order to manage and mitigate social impacts (including enhanced benefits) and to provide feedback into future tourism strategies and plans. Where possible this monitoring should be part of an integrated approach to [monitoring](#) 🌱 and also [adaptive management](#) 🌱.

Application

SIA has become firmly established internationally as an important aspect of [environmental impact assessment](#) 🌱. In New Zealand it is a legal requirement for matters covered by the [Resource Management Act framework](#) 🌱, particularly under section 2, the definition of the environment, section 5, sustainable development, and section 88, requirement to assess effects on the environment.

SIA of tourism projects requires active input from a wide institutional base that includes affected or host communities in defining the issues of importance to them, the developer, government agencies and other organisations involved. Host community resistance to new developments is often as much to do with inadequate information and a poor process of consultation and [participation models](#) 🌱 as to the quality of the project and its effects. There is increasing legal support for consultation in New Zealand law and cases.

Despite developments in SIA, and the legislative framework of the RMA that encourages integrated management, tourism development continues to occur on an ad hoc basis. In tourism planning and management, increasing visitor numbers is no longer seen as the sole goal of successful tourism development. And economic benefit is no longer the sole benefit in a broader [cost-benefit analysis](#) 🌱. Objectives such as host community support, visitor satisfaction, integrated social and economic development, environmental and heritage protection, and cultural enhancement, are also recognised as important. This wider planning perspective includes a range of participants, and provides an integrated approach to social development, marketing, environmental planning, transport and inter-agency cooperation.



Problems in the application of SIA include:

- inadequate consideration of the carrying capacity of the local community (e.g. water, transport, sanitation, housing, health and other social services) and implications for the local cost of living
- inadequate consideration of local social-cultural conditions, social organisation and social control
- failure to consider changes in employment demand, skills, training, immigration
- lack of early and *meaningful* community involvement.

Social impacts in the tourism sector are often diffuse and cumulative. Therefore a community, or wider, perspective is needed to assess them. But there does not appear to be application of SIA at the plan level for areas with tourism development, especially where there are a large number of cumulative effects or social issues evident in the process of plan development. The tourism industry is insufficiently involved in resource management at a regional and local level, particularly in the development of regional and district plans for resource management.

SIA capacity needs to be built at all levels - central government, regional and local government, tribal, community groups and private sector. There needs to be better co-ordination between agencies involved in the administration and management of tourism, natural resources and social services.

The social assessment process should provide a framework for integrating all the various aspects of planning and impact assessment, with a focus on key issues for development and a basis for ongoing consultation.

Our evaluation

The social aspects of tourism projects and associated developments warrant special attention in an integrated approach to impact assessment because of the close interaction between tourism and the physical, social, cultural and economic environments. It is important to consider the needs of the host community and local enterprise. A rigorous and comprehensive approach to assessing environmental and social impacts of tourism development would provide decision makers and the industry with a dynamic and interactive approach to the host community, sensitive to the needs of good service delivery and hospitality, as well as the local community. SIA assists an integrated EIA process to involve a range of stakeholders including local government, host communities and other regulatory environment agencies.