

30 April 2019

[19-10]

Submitted for the EPH 2019 (Marseille) Pre-conference: HIA institutionalization and multisectoral collaboration in Europe

Title: **“HIA in context”**

Author: Rainer Fehr, Department of Public Health, University of Bielefeld (Germany)

Abstract

Background: Efforts to institutionalize HIA, and to pursue its further development on multisectoral collaboration, have a track record of being variably successful. As a rule, the basic HIA idea is widely applauded but – for multiple reasons – the practical implementation can be tenacious. While prejudices and vested interests cannot easily be overcome, there is room for conceptually and practically strengthening HIA.

Goal and methods: To explore innovative ways of invigorating HIA by utilizing its diverse relations with other forms of governance-supporting health assessments, as analyzed by the EUPHA “health assessments” working group (involving 10 EUPA sections). This contribution is based on a 2017 EJPH paper, a 2019 book chapter, and recent literature searches. HIA is seen as embedded into the wider group of governance-supporting health assessments, in order to gain appreciation by providing model solutions applicable beyond HIA, and to learn from seminal developments elsewhere.

Results: Applying the “health assessments” approach discloses HIA’s close connectedness with related approaches, including health reporting, health needs assessment, health technology assessment, health systems performance assessment (as favored by EC circles) as well as evaluative activities. Insights can be grouped as follows:

- Mutual exchange concerning concepts and experiences: For example, the EPHIA guide on HIA includes “policy analysis” which is similarly applied in evaluations; it also includes “profiling” of communities which is highly similar to health reporting; and it lists “monitoring” (of the actions agreed from the HIA) and “outcome evaluation” (evaluating the predicted impacts) – here, HIA’s interrelatedness with the other types of health assessments is obvious.
- Improved practice by collaboration and exchange: Local and regional knowledge is often embedded in various health assessments (incl. reports, evaluations). Existing Health Needs Assessments (HNA) point to vulnerable populations, a Health Systems Performance Assessment (HSPA) reveals specific weaknesses of local health care; both aspects are potentially relevant for expected impacts. Existing ex-post evaluations of similar projects can inform prospective HIA. And, importantly, interference among assessments needs to be avoided: where other (environmental and/or social) impact assessments are conducted, assessors need to be aware of potential overlap or even contradictions, undermining credibility among decision-makers and the public at large.
- Teaching and training: Since the competencies required for assessing human health in HIA overlap widely with those required for other types of health assessments, jointly designing (integrated) curricula and teaching modules allows to harness synergy potentials.

Discussion: Viewing HIA as one (important) type among the group of “health assessments” fruitfully inspires HIA, both on conceptual and on practice level, and may help to strengthen HIA significantly.

Characters: 3.000.