Bridging the Gap between SEA and EIA: Lessons from the Turcot Interchange

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Research Aims:

Government goals, expressed in high level policies, plans and programs (PPP) do not always translate into outcomes in projects "on the ground" in Canada. Although Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) approaches, as well as a wide variety of policies, plans and programs, contain goals that are expected to envision a movement towards social, economic and environmental sustainability, these goals are not necessarily upheld in large-scale projects and their Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). Although this disconnect is often approached through anecdotal observations, it is essential to analyze the sustainability of large-scale developments and the way in which they "measure up" when compared to alternative options. To gain greater insight into this issue we chose to investigate the plans of the Ministère de Transport de Québec (MTQ) for the reconstruction of the Turcot Intersection in Montreal as a case study.

Methodology:

Our work (article publication expected in the journal “Environmental Impact Assessment Review”) proposes a Goal Compliance Analysis (GCA) methodology wherein the level of harmonization between SEA, PPPs and proposed projects and possible alternatives can be investigated by experts (see figure 1). This method is quantified through a Likert scale which allows for comparison of project alternatives for decision making and analytical purposes. The 2009 MTQ proposal and two alternative proposals for the Turcot Interchange redevelopment in Montréal, Québec were analyzed.

The 2009 MTQ plan for the Turcot redevelopment was found to be in poor compliance with the majority of objectives for the six social, environmental, and economic sectors that were examined, while the two alternative plans were found to be in much greater accordance with the intentions of governmental SEA and PPP. It is worth noting here that there is little substantial difference between the 2009 MTQ plan for the Turcot and the one approved by the Quebec Government in 2010.

Synthesis and applications:

We found that the Goal Compliance Analysis (GCA) methodology is a versatile "watchdog" tool for the examination of the level of harmonization between stated goals for regions, industrial sectors, or governments. GCA can be used as a tool for comparative analysis in decision making at many different possible scales. GCA is also a fairly straightforward method that can be used by policy makers and members of the general public alike.