
Evaluation of an Impact Assessment Process for Rural Development Plan Measures

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Summary

Impact Assessment (IA) is an important process in order to help both researchers and policymakers to identify the vulnerable points of policies with final goal to improve them. For this reason, European Union introduced impact assessment, as a mandatory process in all new policies and directives. One of the main EU policies are the Rural Development Plans (RDPs), as a part of the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which are implemented in every member-state. The aim of this paper is to evaluate an impact assessment process for the rural development plan measures. This process was implemented as case study for a specific measure of the Greek RDP. The implementation of the impact assessment process refers to a sample of farms participating in the measure 121 “Modernization of agricultural holdings” in the region of Central Macedonia in Greece for the programming period of 2007–2013. From the evaluation of the IA process very useful conclusions were raised. The results will help the researchers and the policy makers to make improvements in every step of the impact assessment process.

Key words: impact assessment, rural development plan measures, impact assessment process

Оценка на ефекта от мерките по Програмата за развитие на селските райони

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Резюме

Оценката на влиянието е важен процес, целящ подпомагане едновременно на изследователите и изготвящите политиката да идентифицират уязвимите точки в нея, за да могат да ги подобрят. За тази цел ЕС е въвел оценката на ефекта като задължителен процес за всички нови политики и директиви. Една от главните политики на ЕС е ПРСР като част от втория стълб на ОСП, приложена във всяка страна – членка. Целта на доклада е да оцени процеса на измерване на ефекта от мерките по Програмата за развитие на селските райони. Този процес е въведен като аналитично изследване на специфични мерки от гръцката ПРСР. Изследва се извадка от ферми, участващи в Мярка 121 „Модернизация на земеделските фирми” в района на Централна Македония за програмния период 2007–2013 г. След оценката на процеса на изчисляване на влиянието са направени полезни изводи. Резултатите ще подпомогнат учените и изработващите политиката да подобрят всяка стъпка от процеса на оценка на ефекта.

Ключови думи: оценка на влиянието, ПРСР, процес на измерване на ефекта

Introduction

Impact Assessment defined as a set of logical steps to be followed when you prepare policy proposals (EC, 2009). Another definition given by International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA, 2014) is that “Impact Assessment is the process of identifying the future consequences of a current or proposed action”. The European Commission introduced Impact Assessment guidelines in order to help researchers and policy makers in assessing the impacts of the main EU policies (EC, 2009). According to them, an impact assessment process is necessary for the assessment of the economic, social and environmental impacts of the policies.

The main EU policy for agriculture is the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) which includes two main pillars, the direct payments and the Rural Development Plans (RDP’s) (EC, 2005). RDP’s are implemented through a set of specific measures which are different in every member-state (Bournaris et al., 2014). For assessing the impacts of the RDP measures in rural areas there are many different impact assessment processes in literature (Manos et al., 2013). An impact assessment process is used, as a tool for helping both the researchers and the policymak-

ers in following specific logical steps and phases as described in the impact assessment guidelines (Wascher et al., 2011).

The aim of this paper is to evaluate an impact assessment process which was proposed for Rural Development Plan measures. The implementation of the impact assessment process was made to a sample of farms participating in the measure 121 “Modernization of agricultural holdings” of the Greek Rural Development Plan 2007–2013 in the region of Central Macedonia. The evaluation was made by a group of experts as a part of the final phase of the impact assessment process.

The structure of the paper is organized as follows: In the following section the implemented Impact Assessment process is presented. In section 3, the evaluation of the impact assessment process is analysed. The final section contains the conclusions.

Impact Assessment Process

The literature proposes many different impact assessment processes for assessing the impacts of specific policies. Several researchers suggest impact assessment processes related to the various impact areas (environmental, social, economic, etc.) (Michaels, 2009). Poveda and Lipsett (2014)

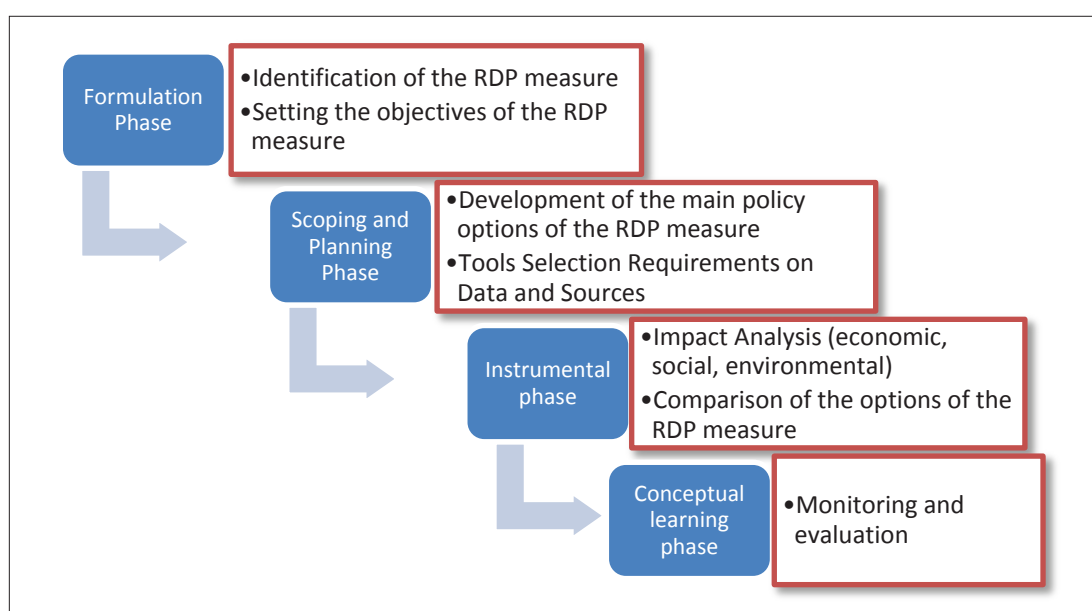


Fig. 1. Phases and steps of Impact Assessment process for RDP measures

proposed a comprehensive integrated methodology for assessing the impact of policies in sustainability while Vaidya and Mayer (2013) used a participatory approach to develop an impact assessment process for the sustainable the management of natural resources. An impact assessment process of environmental impacts on seawater desalination plants in Spain is presented by José Luis Fuentes – BARGUES (2014). On the other hand Wu et al. (2014) describe how their proposed environmental impact assessment process (PEIA – Plan Environmental Impact Assessment) can integrate spatial planning and rural planning. Finally the Chanchitpricha, Ch. and Bond, A. (2013) aim to record the questions about the effectiveness of impact assessment processes through the development of a framework based on the literature, using various criteria to measure the effectiveness of the impact assessment.

The impact assessment process proposed for the Rural Development Plan measures is based on the LIAISE project modules for impact assessment support (LIAISE, 2011). The phases and the generic steps of the Impact Assessment process for RDP measures are presented in the following graph and are presented as a step by step IA process for RDPs (Moulogianni, 2015).

The main purpose of these generic steps is to provide practical and conceptual help in the impact assessment studies of rural development plan measures. Although the steps can be applied with flexibility, they organized in chronological order, following the impact assessment process that European Union defines in impact assessment guidelines (EC, 2009). The choice of the steps and the weight of the steps may vary between different impacts assessment studies and depends on the measure or on the policy that is examined. The set of seven steps can be grouped into four phases as suggested by Wascher et al. (2011):

1. Formulation phase;
2. Scoping and planning phase;
3. Instrumental phase;
4. Conceptual learning phase.

The Formulation Phase includes the first two steps of the proposed impact assessment process, (i) the identification of the RDP measure,

that its impacts will be examined and (ii) setting the objectives of rural development plan measure as defined by the legislation. This phase constitutes the initial stage of any impact assessment study.

The second phase or Scoping and Planning phase includes (iii) the development of the main policy options of the rural development plan measure. This phase also involves (iv) the selection of the impact assessment tools, data requirements and sources and possible indicators for measuring the impact that will be used.

The Instrumental phase involves two steps, (v) the impact analysis (economic, social and environmental) and (vi) the comparison of the options of the rural development plan measure.

The last phase is the conceptual learning phase, including (vii) the monitoring and evaluation of the impact assessment process. This phase is the most interesting phase in the impact assessment process since it examines the results of the previous phases and provides valuable information for the improvement of the impact assessment process. In this paper are presented the results of the seventh step of the process.

Evaluation of Impact Assessment process for RDPs

The evaluation of the process is the final step of the impact assessment process for RDPs. The IA process was implemented for an ex-post assessment of the RDP Measure 121 “Modernization of agricultural holdings” of the Greek Rural Development Plan 2007–2013. The research measured the economic, social and environmental impacts in a sample of farms in the region of Central Macedonia in Northern Greece. The researchers with the help of policy makers of the region of Central Macedonia tried to follow the phases and steps of the impact assessment process for RDPs. The evaluation conducted by a panel of experts after the end of the IA process. The composition of the panel included both researchers from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and policymakers from the Region of Central Macedonia. The panel examined separately each step of the IA process and checked how

they implemented. They evaluated the positive and negative points of every step of the IA process and proposed some improvements in the process.

The first phase of the impact assessment process for RDPs was the formulation of the impact assessment process. During the formulation phase, the researchers with the help of policy makers decide which RDP will examine and collect all the available information about the measure. However, the evaluators proposed that depending on the maturity of the examined rural development plan measure, the activities of this phase may need to focus on two points. First point is to include in the formulation phase experts from the private agencies (consultants) which are responsible for submitting the applications of the farms to the RDP. The second point is to focus on the political will and the political line that will be followed. During this phase, the rural development plan measure is analyzed and the effects that will be measured are pointed. In our case the RDP measure was the Measure 121 “Modernization of Agricultural Holdings” of the Greek RDP. The objectives of the study was set and from the evaluation emerged that relationship between the policy makers and the researches is crucial. The policy makers, which are responsible for implementing the rural development plan measures, should give all the available data about the RDP measure to the research team, in order to help the researchers at the first phase of the IA process. For this reason, it is important to develop a trustful relationship between the research team and the policy makers.

During the second phase, the impact assessment process was designed. This phase goes further one step than the Formulation Phase, it needs to provide support for the initial identification of the political line, the impact areas (economic, environmental, social), and the impact scale (local, regional, national). This phase also aims to plan the full process to be followed in the study. The data regarding the impact areas will determine a part of the political line and this will contribute significantly to the final implementation of the impact assessment process. In this phase the main policy options were developed and the im-

pact assessment tools to be used and their data requirements and sources were selected. The researchers also informed the policy makers about the available IA tools and methods. The evaluation of this phase concluded that the selection of user friendly IA tools is significant.

The next phase was the phase of the implementation of the selected method and tools. All the economic, social and environmental impacts were analysed used a set of selected indicators for each category. Also a comparison with alternative options of the rural development plan measure was made. This phase is potentially the key phase in the impact assessment process, and is perceived as the main phase of the study. The main focus of this phase is on the results and on the comparison of the options of the rural development plan measure. The evaluation showed that it is very important to analyse systematically the results and the alternative options to the policy makers. The researchers have to make policy briefs and to highlight the key results and the key options in order to help the policy makers in the planning of the future activities of the policies.

The last phase is the evaluation of the impact assessment process which is described in this paper. The evaluation of the IA process is one of the most important steps of the process. It shows the positive and negative points of the implementation of the IA process; it suggests solutions and highlights crucial errors that must be avoided in future implementations. It also highlighted that following a specific impact assessment process with default steps is an important tool both for the policy makers and the researchers.

Conclusions

An impact assessment for RDPs was implemented in the Region of Central Macedonia and for a specific RDP Measure the 121 measure “Modernization of agricultural holdings” of the 2007–2013 programming period. The impact assessment followed a specific step by step impact assessment process for RDP measures with final step to evaluate the implementation of the pro-

cess. From the evaluation of the IA process was raised very useful conclusions. First of all, for a successful implementation of an impact assessment process is necessary to develop a trustful relationship between the research team and the policy makers which are responsible for the implementation of rural development plan measures or policy. One other significant point is to follow the steps and especially in the design, planning, and the implementation of the IA process. The consistent implementation of steps provides greater transparency in the impact assessment process at every stage of the process. Also the selection of known and user friendly impact assessment tools is very important. Another point was the continuous contribution from the policy-makers side at every step of the process. This leads to a continuous evaluation of each step and the redesign of the process, where it is necessary. At the main phase of the implementation of the IA tools, it is very important to analyse the results to the policy makers before the policy suggestion were developed. This is very useful, since it gives freedom to researchers to reconsider the results and reuse the impact assessment process at any time of the development of the RDP measure. Finally, the evaluation of the whole process is very important both for the researchers and the policy makers.

Generally, we can conclude that the implementation of the impact assessment process for RDPs was a useful test case, for an ex-post IA process for rural development plan measures. Also, the practical implementation of the IA process showed how important is the effective communication and cooperation of the parties involved, and how they interact with each other. A key element of a successful impact assessment process is a good collaboration between researchers and the policy makers in an environment of confidence and transparency. For future research will be very interesting to investigate if the impact assessment process for RDP measures can be implemented for an entire set of measures or for the entire RDP.

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