

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) AND OUTDOOR ADVERTISING

Discussion Document

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ABSTRACT

EIAs for outdoor advertising present an individualistic approach and are aimed at specific high impact signs such as a specific billboard on a specific site. In contrast with EIAs, SEAs for outdoor advertising present a cumulative approach. It covers a variety of high impact and other signs over larger areas such as the total area under the jurisdiction of a specific controlling authority, parts of urban areas or larger shopping centres. SEAs will result in Outdoor Advertising Plans (OAPs) which will indicate what number of which sign types may be erected at which locations and under which conditions. The SEA approach will have various benefits for both controlling authorities and the outdoor advertising industry, such as improved incomes, improved productivity of scarce human resources and better community involvement.

1. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF SEA

Where Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is aimed at individual projects on specific sites, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is aimed at projects and programmes covering a wider geographic area or a whole sector.

According to the *Guideline Document on Strategic Environmental Assessment in South Africa*¹ SEA has the following benefits and objectives:

- ❑ **Pro-active:** It pro-actively informs the development of plans and programmes.
- ❑ **Opportunities and constraints:** SEA identifies the opportunities and constraints that the environment places on development. In contrast to EIA, it not only looks at the impact of

¹ DEA&T and CSIR – DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AND TOURISM AND COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH. (2000, February). *Guideline Document: Strategic Environmental Assessment in South Africa*, p.10.

development on the environment, but also assesses the effect of the environment on development.

- ❑ **Sustainability:** It provides guidelines to ensure that development takes place within sustainable limits.
- ❑ **Integration:** It has the ability to integrate across areas, regions or sectors.
- ❑ **Cumulative effects:** SEA improves the way in which cumulative effects are dealt with in environmental assessments.
- ❑ **Chosen level of environmental quality:** It focuses on the maintenance and enhancement of a chosen level of environmental quality, rather than on minimising individual impacts.

2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN MANUAL FOR OUTDOOR ADVERTISING CONTROL (SAMOAC).

2.1 Functions

The current SAMOAC (April 1998) is a guideline document that provides conditions and principles for the management and control of 35 classes of outdoor advertisements and signs. It is aimed at both the outdoor advertising industry and controlling authorities with the purpose of encouraging the standardisation of assessment criteria and uniformity in the application of these criteria. SAMOAC focuses on the control of advertisements and signs on an individual basis and recommends that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) be undertaken for any outdoor advertisement or sign larger than 36m².

It is important that SAMOAC be seen as a guideline document only. The onus is placed on controlling authorities to give legal status to this document by incorporating it into relevant legislation. The current SAMOAC gives controlling authorities the option to adapt the original document in accordance with local character and needs before taking such a step.

Like most other outdoor advertising control systems the approval of outdoor advertisements and signs under SAMOAC is based on specific and deemed consent. Specific consent implies that the controlling authority must approve the application for a certain sign type before it may be erected.

Deemed consent implies that certain sign types are deemed approved without the controlling authority having to provide specific consent as long as certain prescribed conditions are adhered to.

2.2 SAMOAC and Areas of Control

Apart from general and specific sign conditions SAMOAC also allows for Areas of Control as a supplementary control measure. Areas of maximum, partial and minimum control reflect the sensitivity of the environment and the degree of control needed in such areas. This implies that only a limited number of signs with a low impact will be allowed in areas of maximum control such as residential areas; while a large number of signs with a higher impact will be allowed in areas of minimum control such as industrial estates.

3. A CUMULATIVE APPROACH TO OUTDOOR ADVERTISING

The most important limitation of applying regulatory conditions and specifications such as those contained in SAMOAC is that outdoor advertising applications are considered on an individual basis. The cumulative effect of outdoor advertisements and signs, in a positive as well as a negative sense, is therefore not taken into account. This individual approach also has various other negative effects such as a huge strain on limited manpower resources and long waiting periods for the approval of applications.

In order to give expression to a cumulative approach to the management of outdoor advertising, the SEA procedure should result in *Outdoor Advertising Plans (OAPs)* which are to be incorporated in relevant legislation. Such plans may cover larger suburban shopping centres, road sections, urban districts or even whole cities or towns or municipal districts and will indicate what number of which signs may be erected at which locations. OAPs should give expression to the conditions contained in SAMOAC as well as all demarcated areas of control, but it might also provide more specific conditions additional to those contained in SAMOAC if and where such conditions are needed.

Since community participation should form an important part in demarcating areas of control, the SEA approach might be ideal for demarcating such areas. No control measures can be implemented and no OAP can be drawn up before areas of control have not been demarcated for

the total district under the jurisdiction of a specific controlling authority. The ideal approach will be to demarcate areas of control and draw up an OAP for the total district under the jurisdiction of a controlling authority by means of the same SEA process. Such an OAP might then be refined by looking in more detail at certain components such as shopping centres.

3.1 Benefits of the SEA procedure and Outdoor Advertising Plans (OAPs)

Applied to outdoor advertisements and signs the SEA procedure has the following benefits:

- ❑ A co-ordinated and more significant contribution can be made to the aesthetic environment and local character or sense of place.
- ❑ A cumulative impact assessment of all outdoor advertisements and signs is possible.
- ❑ An OAP based on a SEA will reduce the number of applications for individual signs and advertisements and will therefore result in a more productive application of scarce manpower and funds by controlling authorities.
- ❑ The outdoor advertising industry will benefit from a simplified procedure for obtaining permission to erect outdoor advertisements. Once the relevant authority or authorities have approved a SEA and its resulting OAP, all advertisements and signs covered in the OAP might be erected with deemed consent by whoever has acquired the relevant concession or rights, subject to the conditions of the OAP, unless the OAP stipulates that certain advertising structures may be erected only after the approval of a more detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or similar study, which will imply that specific consent is required.
- ❑ More effective community involvement will be obtained in the management of outdoor information transfer and the aesthetic environment. This will result in optimum environmental benefits for local communities.
- ❑ Controlling authorities will derive a better income from advertising rights without impairing perceptual resources.

3.2 Developing sense of place or local character

For every local authority or any other institution involved in tourism sense of place is a critical issue to look at.

Sense of place can be seen as the innate ability of a place or setting to form vivid mental images in the observer's mind, to change his emotions in a major way, and to stay in his memory over extended periods of time.

Sense of place is the intangible qualities which contribute to the identity of a place and which help to determine the differences between one place and another.

The totality of natural and man-made things, together with history, culture and tradition, assembled in a unique way, contribute to sense of place. However, there may be key elements which dominate and which are of particular significance. Sense of place is more than relatedness and character. It refers to uniqueness of quality and individuality of character which makes one place or location different from any other. (See appendix for examples on sense of place).

By means of a cumulative approach the SEA procedure can play an important role in enhancing local character. All the elements that contribute to sense of place should be identified and guidelines should be developed to develop and enhance sense of place. This information should be incorporated into the OAP.

4. IMPLEMENTING SEAs AIMED AT OUTDOOR ADVERTISING

4.1 SEA requirements

The following are required for any SEA aimed at outdoor advertising:

- ❑ It is to be undertaken by an independent environmental consultant with an aesthetic background and with the necessary expertise regarding traffic safety.
- ❑ The cumulative effect of all possible classes of advertisements and signs should be taken into consideration.

- ❑ Outdoor advertisements in adjoining areas should be taken into consideration.
- ❑ The SEA is to be approved by the relevant controlling authority.
- ❑ Public participation and involvement of interested and affected parties are essential.
- ❑ Alternative development scenarios should be considered.
- ❑ Maximum long-term environmental benefits for the community should be obtained. This includes the psychological, ecological, social and economic environments.

4.2 Implementing the SEA procedure

The SEA procedure should focus on the higher impact signs, but should also include lower impact signs which can be put out on tender, such as street name advertisements, or street furniture and large posters or specific elements thereof such as rubbish bins or bus shelters. Signs which cannot be put out on tender, such as shop signs, should be taken into consideration as far as the general picture is concerned and the influence it might have on those which can be put out on tender.

The following parties should share the responsibility for implementing the SEA procedure:

Controlling authorities' involvement in undertaking SEAs for outdoor advertisements results from their responsibility for conserving tourism resources and creating pleasant environments to live in. Such studies can be funded through the income derived from outdoor advertising rights put out on tender. More than one controlling authority might be involved in a municipal area such as a local authority and a roads authority.

The **outdoor advertising industry** has a social responsibility for contributing to the sustainable management of tourism resources and for the upliftment of communities. This may include the planting of trees and landscaping contributions. Controlling bodies such as the Outdoor Advertising Association of South Africa (OAASA) or Out of Home Media SA (OHMSA) can play

an important role in implementing the SEA procedure. In such a case tenders for the concession would be open only to the members of the relevant outdoor advertising body. This will force more contractors to become members of the controlling body, which will improve control within the industry and the industry's involvement in the sustainable management of aesthetic resources. It will also compel the various controlling bodies to work together.

Private institutions such as the owners of shopping centres. SEAs and OAPs by private institutions should also be combined with landscape plans for such areas in order to increase the attractiveness of such facilities and to obtain better harmony between advertisements and the environment. Even better results will be obtained when advertisements and landscaping are taken into consideration from the very beginning when building structures are designed.

A **co-ordinated effort** involving controlling authorities, the outdoor advertising industry and private concerns is of the greatest importance in order to ensure that all aspects and areas in a municipal area are covered. The local authority should take the responsibility for co-ordinating all the parties involved.

The involvement of **local communities and civic groups** in drawing up and evaluating SEAs are of critical importance. Local communities should also be represented on bodies awarding outdoor advertising tenders. Ideally a controlling authority should be assisted by an Aesthetic Advisory Committee (AAC) in approving, implementing and managing an OAP. Such an AAC should have the necessary expertise regarding design review in order to advise on advertising contents in cases where this might be an important aesthetic issue. From a practical point of view an AAC should actually fulfil an advisory function with regard to the aesthetic environment as a whole which will also include aspects such as architectural design and landscaping.

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Appendix

Case Studies

Sense of Place

The following fictional case studies serve to indicate what sense of place is all about:

Case Study 1

A small town somewhere in the Karoo has a lot of well-preserved historical buildings in Victorian and Karoo style. There are a lot of shade trees such as oaks and plane trees. A system of irrigation furrows is still functioning. The water is used for growing vegetables on large erven. Many of the historical homes have verandas which faces directly onto the street and which stimulates social interaction. The town was established in the early 1800s and served as an important outspan and stop-over for transport wagons, travellers and explorers. Hand-painted shop signs in the old English pub sign style contribute to the historical character. Apart from the historical buildings, various other things remind one of the past, such as *donkiekar* rides and a transport museum. The town is pedestrian friendly with broad sidewalks and a number of pedestrian streets. There are a number of sidewalk cafes where traditional food is prepared. Today this town is still a very popular stop-over for tourists on their way to the coast.

Tranquillity can be seen as the cornerstone on which sense of place is based in this little town.

The following elements form the building stones of tranquillity:

- Shade trees, green vegetable gardens and the sound of water running in irrigation furrows which form a sharp contrast with the hot Karoo climate.
- Opportunities for social interaction on sidewalks and in pedestrian streets and with locals sitting on their stoeps.
- The slow pace of things in general – getting where you want to be by walking, riding a bicycle or using a donkey cart. Relaxing at a sidewalk café watching life go by.
- The historical buildings, transport museum, traditional food, handcrafted items and the irrigation of vegetable gardens, remind one of a time when life was more simple.

Case Study 2:

A small fishing village/ holiday resort along the Overberg coast still has a number of traditional fishing cottages. The natural vegetation consists of Fynbos with its characteristic smells. The village has a small fishing harbour where fresh fish can be bought on a daily basis. The area has a rugged coastline with strong winds and storms.

The following aspects are of historical importance:

- The village was established at the end of the eighteenth century as a fishing community.
- The local coast has a rich history of shipwrecks. Local inhabitants have often used wreckage from sailing ships as building material. A shipwreck museum provides interesting information.
- During the nineteenth century farmers and their families from the hinterland outspanned their ox-wagons at the village on fishing trips to the seaside.

A large number of homes are built from undressed white sandstone which provides a characteristic and unique building style and which blends with the natural environment. Wooden railway sleepers are used for lintels and other purposes which provide a connection between structure and the historical use of materials from shipwrecks.

In enhancing the character of the village one would emphasise the following:

- Rugged coast and climate together with the history of shipwrecks
- Fishing village culture together with traditional cottages and harbour.
- History of village as a seaside resort for anglers
- Building style using local undressed sandstone.