Practitioner perspectives on the barriers and constraints to the assessment of socio-economic impacts in EIA

By

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have found the assessment of socio-economic impacts in EIA to be of poor quality and literature cites various reasons for this. However, socio-economic impacts can result from many types of development project and they are often interlinked with biophysical impacts making their proper assessment important. The barriers and constraints to their assessment are analysed, through a review of the literature, and a conceptual framework of hypotheses as to the reasons for their poor assessment is developed. The hypotheses are tested against the perspectives of EIA practitioners using questionnaires and interviews. Several issues were identified as inhibiting good practice socio-economic assessment, in particular, a lack of appropriate guidance, lack of capacity amongst the competent authority and a lack of experience amongst practitioners. Employing expert judgement to evaluate significance and the use of qualitative impact prediction methods were seen as appropriate tools for socio-economic assessment whilst training and a consensus regarding the types of impacts to include in an assessment were seen as important to increase its quality. The study concludes with a discussion on the implications of the findings for the future development of EIA practices and recognises opportunities for further research.
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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to EIA

European Community Directive 85/337/EEC (CEC, 1985), as amended by 97/11/EC (CEC, 1997) and 2003/35/EC (CEC, 2003), requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be conducted for certain types of development. The EIA Directive has been implemented through a series of regulations in the UK though the majority of planning applications in England and Wales fall under the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 (Glasson et al., 2005). The EIA involves a number of steps including inter alia screening, scoping, description of the baseline environment, identification of main impacts and the evaluation and assessment of significance. The likely significant effects of the development must be compiled into an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which is taken into account by the competent authority on making its decision to grant or refuse consent.

The purpose of EIA has been described as threefold (Glasson et al., 2005). Firstly, EIA is an aid to decision-making by providing a systematic examination of the environmental implications of a proposed action before that decision is taken. By considering the EIA, along with other documentation relating to the development, the decision-maker can clarify the trade-offs associated with the development and therefore lead to more rational and structured decision-making (Glasson et al., 2005). EIA also aids the formulation of development actions in that it encourages the consideration of environmental impacts early in the planning cycle, which assists in the minimisation of adverse impacts on the environment. Lastly, EIA is an instrument for sustainable development, placing economic and social development in their environmental contexts and mitigating the harmful effects of development in advance at the planning stage (Sadler, 1996; Glasson et al., 2005).

1.2 Socio-economic assessment in EIA

Annex 4 of the EIA Directive lists “population” as one of the aspects of the environment that requires a description to be included in an EIS (CEC, 1997). The Directive also requires the assessment of the population’s interactions with other factors, such as fauna, flora, soil, water,
air, climatic factors, landscape, and material assets including the architectural and archaeological heritage. It is the inclusion of population and their interactions that suggests a human or “socio-economic” dimension to the EIA process (Glasson and Heaney, 1993; Chadwick, 2002) and therefore the need for it to be included in an EIS. These social science components of EISs are called socio-economic impact assessments or Social Impact Assessments (SIAs)\(^1\) (ICGPS, 1995) and are important because the economic fortunes, lifestyles and values of people are important for social well being (Glasson and Heaney, 1993). Glasson et al. (2005) emphasise their importance in decision-making by noting that the key trade-offs in projects often revolve around the balancing of socio-economic benefits against biophysical costs.

1.3 What are socio-economic impacts?

Defining what is meant by socio-economic impacts is not a straightforward task (Chadwick, 2002), and there have been many attempts in the literature at a definition. For example, the UK guidance on EIA procedures (DETR, 2000b) provides a checklist of matters that may be considered for inclusion in an EIS and lists the “assessment of human beings, buildings and man-made features” amongst the features to be assessed for effects. UK government guidance (DETR, 2000a) expands on this definition, suggesting a consideration of a range of impacts including the numbers employed and changes to the population arising from a development.

Other literature has expanded on definitions of what should be included in an EIS to imply the assessment of a greater range of social impacts as well as the housing and population changes that the DETR guidance suggests. For example, a definition is provided by Burdge (2003b, p85) who describes the assessment of socio-economic impacts as:

> “the systematic analysis, in advance, of the likely impacts a proposed action will have on the life of individuals and communities.”

\(^1\) “Socio-economic assessment remains the favoured term in Europe” (Burdge, 2003a, p226)
Becker (2001, p311) provides a similar definition of SIA as:

“the process of identifying the future consequences of a current or proposed action, which are related to individuals, organisations and social macro-systems.”

The number of definitions of socio-economic assessment have given rise to an array of social and economic impacts that have been suggested for assessment. The list of impacts range from changes in employment and population size to other socio-cultural impacts. For example, the ICGPS (1995) advocates the consideration of impacts such as the ‘distribution of power and authority’ to be assessed. This may be due more to the fact that the ICGPS (1995) and ICGPS (2003) act as guidance for SIA in the USA which is required as an additional process to EIA and has more of a focus on social impacts. These impacts would then seem too detailed for an assessment under UK EIA legislation. Glasson (2001) provides a more realistic list of social and economic impacts that should be considered in UK EIA (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Types of socio-economic impacts to be considered in a socio-economic impact assessment (Glasson, 2001)

1. **Direct economic**
   - local and non-local employment
   - characteristics of employment (e.g. skill group)
   - labour supply and training
   - wage levels
2. **Indirect/wider economic/expenditure**
   - employees’ retail expenditure
   - linked suppliers to main development
   - labour market pressures
   - wider multiplier effects
3. **Demographic**
   - changes in population size (temporary and permanent)
   - changes in other population characteristics (e.g. family size, income levels, socio-economic groups)
   - settlement patterns
4. **Housing**
   - various housing tenure types
   - public and private
   - house prices
   - homelessness and other housing problems
5. **Other local services**
   - public and private sector
• educational services
• health services; social support
• others (e.g. police, fire, recreation, transport)
• local finances

6. **Socio-cultural**
• lifestyles/quality of life
• gender issues; family structures
• social problems (e.g. crime, illness, divorce)
• community stress and conflict; integration, cohesion and alienation

It must also be recognised that the type and extent of socio-economic impacts vary from project to project, and at different stages within the development. For example, the development of a power station may require many temporary construction workers, but less longer-term operational workers. These different types of impact will affect the local communities in different ways and, in turn, have differing knock-on impacts on schools and police services for example.

1.4 **Current assessment of socio-economic impacts**

Previous studies (Glasson and Heaney, 1993; Chadwick, 2002) have analysed the scope of assessment of socio-economic impacts in the EIA process in the UK and found their coverage to be inadequate. Glasson and Heaney (1993) appraised 110 EISs produced between 1988 and 1991 and found that fewer than half addressed any social or economic impacts and of those that did the quality was generally poor. It was also found that within those EISs that had included socio-economic impacts, the range of impacts addressed was very small. Other than effects on employment, expenditure and local authority finance, very few social issues were included (Glasson and Heaney, 1993). The EISs were also found to include a very limited use of techniques, with only 17% of the EISs including quantitative techniques and most of these remained unjustified. Overall, they concluded that the quality of assessment of socio-economic impacts was ‘generally poor’ (Glasson and Heaney, 1993, p342).

A similar result is discussed by Sadler (1996, p84) who found in his survey of practitioners, researchers and other specialists from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, that 52% of the EISs were rated as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ in their effectiveness of examination of socio-economic impacts. A more recent study by Chadwick (2002) of 110 EISs produced between 1993 and 1999 found that the range of socio-economic impact types continues to be
small, mostly considering direct employment effects. Chadwick (2002) goes on to conclude that all of the studies are in agreement about the unsatisfactory treatment of socio-economic impacts in EISs. This has led to socio-economic impacts being labelled as the ‘poor relation’ (Glasson and Heaney, 1993, p343) and ‘orphan’ (Burdge, 2002, p3) in UK EISs and have tended to have a secondary status to physical and ecological impact assessment (Lawrence, 2004).

### 1.5 The need for better assessment

Section 1.2 above describes the requirement for socio-economic assessment to be considered in EIA under the EIA Directive. Despite the legal requirement, the assessment of socio-economic impacts has been shown to have other benefits such as improving the democratic process, ensuring that impacts do not exceed the benefits of the project and improving equity and fairness in development (Vanclay, 1999; Burdge, 2003a). As already mentioned, key trade-offs in the decision making process often revolve around socio-economic impacts, and to include the effects on economies and social make-up in a clear publicly available document aids transparency in decision-making.

There are more practical considerations when discussing the advantages of incorporating socio-economic assessment in an integrated EIA, namely that socio-economic and biophysical impacts are invariably linked (Chadwick, 2002) and that their relevance extends to the assessment of impacts of most major projects (Glasson and Heaney, 1993). The inclusion of socio-economic impacts therefore creates an integrated approach to impact assessment and a step towards sustainable development in decision-making.

A widely used definition sustainable development arose out of the Brundtland commission in 1987, describing it as the ability:

“To meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

In 1992 the Rio summit took place in which governments around the world committed to sustainable development through Agenda 21. As such the UK government responded by producing the publication ‘A Better Quality of Life’ in 1999 (DEFRA, 2005) in which it
outlined how it proposed to deliver sustainable development through simultaneously delivering economic, environmental and social outcomes. This integrative perspective is recognised as fundamental in examining the interdependencies that are involved in the predicament of development (Sadler, 1996). Scrase and Sheate (2002) describe a number of definitions for the term ‘integrated assessment’, one of which upholds the view that the three pillars of sustainable development be considered together. Sadler (1996) describes these as ecological integrity, economic output and social equity. George (1999) argues that a fuller integration of environmental, social, and economic assessment is necessary to demonstrate clearly that a project can be classed as sustainable development. What’s more, to ensure intragenerational equity (a precursor for sustainable development) it is necessary to identify all impacts, social impacts included (George, 1999). For the EIA process to adhere to the principles of sustainable development that the UK government has committed to, it is important that it concurs with this integrated approach to assessment.

1.6 Aims and objectives

Practitioners that undertake EIAs are among the main participants of the assessment process, along with decision-makers, proponents and statutory consultees (Wood and Jones, 1997). However, all too often practitioners see a process where the results of their work are not properly taken into account in the final decisions, and where they do not always have the time and resources to do an adequate job (Sadler, 1996). It is the purpose of this research to examine the reason behind the poor treatment of socio-economic impacts in UK EIA as noted by previous research (Glasson and Heaney, 1993; Chadwick, 2002) from the perspective of these practitioners and gain their opinions on the barriers and constraints that exist.

This research has the following specific aims:

- Evaluate potential constraints and barriers to the assessment of socio-economic impacts.

- Compare and contrast the possible explanations with the opinions of a particular stakeholder group, EIA practitioners.
• Analyse the implications of the findings for the future development of EIA practices.

1.7 Dissertation structure

This study aims to assess the practitioners’ perspectives on socio-economic assessment and gain an understanding as to the difficulties they face in producing quality assessments. The investigation begins with chapter two, which develops a conceptual framework that analyses the barriers and constraints faced in conducting socio-economic assessments through a review of literature. The conceptual framework summarises the barriers and constraints into what have been labelled the ‘hypotheses’ that explain the poor assessment of socio-economic impacts.

The study then continues by testing these hypotheses against the perceptions of a sample of practitioners whom have varying degrees of experience in conducting socio-economic assessment in EIA via the use of a questionnaire. Telephone interviews were then conducted based on the answers given to the previous questionnaire, allowing more detailed answers and personal experiences to be obtained. Chapter three describes the specific objectives and discusses the justification for each of these methodologies. The results are presented and analysed in chapter four and are discussed in the context of other published research results.

The research conclusions are presented in chapter five, which summarises the main findings of the research and discusses the implications for the future development of EIA.
CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

2.1 Introduction to conceptual framework

Previous studies (Glasson and Heaney, 1993; Chadwick, 2002; Burdge, 2003b) have established various shortcomings in the assessment of socio-economic impacts in EIA, and these have been described in chapter one. Various academics and the wider EIA community have speculated upon reasons for these shortcomings. These reasons given for the poor assessment have been analysed and formulated into six themes, which have been labelled the ‘hypotheses’ of the constraints and barriers that affect the assessment of socio-economic impacts. These six hypotheses are described below.

Although grouped into six categories for the purpose of research design and formulation, these categories should not be thought of as distinct entities to be addressed entirely separately. Instead, these categories are highly interrelated, each shortcoming having a knock-on effect with another, which in turn compromises the quality of another part of the assessment. For example, a lack of financial resources for the practitioner will have an impact on the quality and range of quantitative data that can be obtained, which effects the degree of quantification of impact prediction, which in turn has an effect on the evaluation of significance. The problem with the assessment of socio-economic impacts may not lie at the assessment process itself, but may instead be a combination of a range of factors which this research aims to address and which are important if the root causes of the problem are to be found.

2.2 Hypothesis One – There exists limited capacity amongst EIA stakeholders.

SIA practitioners must contend with stringent time and resource constraints (including financial resources) that affect the scope of the assessment and how much can be done in the time available (ICGPS, 1995). Although time and resource constraints affect all EIS disciplines, this statement may be especially true for the socio-economic component of an EIA as it has been recognised that to carry out assessment of socio-economic impacts can take a long time and requires expertise (Becker, 2001). To be able to achieve the required level of expertise and produce good socio-economic assessments, the SIA practitioner needs to be
properly trained and qualified (ICGPS, 2003). Despite this, previous research (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996; Vanclay, 1999; Chadwick, 2002) has found that SIA is largely being undertaken by consultants who have very little experience in social science methodology and are not suitably qualified. This limits the effectiveness of the socio-economic assessment as experienced practitioners will often suggest the study of issues that go unrecognised by either the public or other agencies (ICGPS, 1995).

Glasson et al. (2005) note that the consultants’ time, expertise and equipment can be limited by low financial resources being made available by the developer as they seek the lowest price for their EIA. The available capacity of the practitioner can therefore be in part a direct result of the financial resources made available. Bond (1995) notes that there is a perception that to carry out a socio-economic impact assessment at the required level of detail would add to the overall cost of EIA. Indeed, this perception has been used in the argument against the inclusion of socio-economic issues in the EIS (Chadwick, 2002), that including detailed socio-economic issues would add extensively to the time and costs involved in EIA. However, all scientific studies in EIA disciplines that rely on costly baseline data collection programs suffer from time and money constraints (Morrison-Saunders and Bailey, 2003) and the cost of these studies has been noted as being a major problem due to insufficient funding. Despite this, developers often welcome the opportunity to include beneficial impacts socio-economic into the EIS, such as employment and other economic benefits (Chadwick, 2002).

Capacity, in terms of expertise and resources, is also required in the competent authority and consultees (statutory and non-statutory) if they are to provide useful scoping opinions and guidance. However, the availability of resources has been noted as a difficulty amongst the competent authority (DCLG, 2006). DCLG (2006) also describes how the competent authority has difficulty in obtaining responses from statutory consultees within the five-week time scale, a reflection of the lack of capacity in terms of personnel within statutory consultees.

Capacity therefore exists in different forms, financial capacity, time pressures and personnel such as trained staff and staff with experience. However, it is unclear how restricting these capacity factors are to good quality assessment. It is therefore important to establish the perspectives of the practitioner in order to provide the resources necessary for good socio-economic assessment.
2.3 **Hypothesis Two** – *There is little agreement on what impacts should be addressed in a socio-economic impact assessment.*

The EU text does not specifically describe what socio-economic impacts are to be assessed in EIA. This has led to a number of different definitions being used, influenced by literature and previous studies. The lack of an exact definition has been described previously and presents a real problem when judging what should be part of the assessment process and what should not, and broadly whether they should be part of the EIA process at all. Chadwick (2002), for example, found that the range of socio-economic impact types considered in a sample of EISs was very narrow, mainly focusing around the effects on employment, population, local service provision and local expenditure. This practice certainly contradicts with some guidance, for example ICGPS (2003) and Vanclay (2003) who suggest that the term should be defined more broadly to include a wider range of social and human dimensions.

As a result of this uncertainty, debate has arisen on how detailed any guidance should be and whether having a generic list of impacts is necessary and appropriate. For example, Vanclay (2002) argues that a generic list of impacts would be useful especially in the scoping of impacts, but also notes that that a generic list might only go to serve those who favour the more technocratic side of EIA, and not those who prefer the freedom of judgement. Despite this observation, it may be that the number of potential variables that could be affected would be too many and exceed the capacity of most checklists to be exhaustive (Vanclay, 1999). However, Vanclay (2002) found a high level of inconsistency between existing lists of impacts, and those lists that were analysed were found to be incomprehensive. In summary, even though some list of impacts do exist, it is uncertain how useful and appropriate they are and if any detailed lists should be part of future socio-economic assessment guidance.

2.4 **Hypothesis Three** – *There is little quantification of impacts.*

Glasson and Heaney (1993) found a very limited number of quantitative techniques were used with impact prediction mainly based on qualitative procedures and expert judgement. However, qualitative evaluation procedures have been highly criticised and have been described as inconsistent and unsystematic in their treatment of alternatives and values, inefficient with lengthy descriptions and to consist of discussions that fail to focus on key
issues (Lawrence, 1993). Although some of these criticisms have been applied to other EIA disciplines, it is especially pertinent to the assessment of socio-economic impacts which have been described as a kind of ‘art-science’ (Becker, 2001). This is because the assessment of socio-economic impacts sometimes deals with subjective meanings such as stress, and translating these into economic values is perceived to be difficult (Bond, 1995). These qualitative methods, such as narrative descriptions, checklists and matrices have been described to fall short of what is required for accurate prediction and assessment (Lawrence, 1993).

However, quantified data and quantitative impact predictions are not without their criticisms (Rossouw, 2003). The pursuit of quantitative science at the expense of other techniques has led to what has been described as the technocratic side of EIA (Lockie, 2001). Lockie (2001) describes this problem in privileging the quantifiable impacts in that it highlights the apparently positive impacts, such as economic and employment growth while ignoring the more subjective negative impacts. Quantifiable techniques are also ill equipped to deal with social phenomena that may turn out to be inherently indeterminate or unpredictable (Lockie, 2001). Therefore, it is important to gain the perspectives of the practitioner on the availability and suitability of quantitative techniques and the availability of data.

2.5 **Hypothesis Four – Difficulties exist with the evaluation of significance**

Research has found variances in the quality of the assessment at different stages of the process with the evaluation of significance being particularly poor (Sippe, 1999; Lawrence, 2004). However, evaluating the significance of environmental impacts is perhaps the most critical component of impact analysis (Sadler, 1996), and it is of paramount importance to the EIA process that an attempt is made to ascribe significance to any given impact (Thompson, 1990). Impacts to the water and air environment for example, are governed by strict standards and are based on emission levels or on the quality of the receiving environment (Sippe, 1999), with their significance judged on the level of emissions in comparison to some threshold limit. The evaluation of socio-economic impacts have no such recognised standards (Glasson, 2001) and where these don’t exist then the EIA practitioner can evaluate against a set of criteria (Rossouw, 2003). Because of this, interpreting the significance or importance of socio-economic impacts can be especially problematic, stemming from insufficient attention being devoted to their significance in EIA requirements, guidelines and literature.
(Lawrence, 2004). This may in part be due to the myth that exists amongst the EIA community that socio-economic impacts are common sense (Burdge, 2003a). In addition, socio-economic impact significance determination continues to be hampered by difficulties associated with predicting, interpreting and managing socio-economic impacts (Lawrence, 2004). The result is that the determination of significance has been described as a difficult assessment task often avoided (ICGPS, 1995).

Glasson and Heaney (1993) found that in the EISs that he studied, only 9% that considered socio-economic impacts set out rigorous methods for evaluating the figures that were stated in the EIS. Previous studies and literature (ICGPS, 1995; Rossouw, 2003) suggest good practice as clearly stating how the evaluation of significance was calculated, where value judgements were used and stating whose value judgements they represent.

Capacity amongst practitioners may also be a factor as it is recognised that the evaluation of socio-economic impacts is a resource-intensive process (ICGPS, 1995), again highlighting the interaction of the different barriers and the need to assess the perspectives on a wide range of issues.

2.6 Hypothesis 5 – There is a lack of appropriate guidance

A lack of UK specific guidelines has been cited as a factor in the poor treatment of socio-economic impacts (Burdge, 2002; Chadwick, 2002). Although various guidelines and principles exist (ICGPS, 2003; Vanclay, 2003), there is no specific guidance for UK practitioners to aid them through what can be a complex process, and there appears to be little evidence of their use amongst the UK EIA community (Chadwick, 2002).

Guidance varies, from general legal requirement guidance to specific EIA methodology guidance. However, as previously described, there is a lack of legal criteria or thresholds and a lack of a conformed methodology. For example, Bond (1995) specifically describes how there are no established formats for questionnaires, which could pose a problem for baseline data collection. This is in contrast to other EIA disciplines which have extensive guidelines, data sources and thresholds to guide their work, for example the Landscape Institute Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (The Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2002) that guides the visual assessment for a variety of project types.
This lack of appropriate guidance may then hinder assessment given that practitioners require guidelines to improve their practice (Vanclay, 2003), and that guidance can have an impact on all stages of the assessment process including baseline studies, scoping, impact prediction and evaluation, and mitigation and monitoring. However, it is also recognised that guidance can come from a variety of sources, for example scoping opinions from the competent authority, and guiding documents from the practitioner’s themselves in the form of case studies. Unfortunately, it has also been noted that there are a lack of good case studies and has been described as symptomatic of one of the problems in the field (Burdge, 2002).

In summary, the lack of good guidance appears to have contributed to a partial approach of socio-economic impacts in EIA (Chadwick, 2002), but is an important factor in consistently good quality assessment. Guidance can cover all stages of the assessment process and could be important in overcoming some of the identified barriers and constraints, such as capacity (in reducing the time it takes and the experience needed to conduct an assessment), providing a list of socio-economic impacts to be assessed and guiding the evaluation of significance.

2.7 Hypothesis 6 – There is a lack of expectation for socio-economic impacts to be assessed in EIA

EIA disciplines such as noise and air quality assessment have a clear legal framework and standards that must be met and with which the significance of the impact can be judged. However, as discussed previously, the EIA Directive does not explicitly define or list any socio-economic impacts and UK guidance on the preparation of EISs has paid little attention to the issue of socio-economic impacts (Chadwick, 2002). This has led to the accusation that there is a lack of expectation from the regulators for socio-economic impacts to be assessed (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996) and a myth that they seldom occur (Burdge, 2003a). Burdge and Vanclay (1996, pp69) also identify an attitude that ‘humans don’t count’ amongst those regulatory agencies and corporations, resulting in their absence in the decision-making process. Previous studies (Sadler, 1996) have highlighted this absence from decision-making, showing that socio-economic impacts do not have as much influence on the decision-making process as other factors. The perception therefore, is that socio-economic impacts do not contribute to decision-making (Burdge, 2003a). The result is that, while the majority (80%) of EISs have been found to have included some consideration of social or economic impacts
(Chadwick, 2002), the range of impacts tends to be small, including only those beneficial economic and employment impacts.

In order to improve the expectation for socio-economic impacts to be assessed, Chadwick (2002) suggests that they should be explicitly included by developers, consultants and competent authorities as one of the impact categories to be considered at the scoping stage. This research will therefore assess the expectation for socio-economic assessment to be conducted from the competent authority by gaining the perspective of practitioners on the usefulness of the scoping opinion in the identification of such impacts. Perspectives of expectation will also be sought on the developers, gaining opinion on the importance they place on socio-economic impacts and the finances that are made available. Finally practitioners’ perspectives of expectation will also be sought from the practitioners themselves. It is important to gain these differing perspectives as it is recognised that each stakeholder group will have different, and often conflicting expectations and perspectives (Sadler, 1996), and each may therefore affect the resultant quality of socio-economic assessment.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed and summarised the various barriers and constraints to socio-economic assessment that have been cited in the literature. The reasons have been grouped and marked as hypotheses, which will aid in the design of a research methodology and be used to investigate the perspectives of the practitioner stakeholder group. Chapter three describes this research methodology and the testing of these hypotheses.
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to methodology and research design

The principal aim of this research is to establish the perspectives of EIA practitioners on the assessment of socio-economic impacts, and specifically to identify their thoughts on why assessment to date has been described as of poor quality (Glasson and Heaney, 1993; Chadwick, 2002). To achieve this aim, a survey of UK EIA practitioners was undertaken, composing of a self-completion questionnaire (see Appendix I) combined with follow-up telephone interviews. This chapter describes and justifies the methodologies, detailing the objectives and limitations in the use of each method.

3.2 Hypothesis formulation

The analysis in chapter two established six hypotheses that were formed from findings in literature and previous research as to why the assessment of socio-economic assessment has not been of a high standard. The grouping of contributory factors into six hypotheses allowed the development of the questionnaire to be more focused and to be able to specifically test each one. This also allowed the questionnaire to be comprehensive in its coverage of the issues as the questions were specifically designed to address various aspects of each hypothesis, assuring that each one was covered adequately. The development of a conceptual framework also allowed the view of the practitioners to be tested against the views put forward in the literature and thereby probing their perspectives on barriers that they might not have otherwise considered.

3.3 Questionnaire design

A questionnaire has a number of advantages over a method that involves an interviewer (Bryman, 2004). Amongst these are resource issues as a self-completion questionnaire is cheaper and quicker to administer than other research methods. A foremost advantage is that it is convenient for respondents because they can complete the questionnaire when they want and at the speed that they want to go (Bryman, 2004). This was deemed important as some of the questions required detailed answers and thoughtful opinions to be expressed. However, Bryman (2004) also describes one of the disadvantages of self-completion questionnaires, as
the interviewee cannot be probed to elaborate on some answers. The use of telephone
interviews at a later stage helped remedy this problem.

The questionnaires were sent out as attachments to e-mails. The e-mail was embedded with a
brief covering letter (see Appendix II) that described the importance of the research and
thanked the respondents in advance for their input. Although previous research has shown
there to be a higher response rate using questionnaires embedded in the text of the e-mail
(Dommeyer and Moriarty, 1999; Ranchhod and Zhou, 2001), the attached questionnaire was
felt to have a number of advantages. The first is that it allowed a greater use of formatting of
the text, the use of various styles and clear spaces all designed to improve the clarity of the
survey. The university e-mail server does not allow advanced formatting and the layout of the
questionnaire was in danger of becoming corrupted if sent out as an embedded e-mail. The
attached questionnaire could also be sent out as a Microsoft Word document as this is a well-
known piece of software that would be well recognised and familiar to use.

Throughout the design, attention was paid to the factors that have been attributed to the low
response rate of e-mail based surveys. These are that they lack anonymity, there is a lack of a
formal image, there is a reduced incentive and there is a lack of cosmetic features (Ranchhod
and Zhou, 2001). Respondents were informed of the importance of the research and the
anonymity of their answers through the covering e-mail. The respondents were also given the
option of posting their completed questionnaires, thereby ensuring anonymity. Cosmetic
features were improved using an attached e-mail that used formatting capabilities and these
are discussed below.

There are some criticisms of attached e-mail questionnaires over embedded ones that were
considered not to apply for various reasons (Bryman, 2004). The first is that attached
questionnaires are considered to need greater computer expertise, as they require
downloading, saving and then re-sending, whereas an embedded questionnaire only needs
replying to, and therefore only basic computer skills are required. However, this survey was
aimed at practitioners who were considered to have above average computer expertise, as they
were likely to be using word processors, such as Microsoft Word, to produce reports. Indeed,
an amount of computer expertise is needed for all variances on the e-mail based survey
(Ranchhod and Zhou, 2001). However, of the 20 responses only one was returned by post, all
others were returned as attachments to e-mails indicating a high level of computer
competency. The second criticism is that attached e-mails are sometimes filtered out as ‘spam’ but it is recognized that this is becoming less of a problem given anti-virus software available (Bryman, 2004). Another option was to distribute the questionnaire as a web based survey. Although this option was investigated it was deemed unnecessary given the relatively small sample size, and the need for freedom of expression that the attached e-mail survey gave, plus there is a cost involved if the web site was externally hosted.

Despite e-mail based surveys needing a degree of computer competency (Ranchhod and Zhou, 2001), they did provide benefits that would not have occurred with postal questionnaires. The use of an e-mail based survey allowed the respondent to reply with additional information and be able to forward the message and questionnaire onto the most suitable respondent quickly and easily. Postal questionnaires require more resources in the form of time and money, and they also require the use of paper and printing equipment, a worthy consideration given the sustainability issues of the topic.

Respondents were given the option of returning the questionnaire either as an e-mail attachment, by fax or by post. As previously noted, all but one of the respondents replied via attached e-mail.

3.4 Questionnaire structure

The questionnaire comprised of mostly closed questions, as the hypothesis behind each question design is strong allowing a confident selection of answers to be derived. One open question was asked that allowed the respondent the freedom to express their wider opinions on the quality and difficulties associated with socio-economic assessment, thereby overcoming one of the disadvantages of this type of survey, in that detailed answers cannot be given (Bryman, 2004). The use of closed questions has a number of advantages over open questions in that the answers are directly comparable with each other, are easy for respondents to complete and reduce the variability in the recording of answers (Bryman, 2004). Using closed questions also reduces the time it takes to answer the questionnaire and makes the results simpler to analyse on which to draw conclusions. The questionnaire was designed to conform to Bryman's (2004) criteria for evaluating quantitative research; replicability, reliability and validity and the use of closed questions assisted towards these aims by providing the researcher with a consistent benchmark.
Section one of the questionnaire asked direct questions on the practitioners experience and training in which to be able to compare other answers. Section 2 items were asked as statements and not direct questions in order to investigate opinions and perspectives. Indirect indicators were used based on a Likert scale to investigate clusters of attitudes. The scale used was a five-point scale ranging from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree with mid-scale indicating Neither agree nor disagree. A five point scale was deemed sufficient as it allowed results to be analysed without creating a spurious sense of precision and accuracy (Bryman, 2004).

Statements were asked to address the conceptual framework developed in chapter two and to ensure each hypothesis was addressed adequately, more than one statement was asked per hypothesis. Five statements were asked that addressed more than one hypothesis and so was able to shorten the length of the questionnaire. Table 3.1 lists the question numbers of the questionnaire that relate to each of the hypotheses addressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Question numbers (see Appendix I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There exists limited capacity amongst EIA stakeholders</td>
<td>Section 1 – 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 2 – 5, 6, 15, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is little agreement on what impacts should be addressed in a socio-economic impact assessment</td>
<td>Section 2 – 11, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is little quantification of impacts</td>
<td>Section 2 – 1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties exist with the evaluation of significance</td>
<td>Section 2 – 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lack of appropriate guidance</td>
<td>Section 2 – 3, 8, 10, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lack of expectation for socio-economic impacts to be assessed in EIA</td>
<td>Section 2 – 7, 8, 9, 10, 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Question number relating to each hypothesis.

Piloting a questionnaire is good practice (Bryman, 2004). Three colleagues were asked to complete the questionnaire and record the length of time it took to complete. They were also asked to assess the questionnaire for clarity, specifically assessing whether the questions could be easily understood, whether the instructions were clear, and general presentational aspects. Only minor grammatical and presentational modifications were applied to the survey as a result of the piloting.
At the start of each section, a paragraph was written that briefly explained the aim of the questionnaire and included instructions on its completion.

### 3.5 Questionnaire sample

The sample consisted of UK EIA consultancies and was obtained from the ENDS Directory (Environmental Data Services, 2007). The ENDS Directory is a comprehensive listing of UK environmental consultancies that allows consultancies to be searched for and selected by the work area that they cover. The work area selected was ‘EIA’, as this study was specifically focused on socio-economic assessment as part of EIA and socio-economic or SIA was not listed as its own specific work area to be selected.

285 companies were listed as conducting EIA work. Each individual company was then assessed for its appropriateness for the questionnaire by searching the company’s website and establishing if they conducted socio-economic assessments. Due to the nature of socio-economic assessment (i.e. the large variance in assessment depth and breadth (Chadwick, 2002)), the websites did not always exactly specify whether socio-economic assessments were carried out or not. In the cases where they did not specify, a questionnaire or contact e-mail was sent depending on a subjective judgement of its suitability based on the size and work case of the practitioner company. A total of 149 questionnaires were sent out of which 20 (13%) completed questionnaires were returned. Although a low response rate, not all consultancies contacted would have carried out socio-economic assessment as previously discussed. The use of an e-mail based survey may also be a factor in the low response rate, in comparison to paper based questionnaires, as previous research has found (Ranchhod and Zhou, 2001). 20 respondents was considered a sufficient sample size given the low prevalence of socio-economic assessment amongst EIA practitioners. Although no analysis of statistical significance could be derived from the sample, the questionnaire design allowed generalised conclusions to be drawn and the hypotheses to be addressed.

### 3.6 Results analysis

The responses for each question were coded on a range from one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree) so that they could be more easily managed and any correlation between the answers to be identified. Frequency tables were produced for each statement that allowed
easy interpretation of how many, and of what percentage of respondents agreed or disagreed with a particular statement. No statistical analysis was performed, as the sample size was deemed too small to provide any statistically significant results.

3.7 Telephone interviews

Seven interviews with EIA practitioners were conducted. The sample was taken from questionnaire respondents who had indicated their willingness to be interviewed. All those who expressed a willingness to be interviewed were contacted beforehand via e-mail to arrange a date and time that was suitable to them.

The advantage with conducting telephone interviews and the reason that it was chosen over other forms of interview, for example face-to-face interviewing or focus groups, is that it is cheaper and quicker to administer (Bryman, 2004). This is especially pertinent to this piece of research as the interviewees were widely dispersed about the country and there was not the time or financial resources to conduct face-to-face interviews. Telephone interviews were deemed appropriate as other research (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004) note that they can be successful in qualitative research and have the added benefit of reaching respondents who would be adverse to partaking in face-to-face interviews. Although telephone interviews were considered appropriate for this research and allowed sufficient gathering of information, Bryman (2004) highlights two problems with telephone interviewing that this research might potentially have suffered from. The first is that the interviewer cannot respond to expressions given by the interviewee, for example signs of puzzlement, and so cannot engage in observation. Given that the research questions were perspective based, that may have been useful and allowed the interviewer the chance to re-state questions and probe the interviewee further. The second disadvantage is that phone interviews are not sustainable beyond 20-25 minutes, whereas face-to-face interviews are sustainable for longer periods. The interviews were therefore designed to last no more than 15 minutes as that was considered sufficient time to gather information, as perspectives had already been gathered in the form of questionnaires, and to allow for additional conversation drift. Only one interview lasted more than 25 minutes.
3.8 Interview structure

The telephone interviews were conducted after an initial analysis of the questionnaire results allowing an interview schedule to be drawn up beforehand for each of the interviewees. These interview schedules detailed their replies to the questionnaire compared to other responses, and any additional comments that were written as a reply to the open-ended question (Question 17). This allowed the interview to be structured around broad topics and gave the interviewees freedom to express their views unhindered. This semi-structured interview allows the drift of the conversation to dictate both the order and content of the specific questions (Goodwin, 2006) and was considered appropriate for this research given that it aimed to probe the differing perspectives of the practitioners and their in-depth views, and that the practitioners had already been questioned.

The interview commenced with a short introduction and was guided by the interview structure whilst allowing free flowing discussion to ensue. Although the interviews were not recorded, extensive notes were taken during the interview and were written up immediately afterwards to ensure maximum accuracy. The comments were then segregated and a simple coding system employed matching the comment to the hypothesis that they were related to. Although there has been some debate on the use and practicality of coding conversational based research (Bryman, 2004), the fact that this research was based around a specific conceptual framework meant that coding was possible.

3.9 Conclusion

The various methodologies described have been designed to address the objectives of this study with the aim of contributing to the knowledge of the root causes of socio-economic assessments ‘poor relation’ label (Glasson and Heaney, 1993, p343). They were developed to construct quantitative and qualitative data from perspectives and opinions in which to be able to draw conclusions and address the various hypotheses as to the poor treatment of socio-economic impacts.

Chapter four addresses the results of the questionnaire and the telephone interviews and discusses them in the context of the perceived barriers to good socio-economic assessment.
CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have discussed the shortcomings, barriers and constraints to socio-economic assessment in EIA. The following chapter presents the results of the survey in conjunction with a discussion on the implications for the quality of socio-economic assessment. The chapter addresses the perspectives of practitioners in appropriate sections, recognising the interrelations between the barriers and constraints.

4.2 EIA stakeholder capacity

Nine respondents (45%) had been involved with ten or less EIAs in the capacity of socio-economic assessment, while only three (15%) had experience with more than 30 EIAs. This finding corresponds with an observation made by Chadwick (2002) who found a similar lack of experience amongst practitioners and little use of specialised consultants in the EISs that were sampled. This lack of experience is concerning, given that the majority of respondents (12 or 60%) agreed with the statement that poor practices are a consequence of limited experience. Only four (20%) respondents disagreed with this statement (four (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed). Interestingly, those respondents who had experience with ten or more EIAs all agreed that poor practices were a result of limited experience, indicating that those with the most experience placed the highest value on it.

Despite this lack of practical experience with EIA, the majority of respondents had received training in the assessment of socio-economic impacts, although the range of training varied from in-house training courses and mentoring from colleagues, to attending workshops and attaining university qualifications. The importance of training to the respondents was reflected in their opinion on the statement: formal training is important in raising the standards of socio-economic impact assessment, with 14 (70%) agreeing.

The importance of training was substantiated by one respondent who observed that the socio-economic component of EIAs was usually undertaken by practitioners trained in the environmental sciences and not the social sciences. It was argued that specialist expertise is
needed in social impact assessment to make the judgements that are sometimes required in the evaluation of significance from qualitative data and in the absence of clear threshold criteria. Environmental scientists, it was stated by one respondent, ‘often do not have the necessary expertise and understanding of the nuances of the social issues to make accurate judgments’. Another respondent thought that whereas other EIA disciplines have their assessment undertaken by specialists, socio-economic assessments are not, simply because of a lack of specialists. However, ICGPS (1995) recognises that resource limitations will not always allow for the assessment to be done by trained social scientists, but that it may be appropriate to do one without a trained social scientist if there is a significant body of empirical findings available from social science literature. Unfortunately, previous SIA investigations and findings are seldom reported (Morrison-Saunders et al., 2001) and as such access to the ‘grey literature’ on completed SIAs is a problem (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996).

Although experience has been found to be very important in EIA and to the estimation of future impacts (ICGPS (Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment), 1995), it is not only to be found amongst experienced experts or academic literature. Additionally, experience can be contained in case reports (ICGPS (Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment), 1995) to be referred upon and thus have the ability to build upon experiences already logged. As the ICGPS (1995, p17) describes, ‘if we wish to know the probable effects of a proposed project in location B, one of the best places to start is to assess the effects of a similar project that has already been completed in location A’. However, a lack of good case studies was highlighted by several respondents as a problem, indicating specifically that comments could not be received on their own work resulting in little follow-up, and that the case studies available were usually regarding positive benefits and not negative impacts. This lack of case studies gives little opportunity to track cumulative findings (Burdge, 2002). Burdge (2002) recommends extensive evaluation and follow-up research to verify whether SIA variables are actually predicting and performing the way we said they would, and be able to build and expand upon the existing knowledge base.

A lack of expertise amongst the competent authority was also highlighted by respondents as restricting good practice. Expertise in the competent authority can assist in the provision of scoping opinions and can help ensure that the assessment of socio-economic impacts are properly considered in the decision-making process. However, one respondent stated that
they are yet to find a socio-economic expert available in a Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Another criticism related to the LPAs lack of experience and expertise was that they do not know what socio-economic impacts to ask to be addressed in an assessment, and when they receive an assessment, they are unsure what to do with it. It would seem that any increase in practitioner expertise must also be matched by an increase in the experience of the competent authority if socio-economic impacts are to be properly taken into account in the decision-making process. Alternatively, incentives to include the assessment of socio-economic impacts could come from more specific legislation, for example being listed as a specific impact type to be assessed (Chadwick, 2002) and, as is discussed below, an increase in consciousness of the sustainable development agenda.

There was a general consensus amongst some respondents, with four specifically commenting either in the questionnaire or subsequent telephone interview, that the assessment of socio-economic impacts is a growing discipline spurred on by the widespread increase in the knowledge of sustainable development and the need to include human factors in decision-making. It was also noted by two respondents that the widespread assessment of socio-economic impacts is relatively new as part of an EIA, and as such there has been little learning from experience in the way that Barrow (1997) describes there to be in EISs. If this increase in quality due to an increase in experience has been achieved for other EIA disciplines, then we might expect there to be learning from experience for the assessment of socio-economic impacts especially given the importance placed on it by practitioners of this survey and other research (ICGPS, 1995).

SIA practitioners must contend with stringent time and resource constraints that affect the scope of the assessment and how much can be done in the time available (ICGPS (Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment), 1995). High on the list of these resource constraints are the availability of financial resources (Morrison-Saunders and Bailey, 2003), which in turn effects the time allocated and the availability of data. Ten respondents (50%) indicated that they agreed that a lack of financial resources are a constraint to producing high quality socio-economic impact assessments, of these, two (10%) respondents strongly agreed. Despite there being more respondents that agreed with this statement than disagreed with it (five (25%) disagreeing, and five (25%) responding neither agree nor disagree), this does not indicate that financial constraints are a significant hurdle specifically for socio-economic assessment. Although some respondents
alluded to the lack of funding and one even described sufficient funding as the most important barrier to quality assessment. That respondent noted that the lack of financial resources are prevalent in all the EIA disciplines and not just socio-economic assessment. For example, in the study by Sadler (1996), 61% of participants identified budget restrictions as being very limiting on best practice EIA, a very similar result obtained by this research. It may then seem too hasty to attribute the discrepancy in quality between socio-economic assessment and other EIA disciplines to a lack of financial resources even though it has been found to be a constraint on quality.

The lack of financial resources has a direct effect on the time and other resources that can be devoted to the assessment of socio-economic impacts, and in turn, the lack of financial resources could stem from the lack of expectation placed on the assessment of socio-economic impacts to be conducted. As one respondent noted, the resources allocated directly affects the quality of the assessment. However, Chadwick (2002) describes that although socio-economic assessment may add to costs, the information gathered may well be needed for other planning and consent documentation. The lack of financial resources provided by developers to practitioners for socio-economic assessment may therefore prove to be a false economy, and may be an indication of the lack of importance placed on their assessment compared with other EIA disciplines. The next section explores the perspective of the importance placed on socio-economic impacts. As one respondent explained, ‘consultants must invest time in explaining the SIA process to the client’, thereby increasing the expectation placed on the assessments and the subsequent resources.

4.3 Expectation

Socio-economic impacts are not explicitly mentioned in the EIA Directive or the implementing UK regulations and as such have had an uncertain status in EIA (Chadwick, 2002). However, the key trade-offs in the decision on whether to grant planning consent revolve around the balancing of socio-economic benefits against biophysical costs (Glasson and Heaney, 1993). Given these concerns, this research sought to address the practitioner perspectives on the importance of socio-economic assessment and its influence on planning decisions. One aim is to establish whether or not there is a perceived lack of expectation, and if so, if that has a bearing on the resources being available for socio-economic assessment.
Given that the EIA process appears to be better geared to ensuring that bio-physical environmental considerations are taken into account than social (Glasson, 1999), it is not unexpected to find a split of opinion when asked if they thought that developers/clients considered socio-economic impacts as important as biophysical impacts (50% agreeing and 35% disagreeing). However, the vast majority (19 or 95%) of the respondents thought that the assessment of socio-economic components is important when assessing the potential impacts of a project. Although a high percentage of respondents agreeing with this last statement is to be expected, it does provide evidence of a discrepancy of perception on the importance placed on socio-economic impacts between the client and practitioner. Given this discrepancy, it may be reasonable to assume that the developers are not allocating sufficient resources to the practitioners to undertake socio-economic assessment to the standard that the practitioners might wish for. However, as previously discussed, the perception on financial constraints inhibiting quality socio-economic assessment was inconclusive, and the results are unclear on any possible relationship between the practitioners perspectives on the importance placed on assessment by the client, and the perspective of the availability of financial resources. Further research and a larger sample size may uncover a causal relationship.

16 respondents (80%) thought that socio-economic components of an EIA are important considerations in the decision to grant development consent. This is a very high result considering that previous studies have shown the EIS to be of less value in the decision-making process. For example, when Wood and Jones (1997) surveyed planning officers they found that only 63% had found the EIS to be either ‘very’ or ‘reasonably useful’ in making their recommendations. Wood and Jones, (1997, p1249) also found that it was the consultants who believed most strongly in the importance of the EIS in planning decisions, with 44% indicating that they felt the EIS to have been ‘very’ or ‘reasonably important’. However, the Wood and Jones (1997) study found other stakeholders placed less importance on the EIS in determining planning decisions, for example officers from nature conservation agencies and major public interest groups. In summary, although the EIS was deemed important in making recommendations by planning officers, the importance of the EIS on actual decision-making was less certain. In addition research by (Sadler, 1996) found that the EIA process was judged to be successful in ensuring that a full range of environmental considerations is taken into account in decision-making by 67% of respondents, but less (55%) when judged to be successful in ensuring social factors are taken into account. In conclusion, these results may indicate that the importance placed on the socio-economic
components of an EIA by the respondents to this study may not be an accurate reflection of its actual impact on planning decisions.

Despite the previous findings of the socio-economic component’s impact on decision-makers, socio-economic issues such as employment are usually material considerations in the outcome of planning decisions (Chadwick, 2002). The decision-making process is also recognised as having a strong political influence, and not just a rational technocentric process with a focus only on scientific studies (Glasson, 1999). Morrison-Saunders et al. (2001) found that these political expectations reduced the importance placed on scientific studies and that the decisions were largely influenced by political and socio-economic considerations. This may suggest that the real influence of any socio-economic assessment lies outside of the EIS in a political sphere as opposed to within the EIA process as perceived by the respondents to this study. As Shrimpton and Storey (2000) note, in any reasonably democratic process, economic and social factors will strongly influence the outcome.

The results of this study show that practitioners place a lot of importance on the assessment of socio-economic impacts and that they are of the general opinion that these assessments are important in planning decisions. The importance placed on planning decisions may however be misguided given the results of other research on the EISs influence on planning decisions. Despite this, Glasson (1999) found that even though the EIA does not alter decisions, it does provide better information and project modifications and development conditions.

The expectation for socio-economic impacts to be assessed can also come from the competent authority themselves in the form of a scoping opinion. The EIA Directive, as amended by Directive 97/11/EC (CEC (Commission of the European Communities), 1997), require that the LPA must adopt a scoping opinion if requested to do so by the developer. Although not a legally mandated step in the UK (Glasson et al., 2005), the investigation of social impacts during scoping is considered one of the most important components (ICGPS (Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment), 1995) as a lack of detail here may carry itself through to the latter stages of the EIA. These provide the competent authority with the opportunity to outline any impacts that may be significant based on any consultations and contacts that they might have. When asked their opinion on whether scoping opinions provide informative guidance in the identification and assessment of socio-economic impacts, nine (45%) respondents agreed with this statement and
nine (45%) respondents disagreed with it. Although not conclusive evidence that the contents of a scoping opinion has a direct effect on the socio-economic impacts assessed, it does suggest that there is a lack of expectation or guidance from the competent authority regarding socio-economic impacts in EIA. One respondents comment was that the LPA rarely saw socio-economic impacts as a major issue backs up this observation. The respondent also noted that this was mainly down to the LPA not knowing what to ask for, again highlighting a lack of training throughout the process. The importance of scoping opinions may be even more so given that the discretionary elements of EIA have been noted to be carried out less often (Glasson et al., 2005). The scoping opinion may then be an important document in guiding this critical stage of the process.

4.4 Perspectives on guidance

Chadwick (2002) found that there was little agreement in the literature or published guidance of what does and does not constitute a socio-economic impact, as defining socio-economic impacts is not a straightforward task. Because of this difficulty in defining social impacts, they are understood in different ways and many writers do not attempt a specific definition (Vanclay, 1999). The results of this research seem to show that this uncertainty and lack of agreement has resulted in a number of definitions being used amongst practitioners and decision-makers, and as such illustrates a general lack of consensus as to what impacts to consider in a socio-economic assessment.

Only three (15%) of the 20 EIA practitioners questioned agreed with the statement: there is a high level of consensus among practitioners as to what types of issues should be addressed in a socio-economic analysis. 14 respondents (70%) disagreed with this statement, two (10%) of whom strongly disagreed (three (15%) responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed). Very similar results were also obtained when asked if they agreed with the statement: there is a high level of consensus among decision makers as to what types of issues should be addressed in a socio-economic analysis. 15 respondents (75%) disagreed with this statement, five (25%) of whom strongly disagreed.

Although the results show, from the perspectives of the practitioners, that a high level of uncertainty exists amongst both EIA practitioners and decision-makers as to what should be covered in a socio-economic analysis, it is questionable if a list of specific impacts is the
answer. Indeed, there have been many attempts to develop checklists of social impact variables for consideration, especially by the more technocratic members of the SIA community (Vanclay, 1999). Checklists can help to identify impacts and ensure that impacts are not overlooked (Glasson et al., 2005). Examples include the questionnaire checklist, composing of a series of questions to be answered, and threshold-of-concern checklist, composing of a list of components and a threshold for each at which the assessor should become concerned with the impact. A problem however, is that there is little consensus amongst professionals regarding these lists and a concern that the number of potential variables that could be affected would exceed the capacity of most checklists to be exhaustive (Burdge, 2002). What may be worse is that a checklist may be used in place of a proper scoping process and so many of the complex causal mechanisms that produce social impacts may not be thought through (Vanclay, 2002). This view was upheld by one respondent who commented that due to the very nature of socio-economic impacts, the issues addressed must be context specific and will therefore vary substantially. For example, one respondent specialized in the assessment of impacts of retail development projects. The type and frequency of socio-economic impacts associated with this type of development would be very different to that of a rural industrial development. A full list of impacts would therefore help to serve the assessment of either development only partially if stringently followed. Vanclay (2002) addresses this problem by suggesting a list of concepts that should be addressed as part of a SIA, as opposed to a prescribed list of impacts. Vanclay (2002) goes on to describe how the variables must be locally defined where local considerations exist and as such a generic list may not be appropriate (Vanclay, 2002). However, as Vanclay (2002) admits, the conceptualisation of impacts still possesses practitioner bias and as such the concepts that are suggested may have a western bias.

As well as appealing to the technocratic members of SIA, a list maybe used by ‘charlatan’ consultants who have claimed experience in socio-economic assessment that they did not have (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996, p70). On the other hand, those consultants with expertise and professional experience will be able to suggest the study of issues unrecognised by either the public or other stakeholders (ICGPS, 1995), again emphasising the importance of training and experience in this field.

The lack of a consensus may pose particular problems though, with one respondent commenting that currently there was no consensus at all as to what should be addressed in a
socio-economic assessment and this in turn led to varying approaches and standards. Vanclay (2002) describes how a comprehensive list of impacts may reduce this problem by increasing the awareness of the full range of social impacts, and so lead to improved assessments as a result. Chadwick (2002) found that the range of impacts considered in EISs tends to be very narrow but concludes that a list may overcome this by defining the socio-economic environment broadly and so including social as well as economic impacts, and adverse as well as beneficial impacts. Despite this a full list of impacts to be assessed seems a long way off given the perceived lack of consensus on both the practitioners and the decision-makers side.

Whereas other EIA disciplines have extensive guidance and conformed methodologies for data collection and assessment (for example the Phase 1 Habitat Survey in ecological assessment), EIA guidelines provide only the most basic advice for assessing social and economic impacts (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996). Although this research found that the majority of practitioners thought that the guidance they used was useful (12 (60%)), comments received found that quality guidance was generally unavailable, and where it was lacking it was highlighted as being a major drawback to the quality of socio-economic impacts. Of the 20 respondents, six (30%) singled out the lack of guidance as being particularly significant in restricting the quality of socio-economic assessment.

Current guidance being used by the respondents varies widely, from the Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal Quarterly Review (International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA)) and academic books, to US guidelines and specific in-house guidance. Many larger corporations are developing their own in-house standards and it was these that the respondents found useful, leaving those without specifically designed guidance to carry out an assessment unaided.

There is however one type of guidance that all practitioners have access to, which guide the assessment of other EIA disciplines as well, and these are scoping opinions. Nearly all respondents requested a scoping opinion from the LPA ‘50% or more of the time’ indicating a high level of usage amongst practitioners in the identification of impacts. However, as previously discussed, there was an even split in numbers between those practitioners who thought that scoping opinions provided informative guidance and those that did not. One experienced practitioner stated that it was rare to find effective scoping comment on socio-economic issues in the UK, with another commenting that they thought it was the lack of
training in the LPA that prevented them supplying any meaningful guidance. This view was reiterated by another who responded that the LPAs ‘don’t always get it’ when it comes to socio-economic impacts, again highlighting the lack of training amongst the competent authority. It was also commented that if scoping were effective, then that would help to keep assessment costs down as it could be more focussed from the outset. This may in turn reduce pressure on stakeholder capacity. However, LPAs have their own resource constraints as the DCLG (2006) notes, the availability of LPA resources may be a factor in poor scoping opinions due to LPAs having difficulty in obtaining responses from statutory consultees within the five-week timescale. Consultees relevant to the assessment of socio-economic impacts, for example health services, may well present the competent authority with the same problem. This indicates not only a lack of resources amongst LPAs, but also a lack of resources right across the board when it comes to environmental assessment. Even though it has been noted that resources are important and need to be made available to meet the standards of good practice (Sadler, 1996), a driver for their provision must be provided.

Despite the lack of enthusiasm for the scoping opinion, the telephone interviews did allow the discussion of some positive benefits that scoping opinions provide. One such discussion highlighted the fact that some assessors will not be local to the area where the development is proposed and so the scoping opinion was found to be useful in flagging up local issues, such as the pressure on local services. However, it was not the facts and figures that were necessarily required but the local contacts of any stakeholders that should be involved in any assessment that were required.

Chadwick (2002) describes the need for detailed best-practice guidance on the assessment of socio-economic impacts in the UK. The guidance should cover many of the phases of EIA, including baseline studies, scoping, impact prediction and evaluation, and mitigation and monitoring (Chadwick, 2002). This research would support the view that there is a demand for UK specific guidance, but who should produce such guidance? Glasson et al. (1997) have found that EISs produced for local authorities using their own customised handbooks were of higher than average quality. This finding may be more potent for socio-economic impacts where the assessment methodology varies from locality to locality depending on specific socio-economic circumstances. Although this applies to biophysical impacts as well as socio-economic impacts, the presence of binding limits on noise level (additional to background noise level) and air quality for example, means that methods for data collection and analysis
remain broadly similar. However, as discussed above, the use of site-specific checklists of impacts and rigid methodologies may only serve to please the technocentric assessors and not the assessors who favour expert judgement that allows them to set the assessment in its unique context. Another problem with guidance produced by Local Authorities in the UK is that there are several hundred LPAs, possibly resulting in many different lists. The development of national best practice guidance would therefore help to bring consistency of approach into procedures by all these authorities and thereby be more resource efficient (Glasson, 1999). This best practice guidance can either be developed by central government, a professional body or by academia.

One of Chadwick's (2002) research conclusions was that the lack of best practice guidance in the UK on socio-economic effects was hampering quality assessment. It is however recognised that the production of guidance will not be easy given that the methodologies for assessing social impacts are numerous and complex (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996) and that any such guidance is in danger of becoming too mechanistic, therefore not allowing the context specific nature of socio-economic assessment to come to the fore.

### 4.5 Methodological issues

Comments received not only point at a lack of guidance in what to include in a socio-economic assessment, but also on the methodologies used to assess them. The lack of standards of practice was described by one respondent as hampering the robustness of the methods and the confidence in their use for decision-making. In addition, the lack of assessment methodology plus a lack of accepted values or methods for valuation of impacts was seen as severely hampering quality assessment.

Literature and practitioners appear to be in agreement when considering the role that guidance has to play in improving the evaluation of significance. Lawrence (2004) observes that the difficulties associated with determining the significance of social and economic impacts result from various interpretations associated with social and economic phenomena. An observation made by one respondent concluded that the lack of consensus over what constitutes socio-economic impacts ultimately impedes the evaluation of those impacts. Lawrence (2004) also states that the difficulties with determining the significance are a consequence of insufficient attention being devoted to the significance of social and economic impacts in EIA.
requirements, guidelines and literature. The challenge, as one practitioner describes, is to have a universal framework that is flexible enough to allow context specific receptor sensitivity and magnitude criteria to be developed, yet still allow local culturally and sensitive impact significance determination. This would result in a more methodologically rigorous and objective evaluation assessment.

As previously highlighted, interpreting the significance or importance of social and economic impacts can be especially problematic (Lawrence, 2004). Part of the problem may stem from a lack of criteria and thresholds to indicate that point at which a projects’ potential effects are considered significant (Rossouw, 2003). However, the results of this research seem to be inconclusive, in the opinion of the practitioner, on whether the lack of threshold criteria for socio-economic impacts does or does not impede the evaluation of significance. Ten (50%) of respondents agreed with the statement: the lack of threshold criteria for socio-economic impacts impedes the evaluation of significance, and ten (50%) disagreed with it. Although there is no over-riding opinion on the absence of threshold criteria, the results do show a large spread of opinion indicating an even split between those that do find it an impediment and those that do not.

When asked what their perspective was on the statement: quantitative data is necessary for accurate socio-economic impact predictions, 14 (70%) agreed (25% of whom strongly agreed) with only three (15%) disagreeing, indicating a high level of acceptance on the need to use quantified data to make impact predictions (three (15%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed). However, there was less agreement on the availability of this quantitative data. Only seven (35%) agreed with the statement that quantitative baseline data is available at reasonable cost, while eight (40%) disagreed with it (five (25%) neither agreed nor disagreed). Part of the problem may be that while some quantitative socio-economic data is available, such as census data, population statistics and geographical data, much of the information is subjective. This has led to the observation that socio-economic data is more difficult to collect and quantify (Bond, 1995). Although one practitioner stated that there was a large quantity of baseline data available, the quality of baseline data has previously been noted to be a problem (Vanclay, 1999) and has been described as inadequate in a number of cases (Chadwick, 2002).
One practitioner stated that despite the amount of baseline data available, defining the sensitivity of receptors in terms of capacity was very difficult. An example of this is provided by Chadwick (2002) who describes in the EISs that were studied how the ‘local economy’ is rarely defined. This makes the evaluation of significance difficult, as any change to the local economy is difficult to judge or to quantify. A solution to this is described by Lawrence (2004) who argues that it is possible to evaluate the significance of social concerns by using an indicator approach. This allows the more qualitative socio-economic impacts to be evaluated using a more adaptable and transparent technique. Lawrence (2004) goes on to say that the use of highly quantitative and technical approaches are likely to compound the problem of gaps in data and uncertainties in knowledge. It is these gaps in data that force assessors to make value-based interpretations (Lee et al., 1995).

Cloquell-Ballester et al. (2006) describe the main problem of impact quantification is establishing the appropriateness of the indicators so that the level of objectivity is the highest possible. However, (Bond, 1995) notes that translating subjective meanings into economic values is perceived to be difficult, with one of the problems being a lack of guidance on how to carry out these assessments. This point is certainly emphasised by one respondent to this study who stated that there is a general lack of accepted values and accepted methods of valuation for the quantification of impacts. Indeed, it has been noted that social concepts are not always amenable to empirical measurement (Vanclay, 1999) and so are left to qualitative assessment. Despite the apparent need for objective quantified impact predictions, the ICGPS (1995) remarks that it is more important to identify likely social impacts than to precisely quantify the more obvious social impacts. In addition, if the impacts that do not lend themselves to empirical measurement are quantified, then these quantitative predictions may be far from accurate (Lawrence, 1993).

The results of previous studies show a lack of quantitative techniques and quantification of impacts when assessing socio-economic impacts. For example, Glasson and Heaney (1993) found that quantitative techniques were used in only 17% of the EISs that were analysed, and those that were used were generally unsatisfactory. A later study by Chadwick (2002) did not find a marked increase in quantification. Results showed that quantification was rarely attempted but for employment effects and for even these impacts, less than one quarter of the EISs studied had quantification of employment for both construction and operation stages of the project. Given the discrepancy between the apparent importance placed on quantification
by practitioners as highlighted by this research, and the lack of quantification found by previous research, the question then arises as to why there is this discrepancy, and if practitioners perceive the lack of quantification as affecting the quality of their assessments.

The results indicate a strong level of support for the use of qualitative techniques in impact prediction. When asked their opinion on the statement: suitable qualitative impact methods are available; only three (15%) respondents disagreed with this statement. Two respondents also commented on the importance of the use of both quantitative and qualitative impact methods due to the fact that all socio-economic criteria cannot be quantified, as a result of the lack of sufficient techniques to quantify all impacts. However, difficulties were also encountered with the use of qualitative techniques as it was stated that there was a lack of guidance and accepted standards of practice on the use of qualitative methods. This, it was argued, hampered the robustness and the confidence on such methods for decision-making. Another respondent observed that because of the inadequacies in the existing methodological frameworks for objective qualitative assessments, practitioners have often failed to apply a methodologically rigorous framework in a consistent manner.

The current practice of determining significance is to derive it from a combination of scientific methods and values (Rossouw, 2003) and that to recognise that it is subjective and contingent upon these values is good practice (Sippe, 1999). However, using expert judgement to evaluate significance has been described as irrational and at worst undemocratic due to their apparent lack of structure, the lengthy descriptions and inefficiency (Lawrence, 1993). This is in part due to the fact that using expert opinion can result in an expression of values from a solely professional perspective (Rossouw, 2003). Rossouw (2003) describes how the evaluation of significance is largely judgemental if there are no standards set by law, which poses a problem for socio-economic assessment in particular given that it has no threshold criteria, and therefore relies on expert judgement more than most of the other EIA disciplines.

The results of this survey uphold the view that the evaluation of socio-economic impacts is largely judgemental, as when asked their opinion on the statement: expert judgement is invariably the most appropriate method to evaluate the significance of socio-economic impacts; 11 (55%) agreed and only five (25%) disagreed (four (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed). One respondent described expert judgement as necessary due to the fact that
significance determination is generally based on qualitative and context specific data rather than thresholds. The respondent did however emphasise the need for specialist expertise in evaluating significance, again demonstrating the importance of training in raising standards. Telephone interviewees were able to give a more thorough description of the evaluation of significance commenting how, despite the final application of expert opinion, the evaluation must be based on quantified and qualified analysis (for example use of magnitude and sensitivity matrices) so as to be clear how significance was assigned. Lawrence (1993) emphasises the importance of transparency in the evaluation process, stating that ‘the issue is not objectivity or subjectivity but how well the subjective judgements are substantiated’.

4.6 Conclusion

Results of this study show a range of perspectives on a number of issues regarding the barriers and constraints to producing quality socio-economic impact assessments and a considerable consensus of opinion on others. These results and issues have been discussed in the context of findings from other research and the literature. Chapter five will conclude on the implications of these results for EIA development and suggest areas for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study has tested a conceptual framework of hypotheses as to the barriers and constraints in conducting socio-economic assessment against the perspectives of practitioners. The results obtained from the practitioners indicate a rejection of some of the hypotheses whilst others have been upheld. This chapter briefly summarises the important results that were analysed in chapter four against the conceptual framework developed in chapter two, and discusses some of the implications of the findings for the future development of EIA practices.

5.2 Summary of results

Although there was in general a low amount of experience amongst the practitioners in conducting socio-economic assessment as part of EIA, there was agreement that poor practices were a consequence of limited experience in the field. The range of training and qualifications obtained by the respondents varied widely but they were mostly in agreement that training was important in raising the standards of socio-economic assessment although some comments specified the need for specific social science training. This research would support the view that increased training is required to increase the quality of socio-economic assessment and help develop a better awareness and understanding of the nature of social impacts (Vanclay, 1999). Glasson et al. (1997) suggest the use of certificating competent consultants to recognise good quality practitioners as one solution. The need for training also extends to the competent authority, as although not directly investigated as part of this research, additional information from the practitioners did provide a valuable insight into the perceived need for the competent authority to be better trained if socio-economic impacts are to be better included in the EIA process. Indeed, an analysis of the perspectives of the competent authority and the decision-makers was beyond the scope of this project but would make an interesting and useful topic for further research.

The opinions of the respondents were that there is not a consensus amongst practitioners and decision-makers as to what types of issues should be addressed in a socio-economic assessment. Hypothesis two, regarding the consensus of opinion on what impacts should be
addressed in a socio-economic assessment, can be upheld, although it is unclear whether or not this is detrimental to EIA. This perceived inconsistency on the issues addressed points to an issue of guidance, although there is some debate on the need for a specific list of impacts to be addressed and the practitioners were split as to whether this guidance should include threshold criteria. Although there is a perceived lack of consensus amongst practitioners, further research may be needed as to the perspectives of the decision-makers and the difference in perspective from competent authority to competent authority and if that difference effects the quality of assessment.

The respondents to this study dispelled the need for a technocratic approach to EIA and socio-economic assessment in particular. Although quantitative data was found to be necessary for accurate socio-economic impact predictions, suitable qualitative impact methods were thought to be available. However, it should be noted that different socio-economic impacts require different approaches; for example, employment and population impacts may well require a more quantitative approach. Although less clear, the results did show a general perspective that expert judgement is invariably the most appropriate method to evaluate the significance of socio-economic impacts. This again dispels the need for a technocratic approach to socio-economic assessment and the hypothesis that, from a perspective of the practitioners, the evaluation of significance presents problems in socio-economic assessment and that it suffers from a lack of threshold criteria. Although there did not appear to be a perspective that there were any notable difficulties with the evaluation of significance, comments received did suggest improvements such as increasing the transparency of evaluation.

Guidance was seen as important and the current lack of UK specific guidance was highlighted by some respondents as being particularly detrimental to the assessment of socio-economic impacts, especially given the split in opinion on the usefulness of scoping opinions in identifying and assessing impacts. Guidance, it was suggested, should address the evaluation of significance, making it clear how to assign significance transparently in the absence of threshold criteria and given the wide use of expert judgement. The results concur with the findings of Chadwick (2002) who found little guidance in the UK on socio-economic impact assessment and this research would support the need for the dissemination of good practice guidance as suggested by other research (Glasson et al., 1997).
Socio-economic impacts were judged by practitioners to be important considerations when assessing the potential impacts of a project. However, the respondents thought that developers did not consider socio-economic impacts as important as biophysical impacts. The lack of useful scoping opinion, the lack of importance placed on socio-economic impacts by clients and comments relating to the inability of the competent authority to analyse them properly all point to the conclusion that the hypothesis of a lack of expectation not being rejected. Despite this they agreed with the opinion of Shrimpton and Storey (2000), that socio-economic considerations were important in the decision to grant development consent.

The raising of the expectation for socio-economic assessment to be conducted would seem an important item for the agenda to improve its quality and effectiveness in decision-making. A possible solution is provided by Chadwick (2002), who suggests that socio-economic impacts should be explicitly included by developers, consultancies and competent authorities to be considered at the scoping stage, and the respondents views on the requirement for better scoping advice would support this view. As previously described, capacity needs to be raised within the competent authority, as well as amongst practitioners.

Although expectation can be instilled from the competent authority and government legislation, comments by two practitioners did suggest that increased knowledge of sustainable development is increasing the awareness of the need for social and economic impacts to be assessed. In addition, Sustainability Appraisal (SA), mandatory under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, promotes sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of revisions of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and for new or revised Development Plan Documents (DPD) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) (ODPM, 2005). IEMA (2004) notes that because these plans promote sustainable development and often set the framework for future developments, these will then become more sustainable projects. In turn, IEMA (2004) describes how this recognition of the need to consider the relationship of a project to sustainable development has influenced the trend towards a greater inclusion of social and economic issues within EIA. In summary, the increased awareness of sustainable development amongst practitioners and its use in the preparation of plan, policies and programmes may well assist in the inclusion of social and economic impacts at the project level.
Public involvement and public participation has seen greater use more recently (Glasson et al., 2005), and have been noted as being useful in increasing the impact of the EIA process on decision-making (Glasson, 1999), in assessing the significance of unpredictable social impacts (Vanclay, 1999; Lockie, 2001; Rossouw, 2003) and aiding the fairness and inclusion of socio-economic impacts in decision-making (Glasson, 1999). The further development of public participation may therefore be seen as an important factor in the improvement of socio-economic assessment. However, developers do not usually favour public participation (Glasson et al., 2005) and as such further research may be required to help better integrate the values and opinions of the public.

5.3 Limitations and further research

This study was primarily concerned with socio-economic impacts as part of EIA. However, the assessment of socio-economic impacts may occur elsewhere in documentation other than the EIS. For example, socio-economic impacts are sometimes included as part of the planning application as a separate statement, usually emphasising the beneficial effects that a development may have. This has sparked debate as to whether socio-economic assessment should be part of EIA, or a separate process altogether (Vanclay, 1999). Although beyond the scope of this research, the telephone interviews did allow a question to be asked on whether socio-economic impacts should be part of an EIA, as argued by (Chadwick, 2002), or treated as a separate document. All six who were asked the question thought that socio-economic impacts should be included as part of the EIA process and therefore included in the EIS. Although only a very small sample size, it does indicate a consensus of opinion that, whatever the development of socio-economic assessment might be, that its development should be part of the EIA process.

This research deliberately assessed the perspectives of the practitioners of EIA, as it was seen as an important starting point in analysing how socio-economic assessment could be improved. However, throughout the project opinions have emerged on the important role of the competent authority in assisting in the development of socio-economic assessment and its purpose in the decision-making process. As previously noted, further research on the perspectives of the competent authority, for example, the barriers and constraints they face in producing guidance, and the problems encountered in analysing the results of a socio-economic assessment to be able to properly include it in decision-making, are important to
know for the future of the development of the entire EIA process. The effectiveness of EIA is not just a measure of the quality of the EIS, but of its influence on decisions (Sadler, 1996), and therefore an assessment of the barriers encountered throughout the process need to be assessed.

Resource constraints and the number of practitioners that could be surveyed and telephoned limited this research. As such further research would benefit from a larger sample size and the analysis of case studies to be able to assess the constraints as they appear right though the EIA process. In addition a larger sample size might be able to break down the analysis by development type and size much the same as previous studies have done on the quality of socio-economic assessment (Chadwick, 2002) as it is recognised that the techniques of socio-economic assessment can vary widely. Although this research gained results from practitioners who dealt with a range of development types and sizes, the sample was too small to provide any analysis.

5.4 Conclusion

EIA incorporates environmental and related social and economic considerations into the mainstream of decision making (Sadler, 1996) and thereby contributes to the UK Governments ‘vision’ of achieving economic, social and environmental outcomes simultaneously (DEFRA, 2005). The results of this study show some of the constraints and barriers that are faced by practitioners in addressing the social and economic components of EIA and some perspectives on the way that its quality and effectiveness in decision-making can be improved. Improving the quality of the assessment of socio-economic impacts in EIA is important in order to enhance the ability of EIA to achieve its central goal as a tool for sustainability (Glasson et al., 2005).
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APPENDIX I – SOCIO-ECONOMIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Section 1: Training and experience

This section of the questionnaire requires information on your training and experience with socio-economic impacts, which may be used in the analysis of questionnaire data.

For questions 2 and 4 please place an X by the relevant option to indicate your answer.

1. Please state your occupation and job title in the space below.

2. Have you received any formal training (e.g. attended a training course) or informal training (e.g. guidance provided by a colleague) in the assessment of socio-economic impacts?
   - Yes ___
   - No ___

3. If you have received any formal or informal training, please briefly describe what this involved.

4. Approximately how many EIAs have you been involved with, in the capacity of socio-economic assessment?
   - 1 - 10 ___
   - 11 – 30 ___
   - 31 - 60 ___
   - 61 - 100 ___
   - More than 100 ___
Section 2: Socio-economic assessment in EIA

This section of the questionnaire requires information on your perspectives of the assessment of socio-economic impacts in UK EIA.

For each of the following statements please place an X by the option that best reflects your opinion.

1. Quantitative data is necessary for accurate socio-economic impact predictions.
   - Strongly agree __
   - Tend to agree ___
   - Neither agree nor disagree ___
   - Tend to disagree ___
   - Strongly disagree ___

2. Suitable qualitative impact methods are available.
   - Strongly agree ___
   - Tend to agree ___
   - Neither agree nor disagree ___
   - Tend to disagree ___
   - Strongly disagree ___

3. The lack of threshold criteria for socio-economic impacts impedes the evaluation of significance.
   - Strongly agree ___
   - Tend to agree ___
   - Neither agree nor disagree ___
   - Tend to disagree ___
   - Strongly disagree ___
4. Expert judgment is invariably the most appropriate method to evaluate the significance of socio-economic impacts.

   Strongly agree  ___
   Tend to agree   ___
   Neither agree nor disagree  ___
   Tend to disagree ___
   Strongly disagree ___

5. Poor practices are a consequence of limited experience of practitioners in this field.

   Strongly agree  ___
   Tend to agree   ___
   Neither agree nor disagree  ___
   Tend to disagree ___
   Strongly disagree ___

6. Formal training is important in raising the standards of socio-economic impact assessment.

   Strongly agree  ___
   Tend to agree   ___
   Neither agree nor disagree  ___
   Tend to disagree ___
   Strongly disagree ___

7. Socio-economic components of an EIA are unimportant considerations in the decision to grant development consent.

   Strongly agree  ___
   Tend to agree   ___
   Neither agree nor disagree  ___
   Tend to disagree ___
   Strongly disagree ___

   Strongly agree  ___
   Tend to agree   ___
   Neither agree nor disagree  ___
   Tend to disagree ___
   Strongly disagree ___

9. The consideration of socio-economic components is important when assessing the potential impacts of a project.

   Strongly agree  ___
   Tend to agree   ___
   Neither agree nor disagree  ___
   Tend to disagree ___
   Strongly disagree ___

10. How often are scoping opinions requested?

    All of the time ___
    More than 50% of the time ___
    25% - 50% of the time ___
    Less than 25% of the time ___
    Never ___

11. There is a high level of consensus among EIA practitioners as to what types of issues should be addressed in a socio-economic analysis.

    Strongly agree  ___
    Tend to agree   ___
    Neither agree nor disagree  ___
    Tend to disagree ___
    Strongly disagree ___
12. There is a high level of consensus among decision makers as to what types of issues should be addressed in a socio-economic analysis.

Strongly agree  ___
Tend to agree  ___
Neither agree nor disagree  ___
Tend to disagree  ___
Strongly disagree  ___

13. Guidance that is used in identifying and assessing socio-economic impacts is useful.

Strongly agree  ___
Tend to agree  ___
Neither agree nor disagree  ___
Tend to disagree  ___
Strongly disagree  ___
Do not use guidance  ___

14. Within the context of EIA, developers/clients consider socio-economic impacts as important as biophysical impacts.

Strongly agree  ___
Tend to agree  ___
Neither agree nor disagree  ___
Tend to disagree  ___
Strongly disagree  ___

15. Financial resources are invariably a constraint to producing high quality socio-economic impact assessments.

Strongly agree  ___
Tend to agree  ___
Neither agree nor disagree  ___
Tend to disagree  ___
Strongly disagree  ___
16. Quantitative baseline data is available at reasonable cost.

Strongly agree  
Tend to agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Tend to disagree  
Strongly disagree 

17. If you would like to make a comment on factors that contribute to or impede good quality socio-economic impact assessment then please use the space below.

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.

- It may be necessary to follow-up some of the results with a brief phone based interview to investigate certain perspectives more deeply.

Please indicate whether you would agree to being contacted for a short discussion.

Yes  
No  

If yes, please give your name and a contact phone number.

- Would you like to receive an abstract of the results via e-mail?

Yes  
No  

If yes, please give an e-mail address to send it to.
Dear Sir/Madam

I am currently studying an MSc in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). For the thesis I am investigating the practitioners perspectives on the assessment of socio-economic impacts in EIA.

Previous research has indicated that the quality of socio-economic impact assessment has not been as good as that of other EIA disciplines, such as noise and ecology. There have been a number of reasons suggested for this by academics but it is important to gain the opinions of EIA practitioners on the subject. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated.

The attached questionnaire seeks your perspectives on a number of issues relating to the assessment of socio-economic impacts and is designed to take about 10 minutes.

Individual responses will be anonymous and confidential.

Please return the questionnaire by **Friday 22 June** via one of the following options.
E-mail:  s.coles@uea.ac.uk
Fax:  (01603) 591327 marked for my attention
Or post:  Simon Coles, University of East Anglia, Department of Environmental Sciences, Norwich, NR4 7TJ

If you have any questions then please feel free to contact me on.
E-mail:  s.coles@uea.ac.uk
Phone: 07917794354

Many regards and thank you,

Simon Coles
APPENDIX III – TELEPHONE CONTACT LETTER
Dear 

Thank you ever so much for returning the questionnaire on socio-economic assessment, the results of which are currently being analysed.

Thank you also for agreeing to take part in a phone interview in which I would like to ask a couple of questions relating to some of your comments and the answers given by other practitioners.

I would like the phone interviews to be conducted Monday or Tuesday of next week. That’s the 2nd and 3rd of July. I will aim for the phone interview to last no more than 10-15 minutes and they will be confidential.

Please respond indicating if that is a suitable date for you and if so please give a time when it is most convenient for you to be phoned.

Many regards

Simon Coles