

THE COMPLEXITY OF STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA)

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Background and aims: Participation of stakeholders, both public members and professionals, is an integral part of HIA. Nevertheless, participatory HIA practices barely recognize or address the complexity which characterizes participation of diverse stakeholders. Our aim was to study participatory practices within HIA using a concrete case-study of multi-ethnic and multi-disciplinary HIA of a large metropolitan plan.

Methods: This research took place within the framework of an HIA regarding a metropolitan plan in the south of Israel that includes among other components a large industrial park and unrecognized Bedouin villages. The research included participant observation of the process, as well as in-depth interviews with the stakeholders and focus groups. The data was analyzed in qualitative methods.

Results: During the scoping stage of the HIA, the stakeholders scoped the environmental limitations zoning surrounding a hazardous industry and hazardous waste site. Process analysis revealed that stakeholders possess multiple types of knowledge, data and interests, often contradictory. These lead in turn to stakeholders speaking different languages and possessing different approaches to health, which may not be possible to mitigate within the framework of an HIA process. For example, the views of stakeholders regarding the required zoning surrounding the hazardous site ranged from 0 to 32km, based on diverse sets of data such as epidemiological studies, monitored emissions, modeling and local knowledge. Interests included employment, real estate, environmental quality and reputation alongside health.

Conclusions: Stakeholders in HIA are situated in different and often conflicting positions. The current frameworks of participation in HIA, and more widely the current culture of participation in decision-making, do not address this complexity. The presentation will include suggestions for modifying the current methods, taken from work on issues such as complexity and multiculturalism, in order to advance HIA towards meeting its goal to maximize health gain and minimize health inequality.