



Assessment of the Use of SCP Data & Evidence in Regional Policies Executive Summary

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Environment Agency

A Report submitted by GHK
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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Assessment

This report presents an assessment of the use of evidence that describes issues and policies relating to sustainable consumption and production (SCP) in regional policy making. In the context of promoting the effective use of better evidence in designing policies that support SCP, the assessment has considered the use of evidence in Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and identified good examples of use and opportunities and barriers to the further use of SCP evidence.

A Typology of SCP Evidence

The range and type of SCP evidence can be described as relating to:

Resource Pressures: The pressures of activity on the environment (emissions, arisings, consumption of resources and products linked to measures of economic or demographic activity)

State of Resources: The state, and changes in the state, of environmental resources (e.g. air & water quality, renewables capacity, biodiversity) and environmental limits; and related impact assessments attributing change to specified pressures

Responses for Resource Efficiency and Management: Societal responses to promote sustainable consumption patterns and production levels to respect environmental limits and to secure a sustainable state of resources. Societal responses include SCP policies to promote investment in new products and technologies, additional demand management measures, and support for business efficiency. SCP evidence includes the assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of these responses.

This typology has been used, with reference to the policy cycle (from the scoping of problems and objectives to the identification of policy options and evaluation to implementation) to understand both the nature of the evidence used, but also where in the policy cycle the evidence is used.

Regional Policies and the Use of SCP Evidence

The use of SCP evidence in regional policies is extensive...

especially in relation to specific policy themes (water, waste, energy, materials). This is especially the case in RSS (and before this RPG), where resource based policies have subject to review and development over many years. RES policies are also framed by reference to the interface between the economy and the environment, with the emphasis on the economic opportunities from greater interest and investment in environmental quality and resource efficiency. Increasing concern over climate change has led both RSS and RES to deepen their appreciation of the sources of energy use and to consider opportunities to promote and increase the use of renewables and energy efficiency.

SCP evidence is used in relation to all stages of the policy cycle...

from scoping problems, through policy development and appraisal to reviews of programmes and their outcomes. The use of SCP evidence also extends across the typology, with considerable work to asses both the resource implications of social and

economic development and to consider policy responses. Comparatively less evidence is used in relation to the state of resources.

Although there is extensive use of SCP evidence this tends to be undertaken in the context of specific policy themes directly related to the type of resource (e.g. water, waste, energy) or to the use of resources in particular businesses / sectors or to a general review of the environmental economy.

There is less SCP evidence available and used to examine strategic regional policy choices...

which aim to respect environmental limits and to address the challenge of decoupling the use of natural resources from economic development. This is largely attributable to a political and institutional assumption that regional social welfare will be threatened if growth especially in employment but also income is constrained because of environmental limits. This assumption needs to be addressed by demonstrating that the worst case fears associated with a more resource efficient development path and/or the adjustment to such a development path are unfounded.

The reticence to use SCP evidence in this way is also partly explained by a concern for ensuring only robust and validated information is used – requiring, for example, methods of eco-footprinting or the outputs of models such as REEIO and REAP to undergo more scrutiny and review before they are applied as formal assessment tools.

Even so, there has been an increasing interest and some limited application of data and models such as REEIO and REAP to improve understanding of the resource implications of development at regional scale and the nature of the policy challenge. Ideas and analysis of regional eco-footprints and of the economic value of environmental assets have assisted in increasing the awareness of decision makers. It is extremely likely that regional bodies will look to combine these models (and any other analytical tools which might be developed) to maximise the level of insight and evidence as to future regional resource flows, prospective policy responses and their impacts. An important constraint to the use of these tools is likely to be the small number of officers with the requisite training and competence in their operation and application.

There is a requirement for a combination of new ideas and SCP evidence...

relating to the nature of the regional level response to environmental limits, around the policy cycle. For example in the case of both the RSS and the RES there is a need for additional evidence to describe more resource efficient regional development paths and the capability of these paths to deliver both resource savings and desired rates of economic and employment growth will be required. This evidence will need to convince policy makers that the adjustment to a different more resource efficient development path need not have a negative effect on social and economic outcomes.

One interesting area is the work of some RSS to consider the broad resource implications of different spatial development options in terms of function (types of activity) and form (scale, concentration, polycentricity). Here the emphasis is moving from problem identification and analysis to developing and testing policy responses. Another opportunity for a more strategic response to SCP is the recent and new RES reviews which allow scope to prepare additional evidence on the nature of long term regional economic and social change and the implications of increasing resource productivity for competitiveness.

Future Challenges

Regional policy makers should accept that there are new and important questions...

What are the environmental limits that face the region? What scale of decoupling of environmental resource use from development is required, over what timescales? What trade-offs for regional development does this pose? How should the region respond? Does the region have the necessary decision making approaches and methods to define and allow difficult choices to be made?

SCP evidence of all types is required around the policy cycle...

to answer the questions above. Regional SCP evidence has to demonstrate regional resource flows associated with regional development, define the nature of environmental limits and the consistency of the resource flows with these limits. But SCP evidence has to go beyond this to allow the envisioning of policy options and their evaluation.

SCP evidence has to extend beyond the use of modelling approaches...

because they have two major difficulties at present: the first is their 'black box' style which makes it difficult to understand and accept the results; the second is that although they allow, through their use in scenarios, some exploration of policy options, their ability to frame and evaluate potential options in terms of, for example, social well-being is somewhat limited.

SCP evidence has to be shaped by the emerging approaches to decision making...

which will have to develop in order for potentially difficult choices to be made, in particular the need for transparency and participation in future decision making. The nature of these decision making tools will have a major impact on the nature and use of future SCP evidence.