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**Review: *Environmental Impact Assessment In The Baltic Countries
And Poland -
Screening And Quality Control.***

Edited by Harald Kristoffersen and Arne Tesli

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Kristoffersen, Harald and Arne Tesli, editors. *Environmental Impact Assessment In The Baltic Countries And Poland - Screening And Quality Control*. Copenhagen.: The Nordic Council. 136 pp. paper US \$30.00 ISBN: 92-9120-862-0. Paper approved by the Nordic Environmental Labeling.

The states of Eastern Europe face a requirement to rapidly raise their environmental standards in the last years of the 20th century. Marxist theory may well be quiet on green issues, but there is no doubt that communist practice gave a very low priority to the environment. The political revolution of 1989 and 1990 brought with it a commercial revolution that is transforming the economy. Additionally, it brought about a less publicized environmental revolution. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is part of the new practices - and new attitudes - required by these states.

The European Union's Environmental Assessment Directive is barely a decade old -- juvenile compared with the well-established procedures in the United States -- yet it is the relevant standard to apply in any discussion of EIA procedures in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. All four of these countries aspire to EU membership and by implication accept that they will eventually conform to the environmental standards of the EU.

This comparative study focuses on two elements of the EIA process: the screening of projects to determine which ones require EIA, and the quality of the assessment process. Screening is a significant issue in EIA regardless of the level of sophistication and experience of practitioners. The proposed changes to the EU Directive of 1985 focus on project screening. Practice in the EU seems to be moving towards the use of criteria or thresholds in preference to conducting preliminary assessments. Although the practice in the four countries echoes this,

there are substantial differences in the list of criteria from the EU and amongst themselves. Practice in Poland seems closest to methods used in most EU countries, appropriately since Poland is closest to formal association with the EU.

The quality of the EIA process in the four states appears to be limited, at least as indicated by the proxy measures used in the report. In Estonia, for example, the time taken by the assessment process is limited, most statements are very short, and public participation in the decision making process is negligible.

Environmental Impact Assessment In The Baltic Countries And Poland - Screening And Quality Control provides a useful discussion for environmentalists interested in comparative studies, one that could well be revisited in a few years' time to see how the process has evolved. It is however, intended as a reference work rather than a thorough reading of the topic. There are occasional signs that English is not the first language of the authors and the factual record lacks the immediate interest that case studies give.

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