

“Year of the Evaluation” Event

New Challenges for the Evaluation of Science and Research: Political Goals, Theory and Methodological Challenges

Abstract / Call for Contributions

In recent years, calls on science and research have changed in that they must now take social and socio-political relevant dimensions increasingly into consideration. This applies both to the content of research on the one hand and to the utilisation and accessibility of scientific and research findings on the other. The European Research Strategy, for instance, seeks increased consideration of the gender dimension in order to increase the participation of women in science and research, integrate a gender perspective into research content, and break down the structural barriers for women. A further priority in the European research area is the optimisation of the circulation and access to research findings, i.e. knowledge transfer also by means of a digital European research area.

Since 2001, when the “Science and Society” programme was brought into being, the EU has sought to involve its citizens in science and research and to boost their access to research results. At the same time, it seeks to lift interest in science and research in order to counter the “waste of talent”. The aim here is not just to integrate women increasingly into science and research but to make Europe more competitive as a research area and create high-quality jobs. These goals also form part of the Responsible Research and Innovation strategy, which sets five areas of strategic focus: gender, citizenship participation, ethics, open access und science literacy.

These socio-political goals have not only gained significance at EU level, they have also found their way into science, research and technology policy at a national level. In Austria, for instance, the Universities Act 2002 (*Universitätsgesetz 2002*) formulates social goals for universities. The country’s universities are now required to formulate their contributions to society. These include measures to achieve greater social permeability, to increase the ratio of women in leading functions at universities, to promote young female researchers, to expand socially relevant areas of the arts, culture and research, and to boost knowledge and technology transfer.

With these goals come challenges both for political control as well as for monitoring implementation and evaluating the effects. These challenges arise, among other things, because existing control and monitoring systems are based on quantitative indicators, which insufficiently reflect such social goals. Adequate indicators and approaches also need to be developed for evaluating measures to support the achievement of social goals (e.g. consideration of the gender dimension in instruments to promote research or open access initiatives).

The following questions are of particular relevance in this context:

- Which theoretical concepts lie behind the social dimensions and how can these be operationalised for monitoring and evaluation?

- How can the social dimensions be meaningfully and convincingly integrated into existing monitoring systems and approaches to evaluation? How can the tension between the primarily quantitative indicators in existing monitoring systems and the more qualitatively focused social dimensions be addressed.
- Which methodological challenges are associated with the evaluation of the diverse and complex goals in the social dimensions sphere? What role can mixed-methods based approaches can play here?
- What role do indicators and/or evaluation play for political control processes? What unintended effects can result from the limited validity and expressiveness of existing monitoring systems for social goals?

These questions will form the focus of a one-day conference to be held 11 June 2015 as part of the “Year of the Evaluation” events at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) in Vienna. The conference will be hosted by the Department for Sociology at the IHS in cooperation with the DeGEval’s Gender Mainstreaming Working Group and the Research, Technology and Innovation Policy Working Group.

Contributions are invited which deal with the above-mentioned questions either from a theory perspective or from the perspective of the clients, realisers or users of evaluations.

To initiate the discussion, the individual contributions will be introduced and commented by a panellist. We also plan to document the event in the form of an IHS Series publication. For this purpose, contributors are requested to submit a written version of their contributions (length: 30,000 - 40,000 characters) by 1 June 2015.

We cordially invite interested colleagues to submit an **abstract of no more than 500 words by 15 March 2015 at the latest** to office.soz@ihs.ac.at. Notification of the acceptance of an abstract will be sent to the contributor by 31 March 2015.

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