

The challenges of impact assessment

A report by a Working Group

Per Janson, City of Stockholm (previously employed at The Swedish
Research Council)

The definition of impact

- The consequences of an action that affects people's lives.
- The consequences would not have occurred without the action

Different forms of impact

- Scientific impact
- Societal impact
 - A) Technological impact
 - B) Economic impact
 - C) Social impact
 - D) Political impact
 - E) Environmental impact
 - F) Health impact
 - G) Cultural impact

Definition of impact - Conclusion

- Impact can be broadly defined
- Conceptualise impact before a study is undertaken!
- Avoid treating impact as a final consequence!

Why impact assessments?

- Demonstrating the value of research
- Increasing the value of research

Methodological challenges

- Attribution
- The counterfactual argument
- Time lags
- Micro/macro perspective

Attribution

- Attribution: to link impact to a certain instrument or action
- Contribution: The action has played a role
- Better to focus on contribution!

The counterfactual argument

- What would have happened had not the action taken place
- Methods to capture this
 - 1) Interviews with researchers and stakeholders
 - 2) Use a model of intervention logic
 - 3) Judgements by experts
 - 4) Establish control groups

Time lags

- The distance between the action and the consequences
- Finding indicators!

Micro/macro level

- Macro – impact in general on a high level of aggregation
- Micro – specific research project

Recommendations

- 1) Impact assessments are an important element in demonstrating, understanding and facilitating the value of research.
- 2) Impact should be seen as a broad concept, both in regard to in what areas impact can occur and what is considered to be impact.
- 3) Continue the promising work on finding indicators for future impact.
- 4) Continuing cooperation between funding agencies and researchers on impact assessment.
- 5) Funding agencies should prepare for impact assessments that are long term, or more longitudinal.
- 6) More focus on how to establish the counterfactual position.
- 7) Perform an impact assessment that involves different countries and research agencies.