

# NACHGEFRAGT

Januar 2015

## Impact Analysis – How Useful, How Democratic?

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Ein Gespräch mit **Dr. Susan Rose-Ackerman**, Henry R. Luce Professor of Jurisprudence, Yale University.

Geführt von **Mark T. Fliegau**, Fellow und Leiter des Projektes „Innovatives Regieren | Social Impact Bonds“.

**stiftung neue verantwortung (snv):** Professor Rose-Ackerman, impact assessment has become a buzz word in public policy circles...

**Susan Rose-Ackerman:** There is a certain amount of rhetoric around the term ‘impact assessment’ that I find confusing. What actually is that thing that the European Commission loves, that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) loves? On one level, it is simply a call to policymakers to think functionally about a problem, about the policies that they are carrying out. Don’t just literally pass a law. Let’s think about it: Why do we pass this law? What is it supposed to accomplish? And how can we find out if it is going to accomplish that?

**snv:** So, impact assessment is a step in the right direction?

**Rose-Ackerman:** There is a discussion, or some tension if you will, between those who come out of a legal background who think about the relationship between the form and the substance, and those who just want to alleviate problems quickly. Thinking about form and substance of a policy involves taking some time to figure out what is going on, what the background conditions are, and building into the application of the program some evaluation. Gather information, not just act. I remember, I explained that at the World Bank as a fellow awhile ago. The issue there was exactly: “We have the money to spend. There are needs. Let’s get going.” But if you don’t know what the baseline is, what exactly the problem is, it is very hard to figure these things out once you are starting.

**snv:** And yet, you have your difficulties with impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis. Why?

**Rose-Ackerman:** For one, impact is usually tied to good results in some sense. And so the obvious issue is: what counts as good results? And if you could decide, how would you measure them?

**snv:** And measurement problems feed into problems of causality.

**Rose-Ackerman:** It seems to me that the higher the level of analysis, the harder it becomes to make the connection between what, for example, a social service provider is doing and what happens on an aggregate level. This is a general problem. If you have a performance measure, especially in a bureaucracy, you want to reward somebody for what they did. But obviously there are a lot of things going on in the world. We have a lot of cities throughout Germany, for example, with different situations, and what works in one city to reduce unemployment may not work in another. The economic environment is clearly effecting the outcome, but in some town Siemens might come in and build a new factory while in another it doesn't.

**snv:** But we can control for these factors with an evaluation design.

**Rose-Ackerman:** Yes but you have to be careful about it. You have to be pretty confident that you have got the right metrics and design. You also want to make sure that the provider is being evaluated on actual success. They may, for example, like to select the program participants – creaming up. So if they have an empty space in the program, they don't want to fill that space with any person. The provider has the incentive to get good results, but you want to know if they were successful because they selected in easy cases.

**snv:** You have also hinted at normative issues with cost-benefit analysis. In how far?

**Rose-Ackerman:** First, there is a risk of doing the things you can measure instead of the things that may be more important but can't really be measured. But there is another aspect of this. That is, how do you figure out if you have done anything that is good? It doesn't just have to do with getting a baseline and seeing what happens. It has to do with some normative commitment. To decide what is it that you are trying to get out of a program. Then measuring it. And that central problem of figuring out what you want to do is, is not simply a technical problem. It's a value problem. It is how notions of justice or other kinds of value problems are applied besides simply maximizing the difference between benefits and costs.

**snv:** Thank you very much, Dr. Rose-Ackerman.

## Über die Stiftung

Die stiftung neue verantwortung ist ein unabhängiger, gemeinnütziger und überparteilicher Think Tank mit Sitz in Berlin. Sie fördert kreatives, interdisziplinäres und sektor-übergreifendes Denken zu den wichtigsten gesellschafts-politischen Themen und Herausforderungen des 21. Jahrhunderts. Durch ihr Fellow- und Associateprogramm ermöglicht sie den intensiven Austausch junger Experten, Praktiker und Vordenker aus Politik, Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Zivilgesellschaft.

## Über das Projekt

Das Projekt „Innovatives Regieren | Social Impact Bonds“ untersucht am Beispiel der Sozialen Wirkungsfinanzierung welche Rolle innovative und wirkungsorientierte Regierungs- bzw. Förderinstrumente spielen können, um auf gesellschaftliche Herausforderungen zu antworten. Den betroffenen Menschen zum Zentrum politischer Entscheidungen sowie deren administrativer Umsetzung zu machen, stellt dabei ein – wenn nicht das – zentrale Anliegen der intersektoralen Arbeitsgruppe dar.

Mehr Informationen zum Projekt “Innovatives Regieren | Social Impact Bonds“ unter:

[www.stiftung-nv.de/projekt/social-impact-bonds](http://www.stiftung-nv.de/projekt/social-impact-bonds)

## Impressum

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