



REvaluation Conference 2027

"Scouting Paths on Shifting Maps"

February 25 - February 26, 2027, Vienna, Austria

Special Session:

Title Session: *Combining concepts, integrating methods and exploring new data sources for societal R&I evaluation*

Susanne Bühner – ISI Fraunhofer

Sarah Seus – ISI Fraunhofer

Florian Wittmann – ISI Fraunhofer

Abstract/ Description:

With this proposal for a special session, we aim to discuss contributions on how to assess societal impacts (Bornmann 2013, Bühner et al, 2022, Bühner et al. 2023, Reale et al. 2018,) with activities beyond single funding programmes. This can be a strategy or a bundle of programmes (e.g. a mission or a comprehensive strategy) targeting a shared goal or the innovation system as a whole. While the need for systemic evaluation approaches is increasingly acknowledged, there remains a “gap” between more traditional impacts (research and economic impacts) and the SDGs or similar systemic concepts. This poses a considerable challenge for evaluations.

The special session will discuss how various concepts, methods, and tools can be combined and complement each other in order to better understand the interplay of different impacts and bridge the existing gap between different types of impacts. A specific emphasis should be on the discussion how to navigate between (traditional) research effects and the contribution of research and innovation activities to large-scale systemic and societal goals. This session aims to discuss what this methodological opening of concepts means for conceptualising and doing R&I evaluation. We invite contribution to further think the ongoing debates (e.g. formative designs of evaluations (Molas Gallart et al., 2021)) or thinking ex-ante and ex-post approaches together, e.g. by including an impact orientation from the start of the interventions such as impact-oriented monitoring approaches (Bühner & Roth 2023, van Mierlo et al. 2010, Pfeifer & Helming 2024). Such approaches and concepts may help to tailor evaluation activities towards systemic changes. Furthermore, we invite contributions that expand the methodological toolbox and include methods not yet mainstreamed in (ex-post) evaluation. This can include methods frequently used in ex-ante impact assessments such as foresight, quantitative modelling, or methods seeking inclusive and participatory assessments of effects. AI supported methods helping to tap into new data sources are also welcomed.

This special session, calls on the evaluation community to submit contributions (conceptual and practice examples) providing evidence on the following questions:

- 1) What heuristics or theory-based approaches can be used to set up a robust evaluation design evaluating towards societal goals?

- 2) Introducing impact-orientation from the beginning of a funding intervention: what approaches are useful to gain insights beyond the programme level?
- 3) Methods for following the impact pathways towards societal/systemic impacts – what works and with what limitation?
- 4) How to fruitfully combine ex-ante impact assessment and ex-post evaluation approaches in an overall evaluation framework? What are conceptual and practical requirements and challenges when bringing together such approaches?

The session organizers have been engaged in a four-years research project on the topic and will facilitate the session bringing in their own experience. The session wants to be a dialogue session based on a world-café format that brings together different experiences and insights from similar projects and activities. Therefore, we invite speed talks as inputs being either focused on conceptional and design elements or the use of methods to provide a starting point for the later discussions.

References:

Bornmann, Lutz (2013): What Is Societal Impact of Research and How Can It Be Assessed? A Literature Survey. In: *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 64 (2), S. 217-233.

Bührer, S.; Feidenheimer, A.; Frietsch, R.; Karaulova, M.; Lindner, R.; Schubert, T. (2023): Report on the Impact of Science - Current challenges, concepts, and state of the art in impact assessment. Berlin/Karlsruhe: BMBF/Fraunhofer ISI,

Bührer, Susanne; Feidenheimer, Alexander; Walz, Rainer; Lindner, Ralf; Beckert, Bernd; Wallwaey, Elisa (2022): Concepts and methods to measure societal impacts – an overview. Fraunhofer ISI Discussion Papers Innovation Systems and Policy Analysis No. 74.

Bührer, Susanne; Roth, Florian (2023): Entwicklung eines gestaltungsorientierten Evaluations- und Monitoring-Systems zur Erfassung komplexer Wirkungen. Fraunhofer ISI Discussion Papers Innovation Systems and Policy Analysis Nr. 78.

Molas-Gallart, Jordi; Boni, Alejandra; Giachi, Sandro; Schot, Johan (2021): A formative approach to the evaluation of Transformative Innovation Policies, *Research Evaluation*, Volume 30, Issue 4, October 2021, Pages 431–442

Pfeifer, Lena; Helming, Katharina (2024): Effective mission-oriented research: A new framework for systemic research impact assessment. *Research Evaluation*, 2024, **33**, rva003.

Reale, Emanuela; Avramov, Dragana ; Canhial, Kubra ; Donovan, Claire; Flecha, Ramon; Holm, Poul; Larkin, Charles; Lepori, Benedetto; Mosoni-Fried, Judith; Oliver, Esther; Primeri, Emilia; Puigvert, Lidia; Scharnhorst, Andrea; Schubert, Andràs; Soler, Marta; Soòs, Sàndor; Sordé, Te-resa; Travis, Charles; Van Horik, René (2018): A review of literature on evaluating the scientific, social and political impact of social sciences and humanities research. In: *Research Evaluation* 27 (4), S. 298-308.

van Mierlo, B. C.; Arkestijn, M.C.M.; Beekman, V.; Bunders, J.F.G.; Cock Buning, B. de; Elzen, B. et al. (2010): Reflexive Monitoring in Action. A Guide for monitoring system innovation projects. Wageningen UR.

Extended abstracts are welcomed, please see the submission guidelines: [Call for Contributions](#).

To directly submit your extended abstract, [click here](#).

Deadline for abstract submission: July 31, 2026

Strand 6: *The big picture: System-level evaluations*

Contact Person:

- *Susanne Bühner (susanne.buehrer@isi.fraunhofer.de)*
- *Sarah Seus (sarah.seus@isi.fraunhofer.de)*
- *Florian Wittmann (florian.wittmann@isi.fraunhofer.de)*