

“Impact Assessing Institution” (IAI) Label



1 Introduction

Today, accountability is an increasingly relevant issue in all the three areas of activity in which the GII already engages itself and intends to do so in the future: internationalisation of higher education, foundations and corporate social responsibility projects. Beyond input and output, the question of outcomes and impact has become a dominant theme in the last years and will be in the future. So far, in the majority of cases neither universities nor foundations or companies are assessing their real impacts.

Stakeholders and shareholders demand to see proof of the effectiveness and efficiency of their investments also in these non-economic areas. The pressure to be able to provide evidence is ever growing. Yet there is on the one side a certain reluctance towards indicator-based impact assessment in all the three sectors (higher education, foundations, corporate responsibility). The reasons for this reluctance may vary and range from the preference for appearance and claim (in all three sectors) to the fear of discovering short-comings and proof for wrong investments (especially for foundations).

However, this attitude is not sustainable. We see first negative effects of such approaches, e.g. in the UK where the Charity Commission withdrew the charity status from the Kids Company because of financial problems, poor governance and *inability to show impact*. The GII therefore is convinced that there is an immense need for a reasonable label in this field which is so far not exploited widely nor with the right approach.

2 Deficiencies of existing approaches

There is a sizeable number of organisations (comprehensive overview of the most relevant ones are in the LSE paper referenced in the footnote)¹ on the market that offer classical impact assessments, usually either based on an econometric or a social impact approach. The econometric approach is not relevant for the GII as we will not necessarily engage in this domain, although we have the capabilities in place through a partnership with the Economics university in Prague if called for.

The social impact approaches all share some commonalities, made rather explicit by the example of the International Association for Impact Assessment². Such approaches are based on a normative philosophy, i.e. the organisation providing the impact assessment assumes that they know the absolute standards relevant, existing and measurable for any organisation active in the social domain, regardless – and this is highly important – of the aims and goals of the organisation itself. In other words, they assume that a certain set of standards measured by a given set of methods and indicators can define an absolute quality of impact. Moreover, all these approaches assume a position external to the organisation with respect to the impact; i.e. the question is rather what the

¹ Florman, M.; Klingler-Vidra, R.: A critical evaluation of social impact assessment methodologies and a call to measure economic and social impact holistically through the External Rate of Return platform, Working Paper #1602, LSE Enterprise, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/businessAndConsultancy/LSEConsulting/pdf/Assessing-social-impact-assessment-methods-report.pdf>
² (<http://www.iaia.org/wiki-details.php?ID=23>)

stakeholders think about the impact of an organisation rather than whether an impact achieved is in line with an impact intended by the organisation. As a recent LSE study (see footnote) stated: “There is a prescriptive nature within nearly all of the methods that ratings/scores are determined according to what each methods’ creators believe to be best, right or important, or what they are aiming to achieve.” Moreover, most tools are offered by NGOs and for companies. The higher education sector as well as mid- to small-sized foundations are so far rather neglected by providers of impact assessment tools.

These approaches are very similar to classical accreditation procedures. The only accreditation approach that substantially diverts from this is the one of the Association to Advance Colleges and Schools of Business (AACSB) for the accreditation of MBA programmes which is based on a coherence check between the claims a Business school makes and the real programme offered. The AACSB is by far the most successful accreditation organisation with currently more than 1,600 members and 800 accredited institutions despite the immense costs of the process. This approach is therefore the most similar to the GII approach on impact assessment.

3 The IAI label concept of the GII

The GII offers higher education institutions, foundations and companies to co-design their activities, programmes and projects to ensure the maximum impact in relation to the goal of the institution for that specific programme or project. The approach starts from clarifying the goal and aim that the institution has with its programme or project. Then it assesses the procedures set in place with regard to their strength to achieve these goals as well as the mechanisms to control whether the goals are achieved. Goals in this sense have to be impacts, i.e. the GII starts from the premise that an organization does not implement a programme or project with the simple aim to run it but with an aim to achieve something (a change, a new result, a shift,...). The GII then implements an Impact Monitor that provides the organization with all necessary information to keep the programme on track and if necessary adapt. Ultimately, the GII will provide an organisation that established the Impact Monitor with a Label “Impact Assessing Institution” which must be renewed every 2 years.

The IAI label is based on a multiple step approach. First, we identify the goals of the institution in the area where the impact shall be measured. In many cases, the institutions do not have a clear idea of the real goals they pursue and thus substitute these with mere output goals, e.g. in internationalisation an increase in outbound mobility. In the next step, the GII helps to identify the real substantial goals, e.g. in internationalisation one of the five IMPI goal dimensions (see <http://www.impi-toolbox.eu>). Based on these goals, we then in the third step analyse with the client the existing indicators and monitoring systems in place and help to either adjust them or develop new ones better fitting the needs defined by the goals. This results in an institution-individual Impact Monitor which will then be adjusted annually according to the results on the indicators.

An important part of the labelling process are site visits in which we compare the self-assessment information and the data from documents with the reality in loco. In order to achieve the results, each client institution is assigned a mentor from the GII team that accompanies the institution throughout the process. The labelling process is therefore, in contrast to many other approaches rather short (usually achievable within 6-12 months). However, as the complexity of the final Impact Monitor depends on the complexity of the goals it shall control, this process may show some time-related variance. The label itself is granted when an Impact Monitor has been established which is, according to the standards of the GII, deemed sufficient to control the goal achievement of the institution. It is valid for two years and can be automatically renewed if the Impact Monitor stays in place or has to be re-initiated if the Impact Monitor has been terminated meanwhile.

The GII is currently already present in Australia, Czech Republic, Canada, France, Japan, Singapore, Spain, and the UK and thus can guarantee personal real-time support globally. Already now, its members are highly known individuals in the higher education as well as the foundation environment and a number also have active ties and reputation in the business world.

4 USPs of the GII

The main USPs are:

1. The GII is the only institution offering impact assessment in internationalisation of HEIs globally.
2. The various of the GII members have global reputation in the field of internationalisation and impact.
3. The GII combines practical, consulting and academic competence in impact assessment.
4. The GII does not provide a fixed set of standards against which an organisation is measured (the “Cinderella’s shoe” problem)
5. The GII performs a coherence check, controlling whether the programme or project of an institution pursues the goals and impacts it is intended for, whether it achieves these impacts and if not, how this can be changed.
6. Every organisation can establish an Impact Monitor as it is fully customised and adaptable to the needs of the organisation.
7. The GII offers a label that can be achieved without risks attached. No organisation needs to meet absolute external standards but only has to be true to its own aims.
8. The GII helps the organisation to achieve the coherence between aims and impact and thus ensures a successful labelling process.
9. The GII offers an approach that is, to our knowledge, unique in the field of impact assessment.

5 Costs of the IAI label

The IAI label is designed to be accessible by all types of HEIs, foundations and companies. It shall be economically feasible and as efficient as possible. In contrast to other accreditations taking 3-7 years with total fees in the range of 50,000 US\$ (see <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/fees>) and own staff investment of app. 1 FTE per year over 3-7 years, the IAI label is quick and easy to establish.

Regarding the detailed costs, you may contact the Managing Director, [Dr. Uwe Brandenburg](#).