

# Improving Quality and Learning Performance of 'Energie 2000'

Evaluation Research

Ausgearbeitet durch

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Im Auftrag des

**Bundesamtes für Energie**

Oktober 2001

**Auftraggeber:**

Bundesamt für Energie, Evaluationen

**Auftragnehmer:**

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2001

Der Bericht wurde im Rahmen der Evaluationen des Bundesamtes für Energie erarbeitet. Er gibt die Auffassung der Autoren wieder, die nicht notwendigerweise mit derjenigen des Bundesamtes für Energie übereinstimmen muss.

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BBL/EDMZ Bestellnummer: 805.533 e

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## Summary

The structure of the report enables reading at three different levels of detail. This summary is the most concentrated version. The chapters 1 and 2 present all the details. Finally chapter 3 offers the intermediate reading option.

This meta-evaluation reflects upon the evaluation efforts in the 'Energie 2000' program of the Swiss office for Energy in the past decade. More than 60 evaluation studies have been conducted. These studies accompanied the implementation of the Energie 2000 program. Now at the start of the 'EnergieSchweiz' program a new period of evaluations opens up. By learning from the past experiences, the Swiss Federal Office of Energy wants to improve the co-ordination and organisation of evaluations of the 'EnergieSchweiz' program wherever possible in the future. For that reason the Federal Office initiated a formative meta-evaluation. This report gives the results of the meta-evaluation and is meant to be synergetic to the general strive to update and improve the evaluations of the 'EnergieSchweiz' program in the coming years. In particular, the meta-evaluation aimed to contribute to the further improvement of the 'co-operative approach'.

In a first step we selected five cases. The criteria used were derived from the core-interest of this study: the review of co-ordination and organisation of evaluations, especially towards the role and effects of the co-operative approach. We assessed the *scientific and utility quality* of the policy evaluations. Each case has been analysed extensively, enabling a detailed comparison of every aspect of the evaluation with the SEVAL evaluation standards. The used SEVAL standards are to a large extent identical to international accepted standards to express the quality of evaluations. Secondly the evaluation process was studied on the role of the '*co-operative approach*'. Thirdly these findings were aggregated at a more general level to allow their further processing into recommendations on *co-ordination and organisation of future evaluations*.

Although we also did (less comprehensive) secondary analysis on the quality of non-selected cases, we give into consideration that any generalisation beyond the studied cases is not valid. Especially the process-characteristics and the role and effects of the co-operative approach were studied and described in depth in order to deeper insights, not to answer the question how often similar patterns emerge.

Concerning the *scientific and utilisation quality of the policy evaluations* the following conclusions were given in consideration:

1. The evaluation tradition accompanying the 'Energie 2000' program developed over a period of a decade into a clear asset for the Swiss Federal Office of Energy and for the Swiss energy policy in general.
  - 1.1 Measured by the SEVAL standards the scientific quality of the assessed evaluation studies is 'good'.
  - 1.2 Measured by the SEVAL standards compliance with the utility is in general 'average' to 'good'.
  - 1.3 The content, methodology and results of the evaluation studies assessed in general meet the internationally accepted standards for policy evaluation research.

Concerning the role of the '*co-operative approach*' in evaluations the following conclusions were given in consideration:

2. The '*co-operative approach*' is a valuable aspect in the evaluation effort accompanying Energie 2000, its influence on the learning conditions is indispensable.
  - 2.1 If research strategies and research questions are discussed right from the beginning, and derived in '*co-operative approach*' (in consent), best conditions are shaped in terms of favourable learning conditions during and by the end of the evaluation.
  - 2.2 The implementation of the '*co-operative approach*' proved predominantly a 'during evaluation' phenomena, although, in general, the initiator tried to involve actors while producing the 'Plichtenheft'. Somehow the impact of this effort proved limited in some cases.

- 2.3 Still one evaluation was particularly incisive, two cases were productive and in two cases defensive arguments played a role.
- 2.4 In two cases the specific evaluation committee was not functioning in conformance with the reasonable guidelines for this aspect of institutional framing the '*co-operative approach*'; in one case, the committee was basically absent.
- 2.5 Where evaluation committees show signs of being composed less 'balanced', it seems that especially representation of de-central knowledge interests is missing.
- 2.6 By this, and compared with international accepted procedures, the '*co-operative approach*' is not used to its limits, and relatively a rather 'top-down' approach dominated over a 'bottom-up approach'.

The following recommendations on the *organisation and co-ordination of future evaluations* on the role of the '*co-operative approach*' were given in consideration:

3. A continuation of the '*co-operative approach*' as instrument to stimulate the learning conditions within the evaluation efforts accompanying the Swiss energy policy in general and the 'EnergieSchweiz' program specifically.
  - 3.1. Broadening and expanding the '*co-operative approach*' to the phase of preparation of the evaluations in an effort to produce balanced/incisive research strategies and -questions right from the beginning, in consent.
  - 3.2. Broadening the function of the terms of references ('Plichtenheft') into a communication and marketing tool for the evaluation effort in general and specifically towards the '*co-operative approach*'. This might stimulate involvement and learning conditions.
  - 3.3. Stronger institutionalisation of the '*co-operative approach*' into the co-ordination and organisation efforts. This especially concerns the



existence and role of a specific evaluation committee in different phases of preparation and implementation of an evaluation. This specific committee might also take initiatives to strengthen diffusion of outcomes.

- 3.4. More explicit procedures might be considered for the invitation of actors in the specific committee for an evaluation, the number of meetings, the planning of meetings.
- 3.5. Stronger described and institutionalised roles for the 'Evaluation counsellor', the evaluation co-ordinator from Swiss Federal Office of Energy, and interest representing actors from the federal policy level, the de-central governments, target groups and their representatives in specific evaluation committees (not the general 'Begleitgruppe Evaluation').
- 3.6. Institutionalisation of the role of mediator is important to handle possible negative consequences of the '*co-operative approach*'. The role of mediator in the process (fine-tuning of top-down and bottom-up aspects, control vs. learning aspects, ex-post vs. ex-ante aspects and managing interest based inputs) should be allocated within the specific evaluation committee and not be left to 'market-forces' between the interest representing actors and the evaluator. The mediator should be independent from specific interests.
- 3.7. The mediator should be capable of securing the strategic line of thinking as determined by the strategic commission and the general 'Begleitgruppe Evaluation' while participating in individual evaluations and their specific evaluation committees.
- 3.8. In an annex in every evaluation report the involved actors and their roles might be enumerated.

Finally, the following recommendations were given into consideration on the organisation and co-ordination of future evaluations:

4. Additional benefits might be covered within the evaluation efforts in the coming years. The assumption is that the already initiated further development of the organisation and management of evaluation efforts will be effective. Further, a more programmed evaluation effort might focus on a limited number of strategic questions, a more structured and embedded version of the '*co-operative approach*' might be implemented and monitored. Finally, the policy experiments present in Swiss Federal system might be exploited.
  - 4.1. Handing the general 'Begleitgruppe Evaluation' a more autonomous status can solve the dilemma between the government as political and policy actor and the government as taskmaster.
  - 4.2. A multi year program might co-ordinate individual evaluations by more strategic knowledge needs, might increase the potential for inter-case learning. The program might enumerate a limited number of strategic questions that function as departure points for the design of individual evaluations. This might prove more productive in order to underpin Swiss energy policy compared with more fragmented studies, organised ad-hoc.
  - 4.3. Institutionalisation of the evaluation function in Swiss energy policy in a multi-year program might be combined with explicit tasks and duties of the commission and procedures on developing the program.
  - 4.4. By its federative nature, Switzerland lodges a large number of policy experiments of which policy both at the federal and the canton level might profit, under the condition that a limited number of strategic questions programs the evaluation efforts. Research strategies that make use of these natural experiments by cross canton comparative designs might prove very useful. Especially in the perspective of

gaining additional insights in the effectiveness of instruments the conditions for effectiveness among which mixes of instruments.

- 4.5 The budget for evaluations, approximately 1.1% of the program costs of 'Energie 2000' can be roughly assessed in international comparison with indications from the Netherlands and the United States of America. An indication for standardized programs might range on average from 0,1% to 0,5 %. An indication for innovative programs might be on average approximately 1-2% (extreme cases to up to 5 %). With these indications in mind, the conclusion for the in general innovative 'Energie 2000' program is that the evaluation budget was 'substantial but not overdone'.