

Abstract

Title: Sustainability and public value reporting in public utilities

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In addition to numerous environmental factors, such as ecological disasters or incidents of discrimination, which are reasons for the increased public awareness concerning the activities of companies, there are further conditions which are important for public utilities. Therefore some business factors, sometimes induced by reform approaches such as the New Public Management, are gaining importance. Because of that public utilities are often subject to criticism concerning a lack of profitability or missing closeness to citizens. This criticism or the change in values and expectations of the society reflect the fact that societal pressure concerning sustainability requirements for companies is increasing. For this reason instruments of society related reporting become very important for public utilities in order to satisfy expectations and needs of a company's stakeholders and thereby gain confidence and legitimation. Furthermore companies are able to give an account of their activities and the values they are producing for the society.

The main focus of this paper is to analyse the society related reporting of public utilities. In this context the aim is to analyse the kind of society related reporting and the comparability of these reports referred to different categories, especially in an economical, ecological or social field. A further goal is to find differences in the reporting style of companies from German-speaking and English-speaking countries. In the course of the documentary analysis 27 different reports from 25 public utilities have been analysed and compared. These reports belong to public utilities from Austria, Germany, Canada, Great Britain and Australia/New Zealand.

The results of this investigation show, that reporting in terms of public value reporting is not very common in public utilities because more frequently sustainability reports or annual reports were taken into consideration for this analysis. No significant country-specific differences were found. Entirely some slight divergences were discovered concerning the reporting about the violation of the law regarding indigenous people. These contents were only found in Canadian or Australian reports. A further slight difference was found in the reporting about measures of preventing corruption which were found rather in reports of companies from German-speaking than English-speaking countries. Furthermore it became apparent that predominantly more descriptive measures are content of the reports than quantitative and performance-related indicators. As a result of the analysis, there is a lack of comparability among particular report content, because different key performance indicators are used to describe some special topics. Although some reporting guidelines have reached some harmonisation in this kind of reporting there is a potential for improvement concerning future society related reporting. For example a more precise determination of performance indicators in these guidelines could solve the problem of comparability of these reports.