

# More Governance, Less SDI: Implications for Evaluation Research

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Evaluation is endemic to human existence. It is an intrinsic property of the process of understanding, which in turn is a prerequisite for carefully considered action. Evaluation research, either in commercial or in public administration settings, has spawned a veritable industry with its own journals and conferences in the past two decades. However, despite the efforts, evaluation research seems unable to achieve a soft landing; evaluations commonly are derided as ‘beauty contests,’ because what gets scored is what can be easily measured or even measured at all.

A spatial data infrastructure (SDI) is the geographic realm of electronic governance, itself a domain fraught with conflict and fragmentation. Technological innovations too often are the focus of evaluation activities, obscuring inherent social-technical interactions between human actors, institutions and technological artifacts. While SDI evaluation approaches are maturing, there is still considerable difficulty with identifying and measuring impacts, as well as the challenge of managing the increasing complexity as we move from a SDI data-, to a service- and finally to a governance-centric perspective in SDI evaluation. We introduce a taxonomical lens from information systems research to classify existing SDI evaluation approaches as ‘control’, ‘learning’, ‘sense-making’ and ‘exploratory’ evaluations. While ‘control’ evaluation is most prevalent in SDI evaluations led by public managers, we suggest that governance-centric SDI evaluation should be exploratory in nature and should encompass the degree of convergence of rationalities and interests among actors in different spheres of governance.