

SROI analysis of fire brigades in Upper Austria

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This SROI analysis was based on the model developed by the New Economics Foundation and explored the entire fire brigade system in Upper Austria in 2010. The analysis included the Linz municipal fire brigade, 35 plant fire departments and the auxiliary fire brigades. As an alternative scenario, it was assumed that no fire brigades existed. In that scenario, all activities carried out by the fire brigades and the effects associated with these would have to be taken over by existing alternative role players, or would not be done at all. According to the logic of the analysis, the effects were assessed in terms of their monetary value and compared with the overall investment.

The study shows a wide range of tasks and activities carried out by the fire brigades in Upper Austria. It makes the (positive) effects visible that are generated by involving a large number of members in the form of broad and diverse expertise, procurement of a variety of resources, such as voluntary work and donations, etc. The different stakeholders, thus all those who contribute to the fire brigade in any way or benefit from it in any way, were examined systematically. The following groups were identified as stakeholders: the general public, the diverse receivers of services (private people, industrial and trade firms, agricultural firms, public sector, etc.), voluntary helpers, members of the municipal fire brigade, regional bodies and political sub-divisions (municipalities, state of Upper Austria and the Federation), suppliers, labour market service (AMS), insurances, companies that maintain plant fire departments, social insurances, Chamber of Labour, Chamber of Commerce and the staff provision funds.

In total, based on the surveys and calculations carried out for 2010, monetarised effects amounting to approximately 1.5 billion Euros result. On the other hand, investment of almost 148 billion Euros was projected, which comprises funds from the public sector, time expenditure of voluntary members assessed in monetary terms, donations, expenditure of the municipal fire brigades, etc. When referring the overall profit of 1.5 billion Euros to the entire investment of approximately 148 million Euros made in the fire brigade system, an SROI value of 10.2 results. **This means that every Euro invested in the fire brigades of Upper Austria in 2010 created effects equivalent to the monetised value of 10.2 Euros.** Even though the SROI value is relatively high, the consequential effects were probably still highly underestimated, as we deliberately applied a conservative approach. In case of doubt, a lower value was assumed, and some consequential effects, which could have been assessed only based on poorly corroborated and soft assumptions, were not included in the calculations. In particular as far as the area of industry and environmental damage, but also the social capital are concerned, an underestimation of the consequential effects is likely.

The by far largest percentage of the profit is generated by the damage that the fire brigade prevented through their deployments and that benefits the receivers of the service, in which regard fire deployments – compared to technical deployments – make the major contribution in this regard. Within the framework of the study, an effect of the fire deployments of 1.1 billion Euros was determined, which alone accounts for 75 % of the total profit. It is re-emphasized at this point that the present is an estimate based on many different assumptions. These can eventually never be 100% confirmed as the development of a fire depends on many different factors determined by the specific situation. The aim of this analysis is merely to demonstrate dimensions based on plausible estimates.

Even without the effect of damage prevention, it should be considered that the benefit that is generated for the general population through the created social capital, the feeling of security and expertise, and for the voluntary workers in the form of leisure time activities that provide the opportunity to make purposeful contributions, enjoy respect, etc., was assessed with 94 million Euros and thus recoups more than 60% of the total investment and 145% of the investment made by the public sector (communities, state and Federation together provide 64.8 million Euros) in the fire brigade, in which regard the actual core tasks of the fire brigade have not even been considered. Under this aspect, fire brigades in Upper Austria are highly profitable in terms of their effect on the entire society.

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The entire study is available in German at www.wu.ac.at/npo/competence