

assets in Switzerland

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In the wake of public financial management reforms, academics and practitioners have discussed and elaborated the impact of accounting reforms on heritage assets for more than three decades. Both national and international standard-setting bodies and the scientific community were not able to provide a common definition for heritage asset in an accounting context. This article presents the most relevant definitions used in public financial management as well as it elaborates on the critical issues concerning recognition, measurement and disclosure of heritage assets. Based on publicly accessible documents from twenty Swiss states and selected interviews with accounting officers from these states this paper presents an overview of what importance is being given to heritage assets in public financial reporting in Switzerland. The empirical results indicate that despite modern public financial management regimes (i.e. HAM2 or IPSAS) transparency regarding heritage assets remains very limited. As a result, recommendations for, but not limited to Switzerland are presented, which offer a possible approach to increase the level of information available on heritage assets in financial reporting.

Keywords: Heritage Assets, Public Financial Management, Financial Reporting, Switzerland, IPSAS

1 Introduction

For more than three decades¹ academics and practitioners have discussed and elaborated the impact of accounting reforms on heritage assets such as objects of historic, natural and cultural heritage. Still there are various disputes on how to cope with heritage assets from an accounting perspective (e.g. Carnegie & Wolnizer, 1996; 1999 and Micallef & Peirson, 1997). Moreover, there is no generally agreed definition for heritage assets in this context (Aversano and Christiaens, 2014; Biondi and Lapsley, 2014; Blab, 2014; Ferrone and Aversano, 2012; Glanz, 2012). Thus, one objective of this paper is to introduce the main arguments presented in this discussion so far, and to deliver an overview of the most relevant definitions available. Based on the theoretical framework and an explorative empirical analysis, the final aim of this paper is to draw conclusions for Swiss states in regard to

¹ One of the first researchers to start a broader discussion on the financial management of heritage assets was R.K. Mautz in his publication in 1981 and a later paper that followed in 1988.

their financial reporting on heritage assets. This article tackles relevant questions in a Swiss context as there is only little academic research (cf. Glanz, 2012) and practical regulation on how to cope with heritage assets.

The first section describes the purpose of this paper, elaborates the current research gap and explains the methodology used in this article. The second part analyzes the available body of literature on this specific topic of accounting. Moreover, it includes the relevant accounting standards on a national level from New Zealand, Australia and UK, which are the most cited. Also, it follows the developments on an international level, namely in the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSASB). Section three describes the current situation in Switzerland and displays the results obtained from the document analysis and the semi-structured interviews. In part four, the empirical results are discussed with regard to the theoretical implications drawn from the literature. Finally, the last section draws conclusions for Switzerland and suggests an approach to increase the level of information on heritage assets in financial reporting.

The methodology of this paper draws on literature analysis and is complemented by empirical evidence and publicly accessible documents from 20 Swiss states where accounting reforms have taken place. These results were verified through semi-structural interviews with selected chief accounting officers. The empirical results are assessed in light of the theoretical insights gained from the literature analysis. This approach allowed drawing conclusions including recommendations for, but not limited to Switzerland.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Available definitions of public heritage assets

Within the vast body of literature concerning the accounting perspective on heritage assets various definitions have emerged. The following paragraphs highlight those definitions relevant for this article².

As one of the first countries, New Zealand has defined the scope of heritage assets in the context of public accounting in its “Valuation Guidance for Cultural and Heritage Assets” (Treasury Accounting Policy Team, 2002: 3). This document provides the following definition: “Heritage and cultural assets are those assets that are held for the duration of their physical lives because of their unique cultural, historical, geographical, scientific, and/or environmental attributes.” More specifically, the NZ Valuation Guidance proposes the following elements as being cultural and heritage assets³: museum collections, heritage collections in libraries,

² This paper does not distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage assets (as described in IPSAS 31.11-15) as the majority of the analyzed literature does not make such a distinction.

³ The ASB paper was also used by the IPSASB as a basis for its consultation paper “Accounting For Heritage Assets Under The Accrual Basis of Accounting” in 2006 (cf. Blab, 2014).

art gallery collections, general collections in libraries, historical documents, historical monuments and heritage assets hold in local authority trusts.

In its discussion paper the Accounting Standards Board in the UK (ASB, 2006:18) provides the following definition for heritage assets³: “An asset with historic, artistic, scientific, technological, geophysical or environmental qualities that is held and maintained principally for its contribution to knowledge and culture and this purpose is central to the objectives of the entity holding it.” On a broader level, the current accounting regulation in the UK differentiates also between operational and non-operational heritage assets. The above cited definition only applies for non-operational assets. Those assets characterized as operational heritage assets are categorized as property, plant and equipment and hence treated accordingly. (HM Treasury, 2014)

Another definition stems from the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSASB, 2014a: para.17.10), which includes some specific paragraphs on heritage assets stating that:

Some assets are described as heritage assets because of their cultural, environmental, or historical significance. Examples of heritage assets include historical buildings and monuments, archaeological sites, conservation areas and nature reserves, and works of art. Certain characteristics, including the following, are often displayed by heritage assets (although these characteristics are not exclusive to such assets): (a) Their value in cultural, environmental, educational, and historical terms is unlikely to be fully reflected in a financial value based purely on a market price;(b) Legal and/or statutory obligations may impose prohibitions or severe restrictions on disposal by sale;(c) They are often irreplaceable and their value may increase over time, even if their physical condition deteriorates; and (d) It may be difficult to estimate their useful lives, which in some cases could be several hundred years.

However, the above paragraph is included in Standard 17: Property, Plant and Equipment (IPSASB, 2014a), therefore heritage assets are not treated as a specific category but are included in a broader scope. Thus, many researchers and academics mention the lack of a common definition of heritage assets (Biondi and Lapsley, 2014; Blab, 2014; Ferrone and Aversano, 2012; Glanz, 2012). With this in mind, Aversano and Christiaens (2014) propose a new international standard for heritage assets, since the current section within IPSAS 17 does not provide specific enough guidance in regard to recognition, valuation and disclosure of heritage assets.

³ The ASB paper was also used by the IPSASB as a basis for its consultation paper “Accounting For Heritage Assets Under The Accrual Basis of Accounting” in 2006 (cf. Blab, 2014).

2.2 Characterization of public heritage assets

The definition of heritage assets shown in the section above was preceded by a discussion on whether the term ‘asset’ is the appropriate denomination for cultural and natural heritage objects. One of the most critical comments on this subject has been made by Mautz (1988) in the late 1980s with the thought-provoking idea that assets such as monuments or national parks ought to be characterized as liabilities instead of assets. According to Mautz, this argument stems from the fact that there are, from a financial perspective, more outflows of cash (e.g. for maintenance) than inflows, hence the idea to treat them as liabilities. Mautz (1988) offered a solution to this issue in changing the denomination from asset to facilities. This terminology has received support in a more recent article from Barton (2000) who builds on the results from Mautz and revives the discussion whether public heritage facilities should be treated as assets or liabilities. However, more promptly to the discussion launched by Mautz, another interpretation has been offered by Pallot (1990) who proposes a different approach. Instead of arguing that public heritage facilities are not assets, the term assets can be altered to the extent that it would include objects of public heritage. Interestingly, in his more recent work in 2005 Barton has used the term ‘public heritage assets’, thus leading to the assumption that the terminology suggested by Pallot (1990) has prevailed.

In reference to the question whether public heritage assets qualify as being recognized as assets, the term ‘asset’ has been put under scrutiny from a different angle. Other well established researchers raised the question whether public heritage assets satisfy the criteria to be actually recognized as assets from an accounting perspective. The main discussion took place in the 1990s between the Australian Scholars Carnegie and Wolnizer (1996) and Micallef and Peirson (1997). Carnegie and Wolnizer were arguing that applying commercial accounting standards and focusing on economic benefits in a narrow sense of cash-flows for publicly-owned cultural (and natural) heritage collections and therefore qualifying them as assets is not appropriate. Even more so, they inferred that such an approach may have “counterproductive or destructive impacts” on the organizations responsible and/or in possession of these collections (Carnegie and Wolnizer, 1996: 85). Then again, Micallef and Peirson (1997) argued that cultural and natural heritage collections do qualify to be recognized as assets according to the conceptual framework developed by the Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB) and the Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (PSASB) in Australia at that time.

In its widely recognized discussion paper the ASB (2006) argued that heritage assets meet the definition of an asset as such an asset can provide service potential instead or as well as it can generate cash flows. More recently, the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSASB, 2014b) offered the following definition of an asset: “An asset is: A resource presently controlled by the entity

as a result of a past event” (para. 5.6). Moreover, the definition from IPSASB clarifies that a resource is an item with the ability to generate economic benefits or service potential.

2.3 Discussion of measurement options for public heritage assets

In its discussion Paper the Accounting Standards Board (2006: 23) suggests three possible approaches: 1) a “mixed” capitalization approach, 2) a “full” capitalization approach, and 3) a “non-capitalization” approach. The first “mixed” approach is currently applied in the UK and requires entities to capitalize all assets acquired after the year 2001, when new accounting standards have been introduced. This approach, however, faces various problems including inconsistency in the treatment of similar assets and incomplete information of the accounts. The second approach described as “full” capitalization would include the recognition of all heritage assets no matter of their time of acquisition. The third approach labeled “non-capitalization” would result in merely qualitative information. Regarding the measurement options, the ASB provides three possible methods: a) historical cost, b) current value (market-based value) and c) notional value. However, it is noted that all three possibilities have their flaws when applied to heritage assets. When using historic cost, the information might no longer be available or the asset might have been a donation. Applying current value may not be a sensible approach, since there might be no market for the asset. Finally, the notional value is the least applicable as it is a merely theoretical value and is used only under the assumption that any value would be better than assigning no value to an asset.

In a more recent study Aversano and Christiaens (2014:170-171) conclude that there are two different ways to account for heritage assets. The first would be to give heritage assets a value “somehow determined” and to recognize these assets in the balance sheet. The second approach includes recognizing the assets only in a qualitative way without assigning any value to it. Aversano and Christiaens are in favor of the latter approach, while the former is being criticized as too costly and a high level of practical difficulties that may arise from its implementation.

2.4 Preliminary conclusions

Taking into account the broad discussion concerning accounting implications for public heritage assets, some key conclusions can be drawn from this section. Considering the relevant literature mentioned to this point, it can be assumed that the term ‘asset’ is well established and the common denominator when talking about objects of public heritage in an accounting and/or financial context. These issues were first raised in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The literature review indicates that the major part of the further discussion took place in Australia and New Zealand and has spread to Europe over the past

few years. This in mind, it is striking that when it comes to public financial management Australia, New Zealand and UK all apply standards close to those of the private sector and based on accrual accounting, which is also the case for IPSAS.

3 Current situation in Switzerland

3.1 The level of information for heritage assets in Switzerland

Regarding the question as to whether collect and administer information on heritage assets on a qualitative level, the Second Protocol to the Hague Agreement recommends establishing an inventory of all cultural property in order to fulfill the duty of protection and safeguarding of a country's cultural heritage (UNESCO, 1999: Art. 5). Much earlier, the Swiss government produced and implemented the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage in 1966 with its latest update in 2014 (The Federal Council, 2014), which states: "After consultation with the cantons [states], the Federal Council shall prepare inventories of sites of national importance"(Art. 5(1)). As a result, Switzerland disposes of an inventory of its entire cultural and natural heritage on both national and state level⁴. The inventory is based on qualitative information and divides the heritage objects into two categories A) and B), while A-objects are of national significance and B-objects or of regional significance (Bevölkerungsschutz Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2009). All these efforts serve the purpose of emphasizing the value of cultural heritage objects and highlighting their significance for society.

However, this existing register is unlikely to address the unit of account⁵ issue in the same way accounting standards do. For instance, the register recognizes collections of art as one item, whereas accounting standards (e.g. IPSAS 17) require the individual recognition of each asset or even of major components thereof, if they do exist. Aggregation of assets is only permitted if they are "individually insignificant" (IPSAS 17.18) – which is rarely to be the case for pieces of art. Therefore the register itself might not provide information at the required level of detail for the accounting of heritage assets.

3.2 The Harmonized Accounting Model in Switzerland (HAM2)

Based on the federal system in Switzerland, the Swiss sub-national level consists of 26 states that enjoy a high degree of autonomy, also with respect to their accounting law and applied standards, which leads to a heterogeneous set

⁴ The information for the inventory is gathered on state level and aggregated on a national level. The compiled information includes among others: clerical buildings, archeological objects and museum collections. (Bevölkerungsschutz Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2009)

⁵ Sometimes this issue is also referred to as unit of measure issue, but the term unit of account reflects the concept more appropriately.

of accounting standards among the states. The national government and a few states have implemented the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), most states, however, have either kept the Harmonized Accounting Model 1 (HAM1), a basic accrual accounting and budgeting model introduced in the 1980s, or they are implementing the Harmonized Accounting Model 2 (HAM2), a substantially updated version of HAM1 with explicit reference to IPSAS. All states have agreed to switch to HAM2 (or IPSAS) until 2018. This paper only examines those states that have implemented either HAM2 or IPSAS by the end of 2014, which results in the 20 states analyzed in section three. In reference to heritage assets, HAM1 offers no specifications regarding the accounting of such assets. HAM2 only mentions heritage assets very briefly in the explanations concerning the chart of accounts. (SRS-CSPCP, 2015)

3.3 Results and key findings

Table 1 provides an overview what relevance is being given to heritage assets in the context of public sector financial management on state level in Switzerland. For this analysis, the authors considered all Swiss states which have been implementing HAM2 or IPSAS by the end of 2014. The assessment is based on publicly accessible information (e.g. financial statements). In order to verify the results, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of selected chief accounting officers⁶ that included members of both accounting reform groups (i.e. HAM2 and IPSAS).

Results reveal that reporting transparency of heritage assets is clearly limited although a higher level of information would contribute to a better understanding of the government's responsibility to preserve and maintain cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations. Yet, it had not become evident that heritage assets will gain importance in public sector financial management in the short- and medium-term future. The main results are presented in the following four key findings:

1. In general, it can be argued that overall financial reporting transparency concerning heritage assets is limited. In fact, half of the states assessed do not present any type of information on how they handle heritage assets in their public accounts. Ten states however provide some qualitative information about heritage assets, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting. But also these states fail to make transparent extended disclosure on how they cope with heritage assets in their financial reports. Overall, there is no single state which discloses recognition and measurement requirements under the HAM2 regime. States applying IPSAS are more transparent in this regard. All of them provide recognition and measurement criteria, either in their accoun-

⁶ The group of selected accounting officers included the following states: BL, GR, NW, SO, GL, OW, TG, UR, ZG, ZH.

ting legislation and/or financial reports. Hence, it could be argued that the adoption of accrual accounting standards more close to those of the private sector (such as IPSAS) positively influences reporting transparency for heritage assets.

2. Evidence did not support the assumption that states in possession of a vast collection of heritage assets would in turn provide more qualitative or quantitative information about their set of cultural heritage. Instead, Grisons, Vaud or Fribourg which have a relatively huge collection of national and regional heritage assets (Bevölkerungsschutz Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2009) do not make transparent how they treat heritage assets in their financial reports. Therefore it is more probable that the implementation of HAM2 or IPSAS seem to promote reporting transparency in this regard.
3. There is evidence that states that have introduced New Public Management (NPM) instruments do provide more qualitative information about heritage assets compared to their peers. Nine of ten states, which implemented NPM-elements, provide some sort of qualitative information about heritage assets and their entities responsible to maintain them.
4. Compared to their peers, one could consider the states of Zurich and Lucerne as best practice cases regarding their handling of heritage assets in financial reports. Both states provide service performance information including the stewardship of heritage assets and the responsible entities. Furthermore, both states make transparent what type of recognition, measurement and disclosure requirements they apply for heritage assets. For instance, Lucerne capitalizes its heritage assets and they are currently measured at CHF 63.4 million, which roughly accounts for 1.9 percent of total administrative assets. On the other hand, the canton of Zurich capitalizes but fully depreciates its heritage assets in the year of recognition. Despite these efforts, both states have difficulties in measuring heritage assets, as traditional measurement concepts cannot always be applied for these assets due to their very nature and characteristics (cf. Sec. 2.3).

| | Budget and accounting law | Financial reports 2014 | Notes to the financial reports 2014 |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HAM2 | | | |
| FR [†] | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| JU | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| GL | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| OW* | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| TG* | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| UR | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| ZG* | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| SG | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| TI [†] | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| VD [†] | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| SO* | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| GR** | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| AG** | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| AO | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| BL | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| NW | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| IPSAS | | | |
| ZH** | Movable and immovable HA are treated as administrative assets. If capitalized, they are fully depreciated within the year of capitalization. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) |
| BS* | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) Additional disclosures: HA are recognized as financial assets if they have a future economic benefit and if they can be measured properly. HA are recognized as administrative assets, if they have an future economic benefit or if they are used to fulfill a public service and if they can be measured reliable |
| LU* | Movable HA are not capitalized and treated as expenses. Immovable HA are treated as administrative assets and are recognized/measured accordingly. | Immovable HA are measured at 63.4m CHF which equals 1.9% of total administrative assets | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) Additional disclosures: Movable HA (e.g. paintings) are treated as expenses Immovable HA of national or regional importance, which are not internally and externally used (e.g. for renting purposes) are recognized according to the rules which apply for administrative assets |
| GE* | n.s. | n.s. | Qualitative discussion of HA, i.e. in the context of service performance reporting (goals, tasks, output measures) Additional disclosures: Immovable HA are not depreciated due to their characteristics. |

Table 1: Heritage Assets (HA) and their relevance in accounting legislation and financial reporting

Notes to Table 1:

This paper is focused on publicly available information, i.e. accounting laws, accounting manuals and financial reports as well as empirical results from semi-structured interviews. It can be assumed that most of the states have specified their accounting law in accounting manuals. However, most of these manuals are not publicly accessible. We therefore take the perspective of reporting transparency and its respective legislation, while focusing on publicly accessible information.

n.s. = not specified; * State has been introducing new public management elements such as performance contracts, performance budgets or global budgets with respect to its cultural institutions (e.g. museums); † = states with more than 200 HA of national or regional importance. (Bevölkerungsschutz Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2009)

4 Discussion

The obtained results from 20 Swiss states do not only reflect but also correspond with current scientific and technical ambiguities on how to cope with heritage assets in public financial reporting. Neither HAM2 nor IPSAS provide yet a specific single standard for heritage assets. The scientific community, as discussed in section two, is also not able to provide strict guidelines since they contradict in certain normative questions. For instance, it was stated that heritage assets do not meet the criteria to be recognized as assets in the balance sheet. Others argue in favor of a capitalization approach but raise questions concerning feasible measurement methods.

This heterogeneity of theoretical approaches and arguments is reflected on Swiss state level. Hence, some states do not provide any type of information, while others reveal limited qualitative information (in the context of service performance reporting), but do not indicate if or how they recognize and measure heritage assets. States that apply IPSAS or HAM2 are more transparent, while some recognize their heritage assets (i.e. ZH and LU). Nonetheless, they follow different measurement approaches. The following four points illustrate the main arguments concerning heritage assets on Swiss state level:

1. The lack of proper accounting guidance and ambiguous scientific approaches with respect to heritage assets substantially limits a straightforward and transparent reporting approach. Harmonization will only be achieved if clearer and more specific accounting standards for heritage assets are developed. In this context, IPSASB starts to focus on that topic later in 2015, which might lead to a decision if a new standard for heritage assets is being developed (cf. IPSASB, 2014c).
2. Discussions with chief accounting officers of Swiss states reveal that many public sector entities are reluctant to capitalize heritage assets in the absence of practical and reasonable measurement approaches. One option would be to

follow current practices in UK, which capitalize all operational heritage assets and only those non-operational heritage assets where its value is reasonably obtainable. This would at least provide some sort of guidance (cf. Sec. 2.1).

3. The results from the interviews highlight the fact that there is very little intrinsic motivation to provide (or increase) financial reporting transparency regarding heritage assets. The lack of clear accounting guidance could serve as an explanation for these responses. Another probable reason might be that an increase in reporting transparency for heritage assets is not believed to deliver any added-value. A capitalization of heritage assets might raise political attention or claims if equity levels increase in parallel. Thus, from a practical point of view, the capitalization of heritage assets does not necessarily improve the basis for decision making but might on the contrary lead to unintended political consequences.
4. The mere fact that governments are responsible to preserve and maintain heritage assets (UNESCO, 1999) for the benefit of future generations gives rise to accountability issues. It requires the provision of information about the entity's management of resources entrusted to it. However, the current level of reporting practices on Swiss state level concerning heritage assets is inadequate to meet such accountability obligations. A full capitalization might not be a feasible option for every type of heritage asset. But public sector entities could at least make transparent how they cope with heritage assets in their financial reports and for what reasons. This could be complemented by certain qualitative information such as type, nature, tasks, goals and outputs relating to service provision and stewardship of heritage assets as it is already practiced by a few states. (cf. Blab, 2014)

5 Conclusion

This paper demonstrates current ambiguities on how to treat heritage assets in financial reports, either from a theoretical, practical or standard-setting perspective. The heterogeneity of approaches is also reflected on Swiss state level. Some states do not provide any type of information. Others reveal limited non-financial information, for example, in the context of service performance reporting. States applying IPSAS or HAM2 tend to be more transparent. Yet, some states, for example Zurich and Lucerne, do recognize heritage assets, but follow different measurement approaches.

The governments' obligation of safeguarding and preservation of heritage assets for future generations requires the provision of information about the entity's management of resources entrusted to it. However, it will be likely that objectives towards heritage assets cannot be fully or adequately reflected in any measure of financial results. Hence, the recognition and capitalization of heritage assets does not necessarily correspond with greater transparency in every circumstance. Be

that as it may, financial reports might nonetheless include qualitative information about type, nature, tasks, goals and outputs relating to service provision and stewardship of heritage assets to better meet accountability obligations.

Overall, this paper argues that the current level of reporting practices on Swiss state level concerning heritage assets is inadequate to meet government's accountability obligations. And there is little evidence that this situation is going to change in the short- to medium-term future, especially when adequate guidance is scarce.

A more transparent approach regarding heritage assets would require governments to clarify (but not necessarily change) current recognition, measurement and disclosure practice in their accounting laws and/or financial reports. The integration of qualitative information such as types, responsibilities and objectives concerning heritage assets (as already practiced by different jurisdictions) would be a further step towards better meeting the government's accountability obligations. The inventory of heritage assets already in place in Switzerland could serve as a valuable starting point in supporting these efforts.

Zusammenfassung

Im Zuge von Reformen in der öffentlichen Rechnungslegung wird seit über dreissig Jahren ein wissenschaftlicher sowie praktischer Diskurs geführt, wie die Finanzberichterstattung mit Natur- und Kulturgütern (Heritage Assets) umzugehen hat. Weder nationale und internationale Standardgeber noch Wissenschaftler konnten sich bisher auf eine gemeinsame Definition für Heritage Assets einigen. Der vorliegende Artikel erläutert die gängigsten Definitionen, welche in der Finanzberichterstattung verwendet werden und diskutiert die zentralen Probleme bei der Erfassung, Bewertung und Offenlegung von Heritage Assets. Basierend auf öffentlich zugänglichen Dokumenten von zwanzig Kantonen und ausgewählten Interviews mit Finanzchefs mehrerer Kantone wurde eine Übersicht über die aktuelle Situation zur Bilanzierung und Bewertung von Heritage Assets in der Schweiz erstellt. Die empirischen Ergebnisse weisen darauf hin, dass trotz moderner Finanzberichterstattung (wie HRM2 oder IPSAS) die Transparenz bezüglich Heritage Assets sehr limitiert bleibt. Aus den theoretischen und empirischen Erkenntnissen werden Handlungsempfehlungen formuliert, welche eine höhere Transparenz bei der Bilanzierung und Bewertung von Heritage Assets ermöglichen könnten.

Schlagworte: Natur- und Kulturgüter, Öffentliche Finanzmanagement, Finanzberichterstattung, Schweiz, IPSAS

Résumé

Depuis plus de trente ans, des débats scientifiques et pratiques sont menés sur la saisie et l'évaluation des actifs d'héritage, comme les biens du patrimoine culturel et historique ou des réserves naturelles, par les états financiers. Cependant, ni les normalisateurs comptables nationaux et internationaux, ni les scientifiques ne sont parvenus à s'entendre sur une définition commune de ce type d'actifs. Cet article analyse, donc, la situation qui prévaut actuellement en Suisse au niveau sous-national. En référant aux documents publiquement accessibles des vingt cantons et aux entretiens avec plusieurs chefs des finances cantonales, il présente les définitions les plus répandues dans la pratique comptable suisse et identifie les problèmes essentiels en ce qui concerne la saisie, l'évaluation et la présentation des actifs d'héritage cantonaux. Les résultats indiquent que la transparence en matière des actifs d'héritage reste limitée malgré la modernisation de la comptabilité publique (comme par l'introduction du MCH2 ou IPSAS). A partir des connaissances théoriques et empiriques, l'article déduit des recommandations visant à augmenter la transparence de la comptabilisation et l'évaluation des actifs d'héritage.

Mots-Clé: Biens du patrimoine culturel et historique, Gestion des finances publiques, Information financière, Suisse, IPSAS

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