



Indicator-based Assessment

A Path for a better Communication on Sustainable Development in Switzerland?



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1. Context

Monitoring Sustainable Development: a challenge for the official statistics

- Normative issue
- Still a «new» issue
- Multithematic issue
- Decontextualized indicators

Versus the principles of official statistics:

- neutrality, independency, transparency



1. Context

- large indicator system
- large amount of information
- Swiss army knife syndrom





1. Context

Monitoring sustainable development in Switzerland: the MONET-System

- Based on a conceptual approach
- 47 principles of SD
- 12 topics
- 6 indicator types (here and now, tomorrow, elsewhere, efficiency, reactions)
- 73 indicators



2. Role of indicator-based assessment





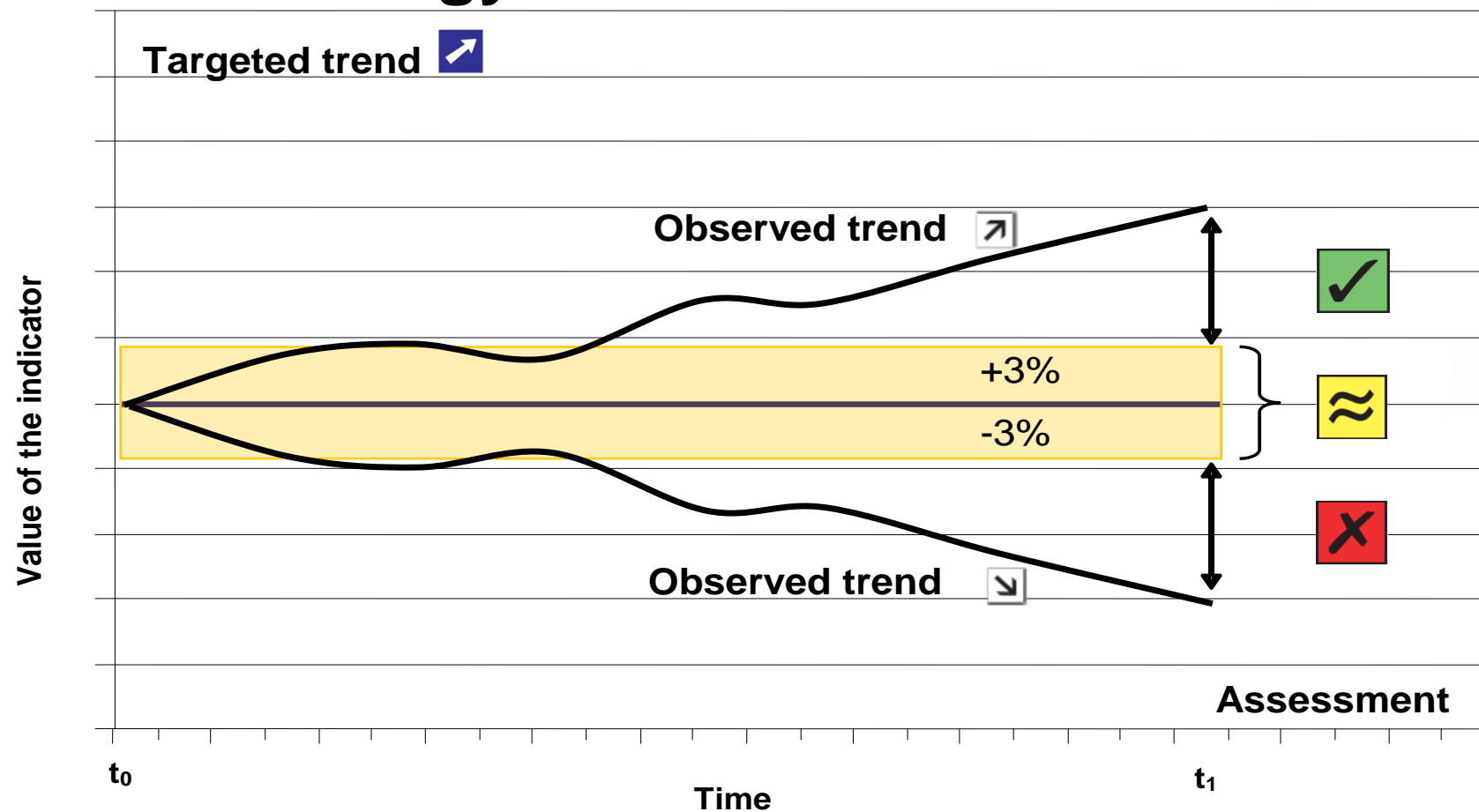


2. Role of indicator-based assessment

- Deliver easily communicable synthetic messages
 - ➔ Should facilitate the use of indicators in the policy process and by citizens
- Role of official statistics:
 - Independency, neutrality
 - **Transparency**
 - ➔ Crucial when using assessment methods!

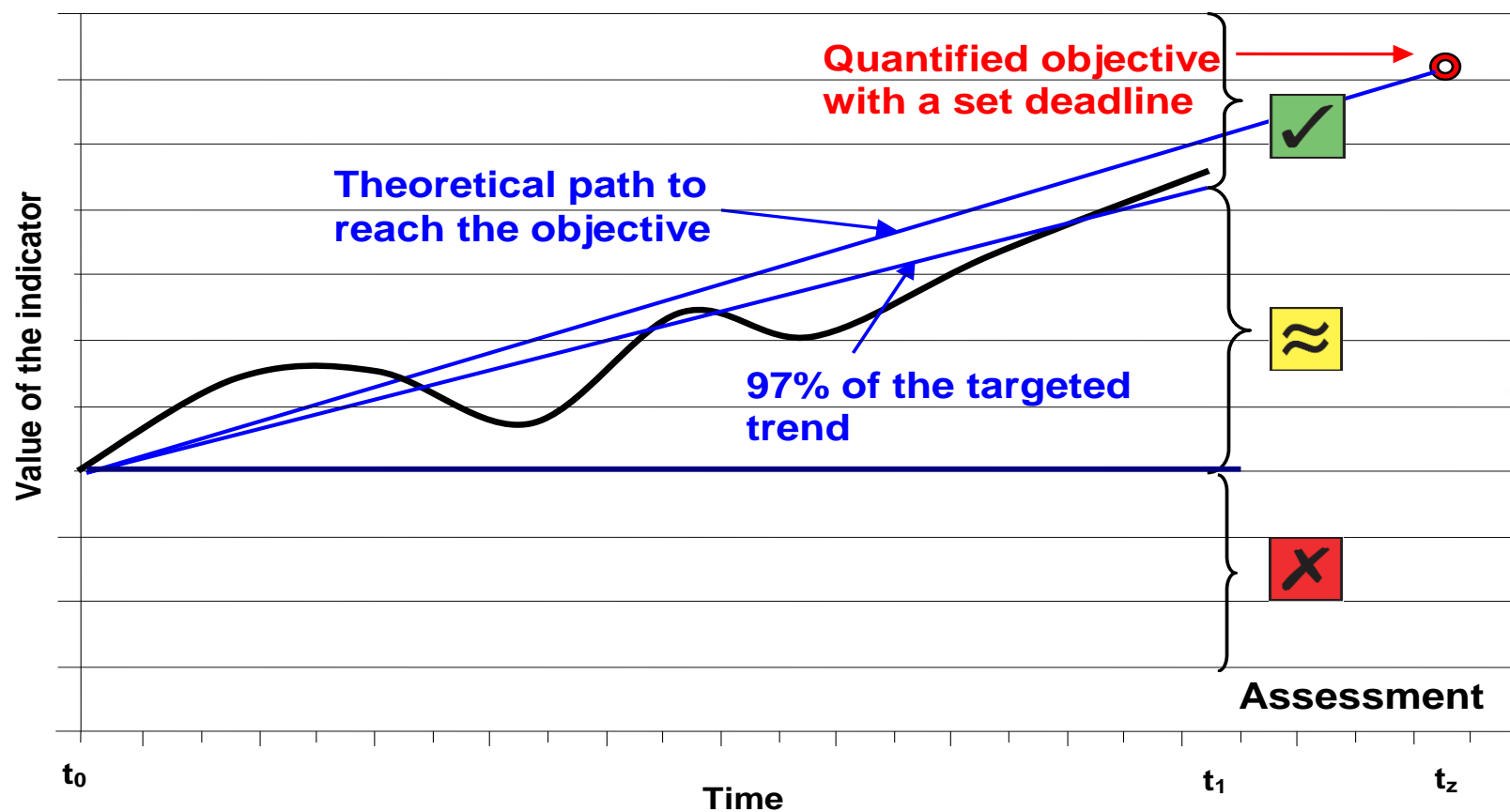


3. Methodology














3. Methodology





3. Methodology

Evaluation symbols:

Targeted trends	  
Observed trends	  
Assessment of the observed trend in relation to targeted trend	  



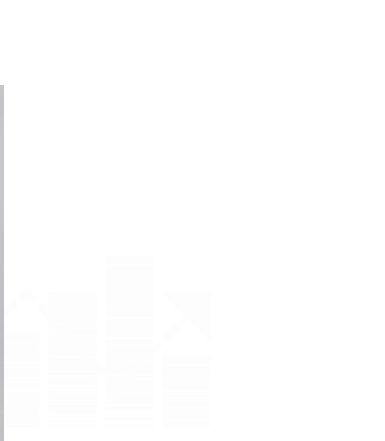
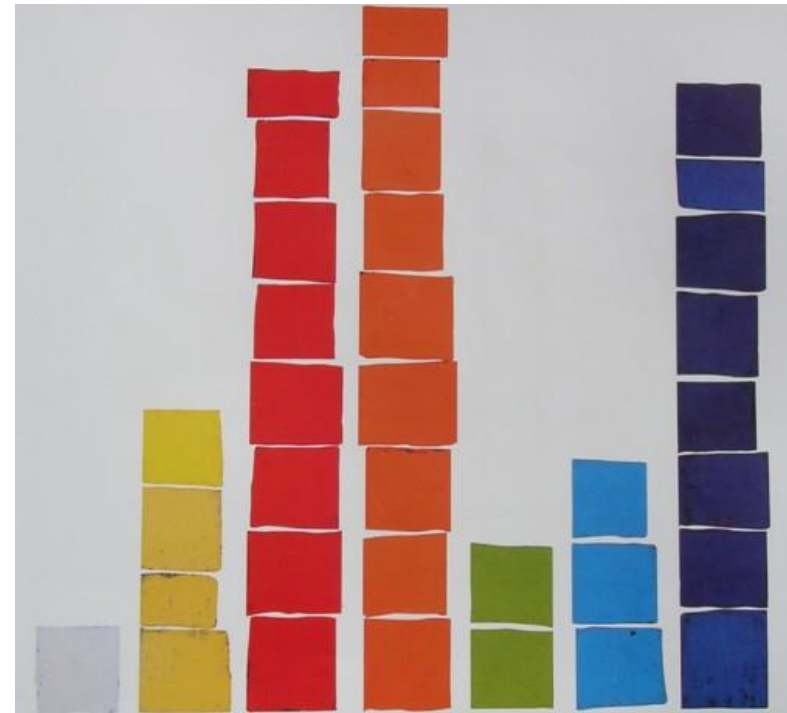
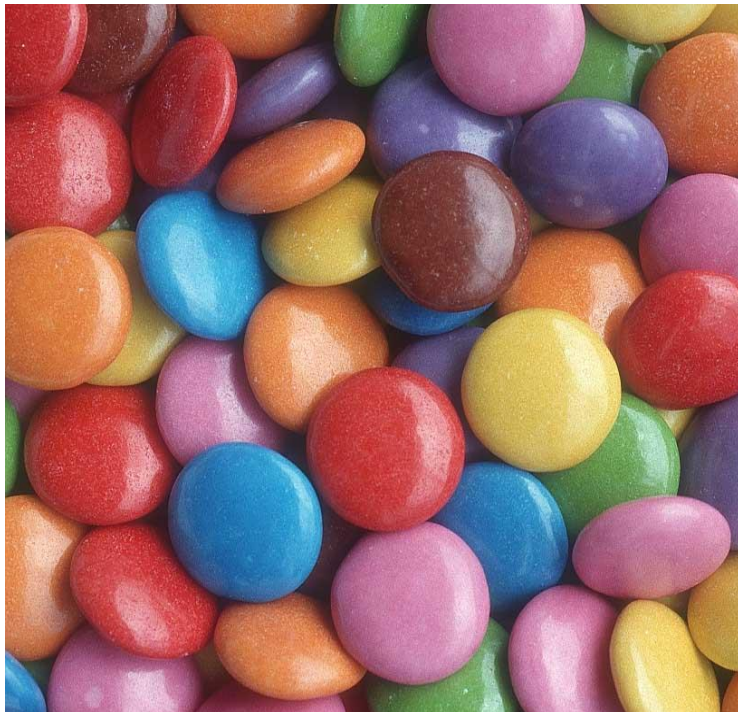
4. Communication

And now, what shall we do
with all these Smarties®?



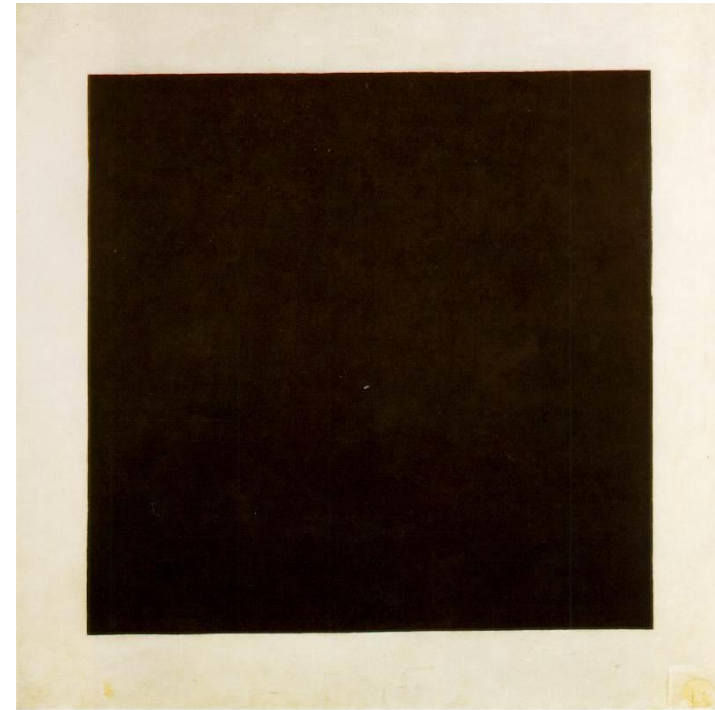
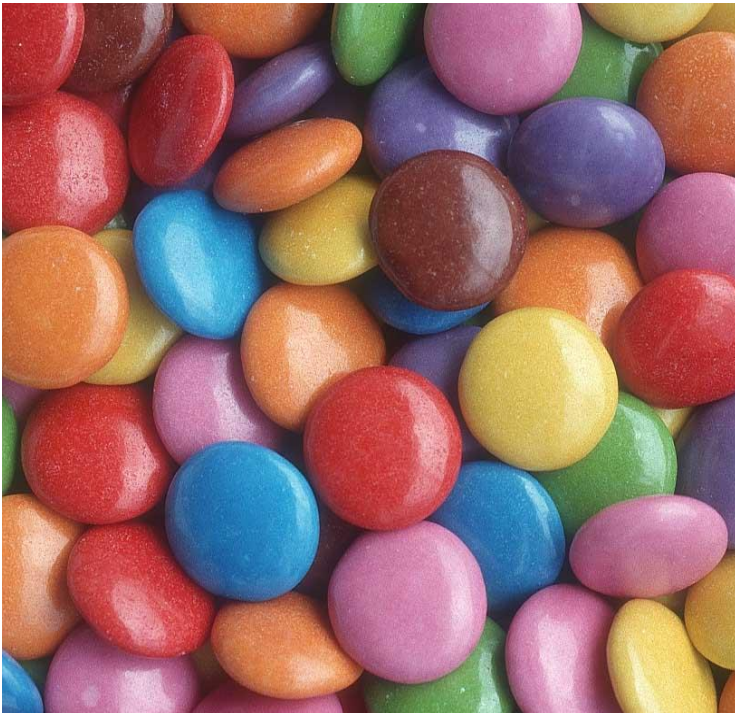


4. Communication



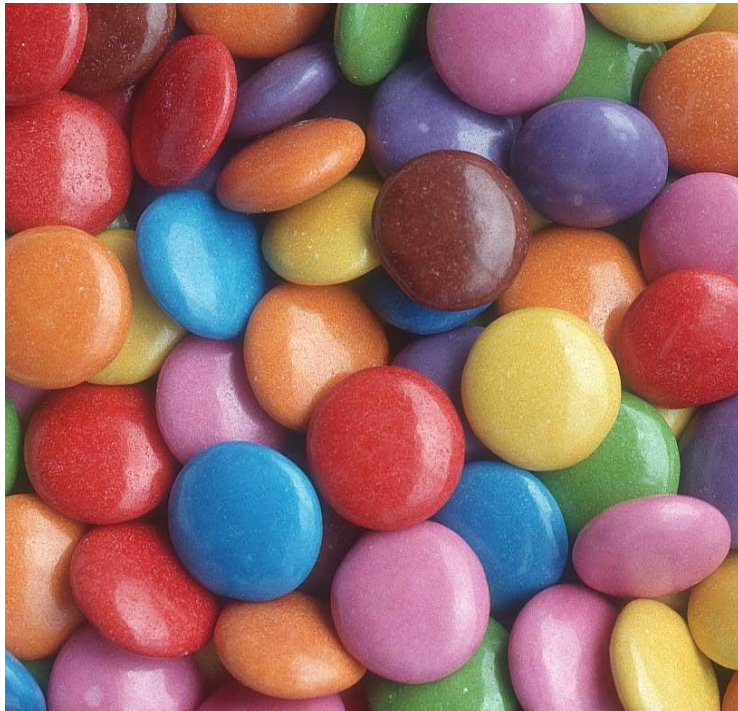


4. Communication



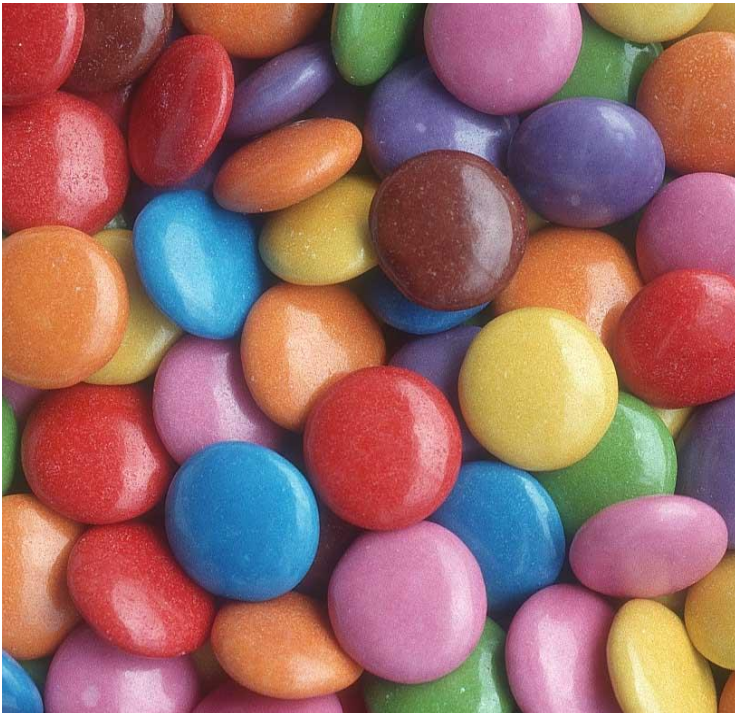


4. Communication





4. Communication



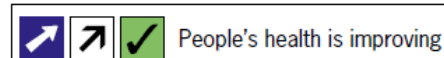


4. Communication

Three communication levels

1st: Individual indicator

Health

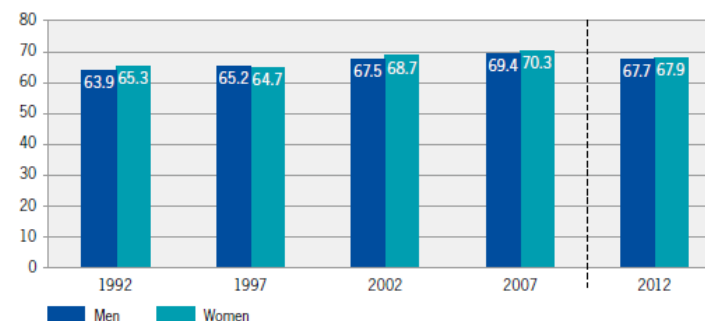


Health must be maintained and promoted

People who feel healthy are often more contented than those who are ill or disabled. At the same time, they are also more productive. The benefits of living a long and healthy life are mainly felt by people themselves. However, the goal of a healthy lifestyle is also worth pursuing in the interests of the economy and society as a whole.

Life expectancy in good health

Life expectancy at birth in years



2012: Break in the time series due to a revision of the questionnaire

Source: FSO – Swiss Health Survey (SHS)

© FSO, Neuchâtel 2015

- Between 1992 and 2007, the life expectancy of women in good health has increased by 5 years and of men by 5.5 years.
- In 2012, it was 67.9 years for women and 67.7 years for men. These data cannot be compared to previous years.
- In 2012, life expectancy in general was 84.7 years for women and 80.5 years for men.



4. Communication

Three communication levels

2nd: Dashboard

Meeting needs – how well do we live?	Trend Targeted/observed	Assess- ment	Page
People's health is improving	↗ ↘	✓	5
Income is increasing	↗ ↘	✓	6
Convictions for serious violent offences are on the rise	↘ ↗	✗	7
The unemployment rate based on ILO definition is rising	↘ ↗	✗	8
Fairness – how well are resources distributed?	Trend Targeted/observed	Assess- ment	Page
The poverty rate decreases	↘ ↗	✓	9
Official development assistance is rising	↗ ↘	✓	10
The wage gap between women and men is gradually narrowing	↘ ↗	✓	11
Preservation of resources – what are we leaving behind for our children?	Trend Targeted/observed	Assess- ment	Page
Teenage reading skills are improving	↗ ↘	✓	12
After an increase, the public debt has returned under the level of 1992	↘ ↗	✓	13
The investment to GDP ratio is about the same	↗ ↘	≈	14
More people are working in science and technology	↗ ↘	✓	15
The populations of breeding birds are on the rise	↗ ↘	✓	16
The settlement area required per person is increasing	↗ ↘	✗	17
Decoupling – how efficiently are we using our natural resources?	Trend Targeted/observed	Assess- ment	Page
No significant change in the freight transport intensity	↘ ↗	≈	18
The public to total transport ratio is increasing	↗ ↘	✓	19
The per capita consumption of energy is decreasing	↘ ↗	✓	20
Material intensity is decreasing	↘ ↗	✓	21



4. Communication

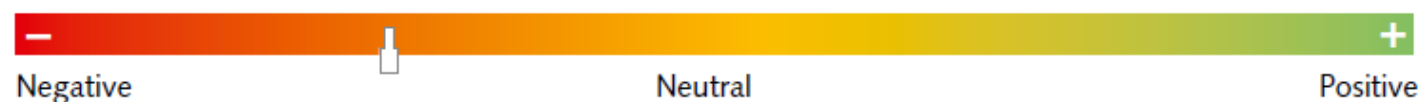
Three communication levels

3rd: Aggregated dashboard

Aggregation of the challenge «Spatial development and transport»

Indicators:

- Built-up area
- Built-up area per capita
- Modal split of passenger transport
- Persons affected by noise
- Intensity of freight transport



Legend: yellow = neutral (unchanged) (value 0, no cursor movement); red = negative (value -1, movement of the cursor one place to the left); green = positive (value +1, movement of the cursor one place to the right)
Adapted from the dashboard of sustainable development (www.monet.admin.ch)



4. Communication

Transparency: are the elements of the assessment communicated to the user?

- Targeted trend (not always implicit!)
- Objectives or target
- Period analysed
- Calculation results



Targeted trend	Objectives	Initial value	Final value	Change in %	Observed trend	Assessment
Growth	2c	2009	2013	20.7	Growth	Positive



4. Communication

Transparency: possibility
to look
behind the dashboard





5. Limitations

The role of the statistician (or whoever is dealing with indicator assessment)

Targeted trend:



Observed trend:

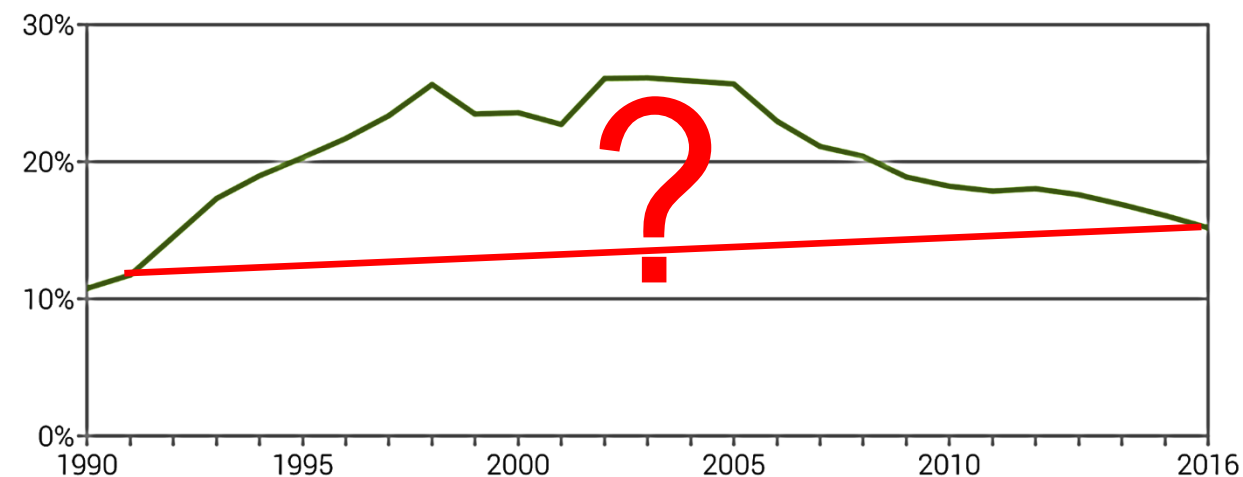


Assessment:



Tasso d'indebitamento della Confederazione

Debito lordo della Confederazione rispetto al prodotto interno lordo



Fonte: AFF – Rendiconto finanziario

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5. Limitations

The role of the statistician (or whoever is dealing with indicator assessment)

- Assessment shall not be an automatic action
- How to determine base year and thresholds?
- There is no empty space between base year and the year of the last available value
- **Use your brain while assessing indicators**



6. Conclusions

Indicator-based assessment = simplification of message

→ **importance of transparency**

... because simple \neq simplistic!

In other words:

Allow the reader to use his/her brain at least as much as you did while developing the assessment method



6. Conclusions

Assessing indicators is an exercise on the edge...

... of the role of statisticians

... of aggregation of information

But facilitate communication





6. Conclusions

There are still open questions but official statistics provide scientific and standardised methods

- Methods can be refined
- Several methods existing with different results
- Where to stop aggregation? Dashboard vs Synthetic Index, Claude Monet vs Paul Klee vs Kasimir Malevitch
- To be considered as “Placeholder”



Thank you for your attention !

Further information:

www.monet.admin.ch (in German and French, partially in English and Italian)

[Getting messages across using indicators - A handbook based on experiences from assessing Sustainable Development Indicators - 2014 edition](#) (Eurostat publication)

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