

## EVALUATION CONNECTIONS

The EES Newsletter

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## A nostalgic look back at the Lisbon Conference

M. Saunders, EES President

I thoroughly enjoyed the Lisbon Conference but since the first task of an evaluator is to evaluate, I asked my colleagues on the EES Board to join me in a dispassionate review of Conference survey results at our first meeting following the conference, on November 5th in Paris. A full account of the evaluation will be posted on our web site.

While we were pleased that a vast majority of participants had expressed satisfaction with the Lisbon venue and the substantive content of the Conference, we focused our debate on the spirited critiques offered by some participants. Our aim was straightforward - to learn how EES could further improve on the design and implementation of its Conferences.

We did a lot of things right. A very big majority of respondents in all categories (350 participants) felt the conference had been satisfactory to excellent. About 80% of judged the scope, relevance, quality of chairs and networking opportunities to have been good to excellent while fewer but still a majority (65%) felt the same way about the overall quality of the presentations and the keynotes.

The Lisbon Conference Centre was frequently praised as an effective platform. The conference centre was perceived as good to excellent. The meeting rooms were close together, many were of good size, the catering was appreciated and participants thoroughly enjoyed the

receptions although there were suggestions that a gala dinner or event would have added sparkle to the event and should be built into future EES conferences, at an optional feature.

All EES members can draw pride in the success of the Conference share in the success of the conference but complacency is not in order. Hence, the EES Board considered a number of ways of further improving the quality of Conference offerings. Among the many ideas that we explored was the need to experiment with alternative formats for our plenary sessions, to provoke more polemic and to elicit more challenging material so as to generate debate.

There is little doubt that we can do more to ensure that presenters and keynoters make the most of the opportunity offered to them through explicit guidance regarding style, content and presentation. We can also do more to balance the programme and sequence it so as to offer more meaningful choices to participants and reduce the compression that was experienced by some presenters in Lisbon.

The EES "brand" (relaxed atmosphere, friendliness, no prima donnas, hospitality etc.) was alive and well in Lisbon. We managed to attract more participants (630) than the last highly successful EES-UKES conference in London. We have attracted a large number of new members. At 500 members, we are growing and we would like to continue this positive trend. We did exceptionally well in reaching out across borders (70 countries) and in attracting delegates from all over the world especially from Eastern/Central Europe (73 or 11.6% of the total). And we know that participants had plenty of opportunity to network and interact. This would not have been possible without the

partnership of the Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE) and the generous support of (list all bursary providers, please)...

In part, we chose Lisbon as our venue for the EES conference in 2008 to give a boost to the evaluation community in Portugal and provide momentum for the emergence of a Portuguese evaluation society. This objective complies with the first of our strategic objectives - to support and enable the development of new evaluation societies in Europe. We can now report that the session that was undertaken in Portuguese on the 1st of October attracted some 80 participants and resulted in a follow-up event that has laid the groundwork for the development of a Portuguese evaluation association. EES will continue to provide support for this initiative.

We are equally committed to enabling opportunities for European Societies to exchange practice, to work together and to develop a distinctively European 'orientation' towards evaluation. As we reported, in the last edition of Evaluation Connections, evaluation societies in Europe have shown a

strong interest in knowledge exchange and the Societe Francaise d'Evaluation initiated, in cooperation with the EES, a gathering of the national societies on the 2nd of July in Strasbourg. In June 2008 the EES conducted an online-survey for preparing and presenting an overview at a meeting of national societies in the advent of the SFE/DeGEval conference in Strasbourg.

In Lisbon, a follow-up meeting took place and it confirmed the commitment to collaborative work across societies using the new Network of Evaluation Societies in Europe (NESE) mobilized by Jacques Toulemonde. Under the aegis of EES, NESE will be the main vehicle through which exchanges, knowledge building and collaboration will occur at the level of the national evaluation societies in Europe.

Please watch this space for news of our 2010 conference which will be announced in the spring of 2009.

## Two Papers from the Lisbon Conference...

### M. Saunders, EES President

Papers from the Conference in Lisbon October 2008: expressions of the role of evaluation in social capital building  
 Participative decision-making and social capital: A study from Poland (Agnieszka D. Hunka<sup>1</sup>, Wouter T. De Groot)  
 Evaluators as Information Brokers – Approach to enhance social capital and policy coherence  
 (Petri Uusikylä & Dr. Petri Virtanen)

It is my pleasure to introduce two papers from the Lisbon Conference that embody the themes of the conference in an explicit way. They have been chosen because they explore the way in which evaluation can help build social capital, but in quite distinctive and diverse environments.

Agnieszka Hunka and her colleagues analyse the way in which evaluation can provide resources for the development of a more responsive approach to decision making in a social and political environment in which, traditionally, low trust and a 'top down' tendency to social policy decisions. The prompt for these developments has been the tension inherent in the complex requirements of EU membership for Poland in which more involvement in key decision making is needed.

In contrast Petri Uusikyla and Petri Virtanen provide a meta analysis in which the European context is depicted as complex, multi layered and interconnected. However, at the same time, the citizenry of the European Union are in danger of becoming more and more dislocated from who decides and , on what basis and what effects do these decisions have to daily life. They argue that this produces a big challenge for evaluators. They introduce the idea of 'brokerage' where evaluators and evaluations might act as a 'bridging tool' or mechanism between governments and citizens that builds their capacity for political 'conversation'. In this way, evaluations aid in developing the connective tissue that social capital can provide for national and international systems

# Evaluators as Information Brokers – Approach to enhance social capital and policy coherence

Petri Uusikylä & Dr. Petri Virtanen, Net Effect Ltd., Finland

## Abstract

Modern societies live in the age of connectedness. Today, policies are more complex and interconnected. National governments have less abilities and policy instruments to steer societal development. Global issues (financial flows, environmental changes, ethnic and social conflicts and mass movements of population) have instant and direct impacts on European and national policymaking. Especially in the European Union multilevel governance system citizens are less and less informed who decides on what and what effects do these decisions have to their everyday life. All this sets enormous challenges also to expertknowledge and evaluation. Traditional programevaluation models and approaches are unable to provide this understanding to decisionmakers – not to mention average citizens of Europe.

In this paper, we propose that evaluators should take more active of a role as information brokers between governments and citizens. Evaluators should have an active role enhancing social and policy capital and strengthening policy coherence. Basic idea is to combine bottomup information and weak signals (what citizens need to know, which are their interest, where are major gaps of ignorance) and topdown information (what is the state of the art expertknowledge on relevant issues, how this can be synthesized and what governments are deciding). New information technology and open architecture of knowledge provide great possibilities for experts such as evaluators to act as information brokers between citizens and government. New thinktanks need to be created as well as new discussion fora. Traditional evaluation reports are history. Experts need urgently new and agile channels to provide their information and knowledge and to hear what citizens want to know.

Keywords: social capital, democratic governance, evaluators role, policy coherence

## Setting the Scene | The MicroChallenge: Decisionmaker with regard to evaluation information

We start with a case study that aims to cast light to the microcosmos of the dissemination of the evaluation information. First, let us remind of the simple definition of rationality which is the foundation of economics. Namely, rational people respond to incentives: when it comes more inconvenient (or costly, for that matter) to do something, people tend to do less (or decide that they do not do anything); and when it becomes more convenient (or cheaper or more beneficial), they will tend to perform at highest level (or at least to do more). Thus, people weight up their choices, they will mind the overall constraints upon them (not only costs and benefits, but their “total budget”), and finally rational people consider the future consequences of their present choices. To give you an example from everyday life (referring here to Harford 2008, who presents a ray of examples in the light of economics ranging from marriage, falling in love, buying a car, sexual habits to gambling, just to mention few examples): if the price of Toyota rises, you probably buy some other car instead (in case if you are not a Toyota enthusiast, of course), if your salary rises, then you plump for a Ferrari (considering of course your total budget) keeping in mind, if you are rational, i.e. mindful of future consequences), that the loan to buy that Ferrari must eventually be repaid. Thus, we should consider the rationality of decisionmaker be he/her a politician or highlevel civil servant. In the following, we make a sketch of threedimensional model that takes places when decisionmaker makes his/her decisions based on the evidence he/she is provided by the evaluator. We simplify reality in the following being

fully aware that evaluation is not a homogenous practice in various policy fields, not to mention the different “academic roots” of evaluation practice and different capital forms embedded in it (e.g. Ahonen & Virtanen 2008): an economist tends to evaluate in a different way than the sociologist, and medical and other healthcare specialists, scholars of social work, and researchers on environmental policy may also tend to apply their own approaches and methods. These differentiations must certainly be taken into account in the relevant studies, as do differences between countries and their traditions, between various branches of public administration, and between different levels of administration—federal, national, regional, and local.

Despite the fact that evaluation differs in terms of approaches and methods, some thematic issues remain the same in all evaluation variations. We think that disseminating evaluation information is among these thematic issues – i.e. policy makers deploy the same kind of thinking process regardless of the policy field they operate. Thus we suggest that the threedimensional model presented in the following is universal by nature. It consists of three parts, namely the weighting up the choices, considering the overall constraints, and finally assessing the future consequences of the choice made by the decisionmaker. We discuss these parts – or steps as we call them in table 1 below – each separately. First step: weighting up the choices of using or not using the information provided for him/her. There are two options for the decisionmaker, he/she can either a) use the information evaluators provide him/her or b) not use the information evaluators provide him/her. This is a typical go/nogo –decision. We assume that decisionmakers tend to do this decisions intuitively based on their previous experience on evaluation and politics per se. What matter here are questions such as, to give two examples, how trustworthy evaluators are (or to be more precise, what is the

evaluator's reputation based on previous evaluations) and what is the intellectual, political and conceptual capacity of the decisionmaker to make that go/no go decision.

Evaluator's means to enhance decisionmaking are in this first step of limited nature. One practical hint on this concerns the technical quality of the evaluation report (and therefore it is useful that existing evaluation standards stress the quality aspects of evaluation reports by highlighting the structure adopted, the concepts used and the language deployed. However, this first step decision simplifies reality of course and it is thus preliminary phase in the decisionmaking process. What follows from this step is of important. The first step go/no go –decision is tentative phase in terms of decision making as a whole.

Second step: considering the overall constraints of his/her decision (in addition to the costs and benefits of his/her specific choice in the first step). The rationale in this second step – from decisionmaker's perspective – stems from various logic. First, decisionmaker can be criticised on the basis of his/her decisions. He/she can be accused for having inadequate grounds for the decisions he/she has made or criticized for not taking on account the information available at the time of making the decision. On the other hand, life is not easy for the decisionmaker because the quality of evaluation information varies – some of the reports are good, some are not. The more evaluation studies are carried out and the more evaluation processes are underway, the higher the risk of ending up with bad quality or somewhat twisted evaluation information caused by the overwhelming amount of evaluation reports – or evaluation tsunami, as Geert Bouckaert (2008) put it recently in assessing the outputs of the current evaluation industry. Purposefully we do not consider here so much evaluation ethics even though we acknowledge the importance of evaluation's moral ground (and this has been discussed a lot over the last years among various evaluation communities throughout the globe). However, we would like to remind the reader that anything can happen and the "reading and dissemination guidelines" are definitely needed in judging the merit of evaluation information. By addressing

anything can happen we refer to Alan Sokal for instance, he having published a total mambojumbo article in 1996 with the title "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" (Sokal 1996) and caused an uproar among the postmodernists he had so convincingly parodied. According to his own words, his life was not the same anymore after this publication because of the public debate among academics as well as in media (Sokal 2008).

Secondly, decisionmaker can be accused – in the spirit of accountability – of wasting taxpayers money by not using the evaluation information provided by commissioned evaluators. Evaluations cost money, as we all know. And if you are not using them, for some reason or another, after they have commissioned, that is a waste of taxpayers money.

Thirdly, decisionmaker ends up in an odd position if the policy field he/she in charge of is not using modern evaluation and information management tools, and the other fields are. Think of, for instance, a Government meeting when the Prime Minister is asking two Ministers for the basis of their proposals. Let us assume that one Minister is able to present a fullblown feasibility study of a new policy initiative and the other one has only intuitive guesses to put forward for the basis of his/her policy initiative. Which one of the Ministers is likely to win? Our experience – both working in several Ministries in Finland says that the one without hard evidence.

What evaluator can do in order to strengthen the role of evaluation information in the second step? The technical quality of the evaluation report is not enough as it was the case in the first step. In this phase, the quality aspects concern the whole evaluation process meaning that the evaluator must convince the decisionmaker that the evaluation has focused on right questions, it has been carried out by deploying most appropriate evaluation design, the information produced is based on sophisticated evaluation methods and analysis, the recommendations are based on the findings, as well as the findings are based on data, and so on.

Third step: assessing future consequences of the decision made in the first step. This phase consists of

two fundamental aspects. The first one of these concerns the trustworthiness of the decisionmaker as a whole. If you make one bad decision, it might be an exception, "bad luck". If you make several bad decisions, then it might convey the idea that the decisionmaker is incompetent. If you make nothing but bad and uninformed decisions, you are no longer a decisionmaker (if you live in a Western democracy). Secondly, and this time looking the matter from the society's point of view, using good quality evaluations can enhance the betterment of society per se – be that better policies, better projects, better administrative functions or better quality in public services. In this light, the role of evaluation turns out to be a decisive factor in society. Evaluators are not only producers of information but also brokers of information from evaluation field to the field of policy and decision making.

The third step is a reality check for evaluation practice and professionals. Namely, the life is not easy for evaluators as well (as it was stressed in the second step with the regard to decisionmakers). Carrying out evaluations is only one path to "broker expertise" and not sufficient by itself. What other expertise – or accumulated capital, if we use the concepts by Pierre Bourdieu (1979; 2004; Ahonen & Virtanen 2008) – is then needed is a good question. Our experience is that an evaluator has to be active in various fields, policy arenas and social worlds and not only to be trapped into evaluation field as an "evaluation professional". To be credible evaluator has to participate in public discussion, publish actively in both academic as well professional journals, work as a practitioner or consultant for public administration and participate in political debates – i.e. to carry out functions that strengthen his/her professional position in various fields in society. This is perhaps a major (if not paradigm) shift in terms of the role of the evaluator in society. If the evaluator of the twentieth century was academic, then the evaluator of the twentyfirst century should be a brokerconsultant. The main points of the threedimensional decisionmaking process is summarized in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Threestep process of evaluation information deployment

Steps of the process	The rationale of the decisionmaker	The means of an evaluator to enhance the deployment of evaluation information
STEP 1. Weighting up the choices	Simple question: To use or not to use the evaluation information they are provided?	The technical quality of the evaluation report.
STEP 2. Considering overall constraints	Contextual question: What else is connected to my decisionmaking and what do I have to take into account when using the outputs of evaluation processes?	The total quality of evaluation process.
STEP 3. Assessing future consequences	Complex and timerelated question: How my trustworthiness as a decisionmaker evolves and how the society reacts?	Strengthening the evaluator's role in society by different active measures including publications, consultation and evaluation service delivery.

### Setting the Scene II The MacroChallenge: Coping with More Complex Policy Domains

Bounded rationality (e.g. Simon 1957), garbagecan decisionmaking and irrational organizational decisionmaking (e.g. Brunsson 1987) are not only problems of singleorganization or singlepolicy decision but have massive cumulative effects in a multilevel and nested bargaining game (Tsebelis 1990) of European policymaking. This can lead – not only to government overload and ineffective policymaking but also to the sclerosis of political institutions, deteriorating trust on government and finally towards paralysis of democratic governance.

Governments throughout the Europe are facing enormous challenges in trying to cope with increasing turbulence in policyfields and evolving complexity and interconnectedness of policies. Attempt to curb the negative impacts of the climate change is a textbook example of the paralysis of politicoadministrative systems in Europe. Problem itself is of global nature and has direct and indirect linkages to energy policy, traffic policy, entrepreneurship policy, health policy and tax policy to name only few policy areas.

Sectorbased administrative structures do not support comprehensive and appropriate horizontal policypreparation and the use of multipolicy assets needed to tackle the problem. Multilevel forms of governance and various players at the different level of steering system (in this case:

globalEuropeannationalregional and local) makes it even more difficult for decisionmakers to see the big picture

and to make right decisions that really have an impact. All this has altered the dynamics of policymaking and set new restrictions for democratic governance.

Figure 1. Negative path towards paralysis of democratic governance  
Information overload

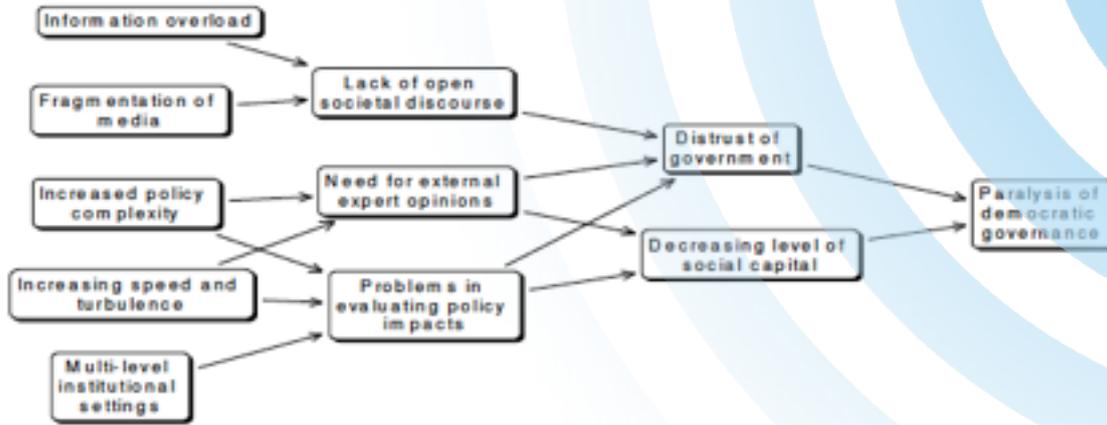
Figure 1 explicates how we see the main factors leading to the paralysis of democratic governance. Information overload together with the fragmentation of the media has created tremendous difficulties in having open political or societal discourse on public affairs. On the other hand, also decisionmakers are more and more dependent on external expert opinions provided by various thinkthanks, research institutions, evaluators etc. The paradox, however, is that more dependent the policy makers are on scientific facts when trying to create evidencebased decisionmaking culture the less answers they are likely to receive. Given the increased complexity of policies, high speed of changes in operating environment and multilevel institutional structures of governance more difficult it is for external experts or evaluators to provide empirical evidence of the impacts of government policies not to mention the forecasts for estimated impacts of wouldbe policies. From the governance point of view this has already lead to an increasing distrust of national governments and European institutions (see e.g. Flash Eurobarometer 20061) and decreasing level of social and political capital and is likely to cause obstacles democratic governance in long run.

The increasing societal complexity and interconnectedness set new challenges both for strategic management and for evaluation of publicsector performance (see Virtanen & Uusikylä 2004). New strategic challenges have to do with

managing complex interorganizational networks, coping with complex and interconnected policies and creating proactive strategies rather than only reacting to environmental changes.

As Kickert and Koppenjan (1997, 39) put it: “In modern society, an approach to public management not only has to deal with norms and values that go far beyond the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency (...) Public management is the ‘governance’ of complex networks, consisting of many actors [both private and public] (...) Public ‘governance’ is the directed influencing of societal processes in a network of many cogoverning actors. These actors have different and sometimes conflicting objectives and interests”. There is a clear need to move from performance management to performance governance.

Kooiman (1993, 2) defines governing as “all those activities of social political and administrative actors that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage (sectors or facets of societies” and governance as “the patterns that emerge from governing activities of social political and administrative actors”. Pierre and Peters (2000) treat governance both as structure and process. They begin by discussing four common institutional models of governance: hierarchies, markets, networks and communities. Each of the four structural arrangements addresses the problem of providing direction to society and economy in its own way. As Pierre and Peters (ibid, 15) note, each appears effective in solving some parts of the governance problem, but each also has its weaknesses. They also make an important claim that since each of the solutions is culturally and temporally bound, they may be effective in certain



places and times, but are not a panacea for all societal problems.

1 Most of the respondents to the Eurobarometer survey claimed that they would be interested in knowing more about the EU policies receiving more information from the EU related policies but are disappointed to the amount and quality of information they receive at the moment.

### Setting the Scene III – The MesoChallenge: Bridging the Structural Holes between DecisionMakers and Citizens

Expectations concerning the role of evaluators vary between different evaluation cultures and paradigms applied. Evaluator can be expected to be a neutral judge, facilitator, provider of accountability and sometimes even a problem or conflict solver. The most usual evaluator roles can be outlined as follows (Albæk 2001):

Evaluator as a neutral, problem solving social engineer in the politicaladministrative decision making process

Evaluator as a controller in an attempt to keep implementation bodies responsible for their dispositions

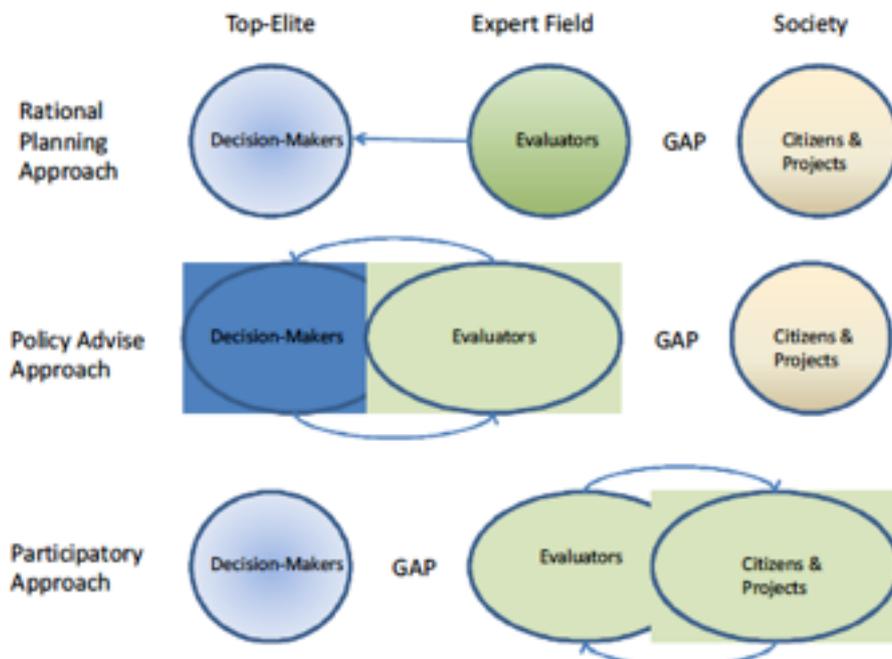
Evaluator as an adviser in praxis, in an attempt to build up or adjust public initiatives or activities

Evaluator as a mediator between divergent knowledge interests

Evaluator as a midwife or therapist for disadvantaged groups in the society (often used in action research).

In the real world these roles are often combined and acted simultaneously. However, neither commissioners of evaluations nor evaluators themselves explicitly state their expectations or preagreed rolesetting. In most of the cases ToRs and chosen evaluation design and methodology sets certain parameters for rolesettings applied.

Evaluations normally serve also many audiences and purposes for utilizing evaluation results. These can serve decisionmaking process, managerial use, information needs of the stakeholders/ clients or expose certain hidden agendas and serve information needs of the public audience. In Figure 2, we try to simplify the alternative structural positions evaluator shares between the citizen and decisionmaker. This is to demonstrate how these simplistic strategic alliances in three planning paradigms deepen the information gaps (later called as structural holes) between citizens and the government. The first setting, namely Rational Planning Approach (RPA) has its roots in positivistic evaluation paradigm. Here the role of evaluation is mainly to judge and value policy decisions (ex ante, interim or ex post). Evaluators are expected to be neutral and base their scientific inquiry on pure facts and evidence. It is



wellknown caveat of RPA that no matter how systematic and methodologically pure the scientific inquiry is, it is impossible to observe the reality based on hard facts only. Fullscale analysis and judgement is always dependent on the interpretative framework and subjective assessment made by the evaluator. When these are not explicitly stated, it is difficult for public audience and citizens to verify whether evaluations are methodologically justed and sufficiently robust. This creates an information gap between decisionmakers (topelite) and the civil society and thus evaluation do not sufficiently serve the purpose of enhancing mutual learning or accountability. During the 1980s and 1990s rigid positivistic models were mostly replaced either by constructivist (Cuba & Lincoln 1989), realistic (Pawson & Tilly 1997) or utilizationfocused approaches (Patton 1997). The last one emphasizes strongly the usability of evaluation results, i.e. results could be used to reformulate policies or restructure organizations. This links the role of evaluator to our second model which is Policy Advice Approach (PAA). In this approach decisionmakers (topelite) and evaluators often belong to same policy communities and issuenetworks and are likely to share common knowledge, policy framing and thus have mutual interests. This is likely to reduce the critical role of evaluator and tie him/her tightly to the existing advocacy coalition trying to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies. Joint action in any closed circle of policy community tends to create a homophily bias in networks, which means that relations are more likely between people who share socially or politically significant attributes such as ideological values, profession, age, educational background or place of living. Dense networks and commonly shared norms and values tend to weaken the innovativeness of the social system (Granovetter 1985) and reduce transparency and open dialogue at the systemic level. Citizens or grassroots level projects are seldom involved or consulted. This is mainly due to lack of information and knowledge but is also a natural cause of complexity and multilayer institutional settings. This is likely to widen the gap between policymakers and citizens and thus

increase passiveness and distrust on government among citizens. Participatory approach (PA) refers to variety of methodological choices to involve and empower participants and stakeholders to project implementation. These models also attempt to build trust relations between the evaluator and citizens or local projects. The evaluator is likely to assume a responsive, interactive and orchestrating role bringing together different groups of stakeholders with divergent views for mutual exploration and to generate consensus. The evaluator plays a key role in prioritizing the views expressed and 'negotiating' between stakeholders. The problem however can be that the influence of this local level consensus building or bonding on policies normally remains rather modest (Uusikylä & Karinen 2005). The vertical gap between implementing agencies (local governments, projects, associations) and decisionmaking bodies still exists in spite of good will to enhance openness and transparency of the policymaking environment. Also the flock of evaluators seems to be divided into two subcluster: those advising policy makers at the top of the decisionmaking hierarchy and those empowering implementing agencies at the grassroots level. Should our analysis be correct, there are several gaps of information or knowledge between key players in society. These gaps are both horizontal and vertical ones. Horizontal gaps refer to lack of social capital<sup>2</sup> among actors at the same level of governance system (i.e. European level, central government or regional/local levels). By vertical gaps we mean reduced amount of policy capital between decisionmakers and civic actors.

### Conclusion: Need for a New Brokerage Roles and Synthesis of Knowledge

Ronald S. Burt (2005) has created powerful theory on brokerage and closure as a mean to enhance social capital. In his theory brokerage is considered to be the activity of people who live at the intersection of social worlds, who have vision advantage of seeing and developing innovative and good ideas. Closure is the tightening of

coordination in a closed network of people, and people who do this well as a complement to brokers because of the trust and alignment they create. Theory expands his earlier models of structural holes. His structuralhole argument draws on network concepts that emerged in earlier sociological writings; most notably Granovetter (1985) on the strength of the weak ties, Freeman (1977) on betweenness centrality, Cook (1982) on benefits of exclusive exchange partners and Burt (1982) on autonomy created by complex networks.

In his view (Burt 2005), "a structural hole is a potentially valuable context for action, brokerage is the action of coordinating across the hole with bridges between people on opposite sides of the hole, and network (...) brokers, are the people who build the bridges. (...) The social capital of structural holes comes from the opportunities that holes provide to broker the flow of information between people, and shape the projects that bring together people from opposite sides of the hole. "

By using Burt's notion of structural holes, we propose that evaluators role should be developed strongly towards bridging immanent structural holes (not only among actors but also between policies) that exist in modern societies. Therefore evaluation should contribute more on strengthening a) social capital among policyrelated societal actors and b) enhancing policy coherence by bridging gaps between different policies and policy arenas.

First endeavor (strengthening social capital) would move evaluation towards deliberative policy analysis and thus aiming strengthening democratic governance in the network society. In practical terms it would mean shifting focus from impact analysis towards policymaking practices, processes, interpretation schemes. The goal is a strong inclusion of those affected by public policy and also the search for the appropriate way of involving many others that might be indirectly affected by it. This would mean the creation of wellconsidered linkages between citizens, policy institutions and often unstable policy practices (Hajer et. al 2003).

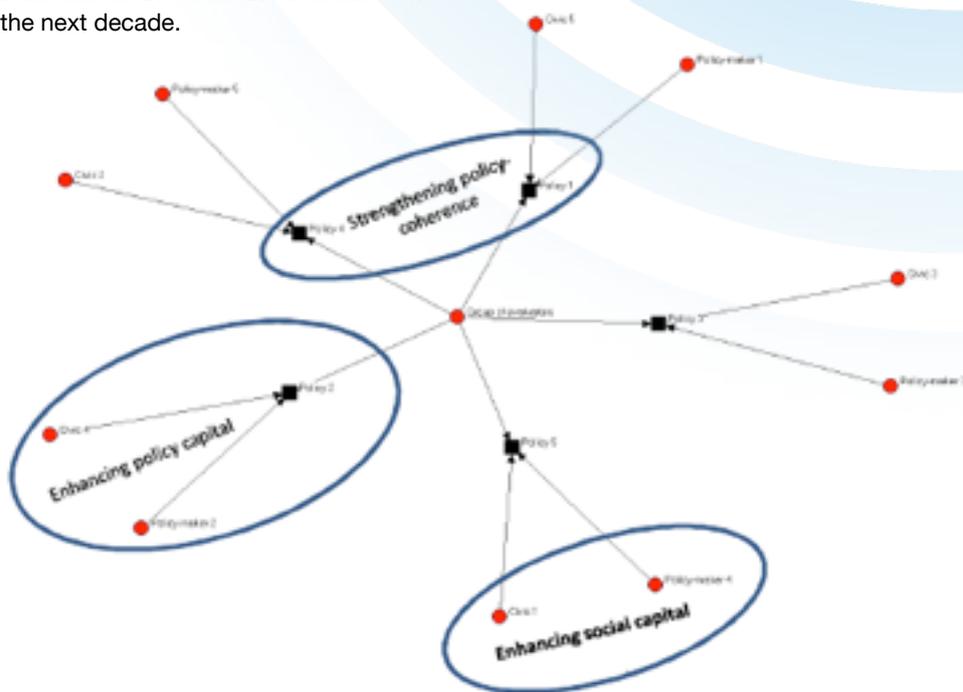
Second goal (enhancing policy capital) refers to increasing need of having more comprehensive evaluation focus.

Evaluation should consider thematic sets of policies and their interlinkages and not only single policy effects and would be impacts. In practice, this would mean that in the future evaluations are more crosssectoral, thematic and apply new techniques of metaevaluation and scenario work developed in the field of futures studies. This would also mean that the applied social science based disciplinary approach (including rigid methodology, quantitative methods and linear causal models) should be completed with synthesizing analyses and provision of metaknowledge.

Figure 3. Evaluators bridging structural holes

Figure 3 summarizes our argumentation concerning evaluators brokerage role as bridging structural holes between policymakers and civic organizations/citizens by enhancing social capital. Enhancement of policy capital means that evaluator become more active in creating new fora for policy debates, exchanging of ideas and argumentation on agenda setting, policy framing and policy options. Finally urge for strengthening policy coherence by

evaluators would need a shift of evaluation focus from single policy impact analysis towards multi and cross policy affiliations, dependencies, gross outcomes and their impacts on society and welfare of the citizens of Europe. All this is naturally an abstract sketch of the overall need for new brokerage and closure role and thus needs further analysis and piloting for creating new tools and methods for the evaluators of the next decade.



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# Participative decisionmaking and social capital: A study from Poland

Agnieszka D. Hunka, Wouter T. De Groot

## Abstract

Eastern European countries, such as Poland, are often used as an exemplary material in social capital studies, with a present mutual distrust between the public and the decisionmakers. In conditions of low social capital, entering the European Union posed problems with implementing policies, and meeting the requirements of new regulations. Environmental issues often present a high degree of complexity – and the EU pieces of legislation require multistakeholders involvement in decisionmaking. Thus, the dilemma: on one hand, there is a demand to engage, empower, and consult many actors; on the other hand, low social capital environment contributes to administrative culture with a ubiquitous topdown approach of institutional decisionmakers.

The paper addresses the problem taking social capital perspective into account. A study of administrative culture and decisionmaking process shows the way environmental decisions are reached, and the role of evaluation in decisionmaking by the analysis of participative processes. The authors propose a way to more participative environmental management, with respect to existing social capital conditions.

Keywords: social capital, decisionmaking, participation.

## Introduction

The number of the European Union Member States nearly doubled in recent years: ten countries accessed in 2004, followed by another two in 2007. Majority of these were former communistruled “Peoples’ Republics”, and the EU expansion eventually ended the division of Europe decided in 1945 at Yalta Conference. All of the new Member States took time to

prepare for the accession beforehand, e.g. to implement EUcompliant laws and regulations. Still, it seems that changes and upswing of the so-called “countries in transition” have been unexpectedly slow. Literature on the subject (for instance: Paldam & Svendsen, 2002) mentions that, since the amount of human and physical capital available is sufficient for much faster economic growth, lack of social capital must explain the low performance. Without contending that this is necessarily true, it may serve as an inspiration to have a deeper look at social capital in Poland. We will do so, discussing the concept of social capital in the following sections. The existing Polish situation and the way it affects decisionmaking processes will be discussed further.

## Social capital, the Polish case

Social capital is most often be defined as the level of trust among people and the density of informal networks (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). This definition is often regarded as too vague (Arrow, 2000) and indeed it is if we do not make a distinction between private and collective social capital (De Groot and Tadeppally, 2008). Private social capital, a concept grounded in the work of Bourdieu (1986), is ‘owned’ by individual actors and may be equated to the benefits that the individual may receive by virtue of being member of a network of (trusted) others (Portes, 1998). Collective social capital, a concept grounded in the work of Putnam (1993, 1995), is a systemlevel characteristic of groups, and is commonly defined as the level of trust in the group as a whole and the strength of their social bonds (networks). Social capital may be put to uses deemed negative for society. Private social capital, for instance, may be geared towards corruption and nepotism, and collective social capital

may be put to use to begin a war. This has given rise to the unfortunate term of ‘negative social capital’ (Wacquant, 1998; Paldam & Svendsen, 2002), as if the capital itself would in these cases be somehow negative (i.e. a debt). Most often, social capital is seen as something benign. In the communitarian outlook, collective social capital is the quintessence of society. We agree with mainstream authors (Woolcock, 1998; World Bank, 1998) that collective social capital is a key to development. Development requires collective action, and if people lack preexisting trust and networks, any initiative to undertake collective action requires enormous efforts in time and energy (‘transaction cost’), often to a degree that collective action becomes effectively impossible. Social capital can be measured in several ways. Closest to the mainstream definition of “trust and networks” lies a combination of questioning people on the degree to which they trust each other, and their involvement in (or density of) voluntary organisations (the latter is the so-called “Putnam’s Instrument”). Studies into the subject underline the low level of collective social capital in totalitarian regimes and centrally planned economies. The dictatorship theory of missing social capital (Paldam & Svendsen, 2002) points at two phenomena. The first is that authoritarian regimes actively destroy social capital such as voluntary associations in order to preempt popular uprising. As suggested by Putnam (1993) a correlation exists between the destruction of trust and the length of a period of dictatorship, viz. the differences existing in presentday Italy between the Southern part which for seven centuries formed the authoritarian Kingdom of Sicily, and the Northern part with its long tradition of city states. The second element of the theory relates specifically to communist, centrally planned

economies. In these regimes, total rationality is taken as to reside in the state, controlled by the Party that represents the people. This image of the state makes any feedback from the population unnecessary and also justifies a finegrained secret control of citizens, which makes trust a very scarce good. This, combined with economic scarcities that used to prevail in these societies, lead people to focus on building up of solely private social capital that could help to work around the state structures, e.g. through corruption and favouritism (Rose, 2000).

What happens if these societies enter into a transitional period, as did the Eastern European countries in 1989? Does the way of “getting things done” change? Is the negative social capital replaced with trust and cooperative spirit? Paldam and Svendsen (2002) argue that this is not the case: Old mechanisms are selfperpetuating, as the case of Italy shows. Distrust between citizens and institutions has become generalized. The private dealings of corruption and political patronage, with their long history of proven efficacy, remain as the most adaptive behaviours, and block the way towards collective actions (and therewith retain their efficacy). Contemporary Poland appears to be a case in point of this pessimistic vision. A study of Chloupkova et al. (2003) shows great differences in the levels of collective social capital level between Poland and Denmark, measured by means of (1) density of voluntary associations; (2) assessment of trust in other people, (3) trust in formal institutions (legal system, police, administration and government), and (4) civic participation level (e.g. in elections). The results are that in Denmark, a citizen on average is member of twelve times more voluntary organisations, trusts other countrymen three and a half times more, trusts institutions ten times more, and participates in twice as many civic actions than in Poland. According to historical data, the levels of collective social capital level (measured as popularity of voluntary associations) were roughly similar in these two countries before communist rule.

## Public participation in Poland

The relations between government and public are part of a country’s collective social capital, and have a strong influence on the efficacy of policy making and policy implementation. If people distrust the government, they will tend to refuse to participate in policy making, for instance (if any invitation would be forthcoming), and rather resort to passive resistance, radical activism or working behind the scenes. And vice versa, if the authorities do not trust the intentions or the knowledge of the public, why would they even invite people to participate? Here we see vicious cycle at work (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). In this section, we will explore if indeed something of this cycle is visible in presentday Poland.

Public participation in environmental decisionmaking process is nowadays a widely recognised standard. The tenth principle of Rio Declaration (1992) grants participation in environmental issues “of all concerned citizens at the relevant level” (Rio Declaration, 1992, p.2). With ratification of the Aarhus Convention, one of the stateofart documents regarding access to information and participation in “environmental matters”, participatory principles have become implemented in the European Community legislation, with the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) as one of the notable examples. Concerned citizens or stakeholders are defined as all interested and/or affected parties. Stakeholders involvement “at the relevant level”, however, can be interpreted in many different ways. Before accessing the EU in 2004, Poland implemented the most uptodate EC legislation in its national regulations. Participation “at the relevant level” is therefore required in environmental law. A study into the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) in Poland and Romania (Hunka, Palarie 2008) showed that water management institutions do put participation into practice, but interpreted in the narrowest possible sense of exchanging information, and invitations

to participate even in this sense stop after one round of formal consultations. As one respondent of Hunka and Palarie (2008) said:

“There must be participation of the public, according to the law, and it must be proved. I think, there are no investors who don’t know (...) that they must reserve 3 or 4 weeks for public consultations. It would be suicidal, if they didn’t do that.” (p. 18)

The only role left for the public after the consultations is the role of protester, and this then is how they become seen by the authorities a priori. Authorities complain, for instance, that: “[These] calls from citizens, that the river stinks, that they observe dead fish floating, etcetera (...) The Majority of these do not stem from the care for the environment, but from a desire to sting neighbours, so, (...) next door squabbles are being transferred to the institutional levels.” (Hunka & Palarie, 2008: 18)

“It is common that the local community leaders who should solve local problems do not work at all, so the cases are delegated to us. The competence is in locals but they want us to react, and if you go to the site (...) what you see is a bunch of huffy people on either side of a fence. It is a confusion of competences or rather indolence and negligence”(Hunka & Palarie, 2008: 18)

Whether this allegation is true or not, it indicates low collective social capital. If it is true, it implies that the people lack functioning conflict resolution structures. If it is untrue, it illustrates how authorities construct reasons to maintain their attitude of distrust. Lack of participation cannot be attributed to lack of interest in local environmental issues, since the Polish public is environmentally concerned (Hunka, De Groot, Biela; in press)

LegutkoKobus (2007) in her study of Local Agendas 21 in 106 Polish districts discussed widely the most popular model of participation in Poland. The majority (96) of the districts implemented some sort of participation for their Local Agenda 21 development. In all cases participation was carried out by means of surveys, meetings with a wider public and local leaders. Interested parties were encouraged to give their feedback and

opinions in all 96 cases. Still, the study shows that local authorities expect oneway information flow, as no feedback is ever given back on the LA21 development process and its final results. Similar strategy was employed for a regional development strategy for the Lubelski Province. After an exemplary execution of roundtable meetings with the majority of key and minor parties, authorities withdrew from further information exchange. (LegutkoKobus, 2007). The same author also observed the development of obligatory plans (e.g. local strategy for waste management) where participation is required as well. These kind of documents are mostly produced by authorities after consulting coworkers and aldermen in order to fulfil the requirement of participative decisionmaking. Another example widely discussed in Poland, is the case of Augustów town bypass. In 1995, plans were made for creating the bypass, cutting in half the Rospuda River valley, a planned at that time nature reserve and NATURA 2000 site to be, a place of very high ecological value. The plans met heated opposition from a number of NGOs and the environmentally concerned public, and even a negative reaction from the EU authorities (Adamowski, 1999; Szymczuk, 2007). After a number of petitions to the European Commission, the EC started legal proceedings against Poland at the Court of Justice of the European Communities in March 2007. The legal actions triggered an attempt at conflict resolution and a rising participatory spirit, resulting in a series of roundtable meetings involving government officials from the Ministries of Environment and Infrastructure, NGOs representatives, concerned citizens, and independent experts in the beginning of 2008. Together they agreed on three alternative scenarios for the motorway, and decided that the construction works should await the decision of the European court. In May 2008, a new open tender for the environmental impact assessment of the investment was officially announced. In July 2008, however, the construction work at the Rospuda Valley was started (by the

local government), following the plans of 1995.<sup>1</sup>

The case of the Augustów bypass illustrates the strength as well as the weakness of Paldam & Svendsen's (2002) theory of missing social capital. The fact that appeals were made directly to the EU shows the deep distrust of the Poles in their own government, and the fact that only the EU court could move the government to action showed that they were right. Moreover, the shocking final result shows that mechanisms described by the theory are still at work indeed. Yet, it must be concluded that the theory seems to break up at the same time, in the sense that all this is not an iron logic any more. After the government's response, the whole of society enthusiastically joined in the participatory process, not only at the planning table but also in the streets, gathering to express support or to protest, signing petitions and wearing a green ribbon of solidarity with NGOs. People invested in their society and their government. In the end, they might feel cheated. Will they invest again?

### Out of the vicious circle?

Many authors have drafted some list of conditions for successful public participation (Arnstein, 1969; Webler et al., 2001). Factors that receive much attention in this literature are for instance: Legitimacy, which imply a focus on evidence and transparency; fairness and equality; equal distribution of power, and willingness to work towards a consensus, even among old adversaries. For Eastern Europe more specifically, conditions for success would appear to lie both at the side of the public authorities and on the side of the population. On the side of the public authorities legitimacy, trust in lay citizens' decisive abilities, and willingness to shed and share their power with public are important. The same principles would appear to hold on the side of the population. Trust in authorities, sense of authorship and responsibility combined with willingness to become involved enable the process from public side. Collective social capital is the common

denominator of these factors, essential for the efficacy with which all of them can be satisfied.

As said, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) project the nonfulfilment of these basic conditions as a vicious cycle. Low levels of trust and social capital generate low levels of participation, which then acts to further undermine trust.

De Groot and Tadepally (2008) in a sense echo this basic idea, but they end their study with a prescription to avoid the vicious cycle. Their conclusion is that if a development agency approaches communities with a proposal for some kind of collective action (e.g. irrigation system restoration, community forest protection), only those communities should be selected that avail of enough collective social capital to be successful in the proposed collective action. Lowcapital communities would fail, which results in further breakdown of social capital. Lowcapital communities should be supported in the by actions geared towards the development of social capital first of all, and one way to do this is to invite the community into any collective action that they are able to carry out irrespective of the action's character (cleaning the school yard? revive the savings fund?). The success then breeds more social capital. The tendency to adopt and implement not only the legislation, but also the Western European readytomade solutions for participation might be tempting, but it is important not to copy the countries with high collective social capital: in case an initiative fails, it might even destroy the little trust accumulated, if people start searching for those to blame. Still, any small scale actions and grassroot initiatives within community are the steps to rebuild social capital. NGOs which are more trusted than the government officials, can provide a necessary bridge between the authorities and the public, and employ the local expertise and ecological knowledge (Olson, Folke 2001). "Green" nongovernmental organisations have a long tradition in Poland, yet, as the case of the Rospuda Valley illustrates, their role is

too often limited to watchdog activities.

Employing independent experts can help in making the decisionmaking process more transparent. External evaluators if engaged as neutral mediators and able to communicate with local stakeholders and at the same time avoid being perceived as taking sides, can facilitate the process. Open access to environmental information, which is for several years a common standard in Poland seems also promising, as it provides the necessary transparency in environmental monitoring agencies. The need for independent experts is

already acknowledged by institutional stakeholders (Hunka, Palarie 2008). For Poland, the advice would constitute targeted actions focused on cases and places where part / joint planning have a good enough basis in people's capacities and motivations. Such success could then be multiplied with good media coverage. In a way, the Augustow bypass is a case in point. Since every concerned party participated in spite of the sad ending breaking down much of the effect, below the surface many positive networks of actors may have been built up. Targeted actions may be reinforced by structural measure that would tilt the

playing field of participation in the right general direction. Authorities involvement in corruption combat and regulations supporting the growth of local initiative and associations may help to stimulate and rebuilt trust between the public and the government. The EC regulations can normalize and facilitate the communication on the bureaucratsNGOspublic line, even if by enforcement at first. Jointly, targeted actions and structural policies will, in our feeling, slowly but deeply change the participation scene in Poland and other Eastern European countries.

## Two New National Associations

### Portugal and Norway the newest Evaluation Associatons

There're two new national Evaluation Associations, the Portuguese and the Norwegian. In Portugal, after the European Evaluation Society Conference and in result of the Portuguese event held as part of the pre-conference programme the Portuguese Evaluation Association (AVAL - Associação Portuguesa de Avaliação) was created on the 16th of March. More details in <http://avalportugal.wordpress.com/>

The Norwegian Evaluation Society will be launched on the 27th of May and the EES will be present at the event in our continuous effort to support the building of new evaluation associations.



## The Romanian Evaluation Association - EVALROM

### Roxanna Irimia, EVALROM President

Evalrom started in 2006 as an informal network of about 30 practitioners in evaluation (both from private and from public sector). The founding process was a combination of bottom-up and top-down actions aiming at the setting-up of a framework for open, transparent and informal discussion in the domain of evaluation in Romania. The process of setting-up was both facilitated and limited by different factors.

There were three factors facilitating the start of Evalrom as follows: the international context, such the dynamism of the associative movements in evaluation and the EU accession of new members states (including Romania's),

the increasing interest of the consultancy services providers towards a new business niche, the emerging interest of the newly appointed public evaluation managers for having a representative, professionally relevant partner of dialogue in the process of increasing the evaluation demand.

But the process was not only facilitated by different factors as previously mentioned, but it was also slowed down by some challenges, which might be drawn from the Romanian socio-economic and institutional context: the national evaluation market being in an infant phase;

little availability of the potential members to invest time and energy for professional networking with no direct and immediate benefit for their current business; difficulties in perception of the evaluation – very often perceived as control or reporting; complicated, bureaucratic and time consuming administrative process for registering and starting the activities of the organisation.

The first meeting (called "Romanian Evaluation Society - Start-up, Process and Action") was encouraged by a professional training in evaluation managed by the Evaluation Central Unit in the Romanian Ministry of Finance. Participants discussed pros and cons

setting a formal organisation. Three main reasons why we should have an association of evaluators were mentioned:

to increase the visibility of its' members with higher chances for each individual to get more contracts; as a purely commercial motivation, involving a lot of individual interest and very little group interest this was not considered as a solid motivation for building the basis of a professional non-commercial group; to improve the access to useful information and key decision makers related to the demand side in evaluation; to build a framework for discussing different topics in evaluation and also to build a platform for promoting ideas in the field; this was expressed the most often.

Evalrom's actions as an informal network were focused rather on the process of founding the organisation (what would be the mission, the membership and the services), rather than on functioning as a forum of professional discussions. In 2008 the members of the informal network decided to turn it into a formal NGO called the Romanian Evaluation Association – Evalrom. The association was founded by 19 evaluation practitioners, most of them active from the supply side of the evaluation market.

**Brief description of the organisation**  
The mission of the organisation is to contribute to the development of the evaluation culture in Romania. The vision of the founding members on the role of Evalrom in the Romanian society is that in five years our organisation will become the major promoter of a society in which people and institutions are learning both from their own experience as well from others, no matter the experience was successful or a failure.

The unique value-added of Evalrom is that it is an open and flexible framework of dialogue among a variety of professionals interested in evaluation in Romania.

The core values of the organisation are:  
Professionalism

Diversity

Respect for voluntary work.

The organisational culture of Evalrom is built on the followings:

Common goals: sense of ownership, mutual respect and trust, manage

interdependencies, shared vision and common direction, build consensus;  
Autonomy: quick, flexible decision making, delegation, freedom to act;  
Action: emphasis on results, meeting commitments, empower people;  
Rewards for change: respect for new ideas, celebration of accomplishments, encouragement, suggestions are implemented;  
Openness: open communication and share information, broad thinking, accept criticism, don't be too sensitive, intellectual honesty, expect and accept conflicts, willingness to consult others. The generic activities of the organisation will be the followings:  
organise symposiums, conferences, workshops in evaluation;  
facilitate the exchange of experience in evaluation;  
disseminate the knowledge and good practices in evaluation;  
ensure professional development opportunities in evaluation;  
design and promote of the national Ethical Code in evaluation in order to establish the evaluation principles in the practice of evaluation in Romania;  
set up partnerships with the academic institutions for the adjustment of the curricula in evaluation to the international standards and to the needs of the evaluation practice;  
advocate and lobby for the application of evaluation to public interventions;  
conduct studies and research which may contribute to the improvement of the methods and techniques in evaluation and to the exchange of knowledge and experience in evaluation;  
carry out other activities contributing to the achievement of EvalRom's objectives.

The human resources of Evalrom are the followings: 19 founding members of whom 7 elected board members (including the President and the Vice-president). The organisation has a core group of 10 volunteers.

The key interest groups (stakeholders) Potential individual members – from both supply (consulting companies, individual consultants, researchers, faculties, NGOs activists) and demand. Institutions, organisations interested in evaluation – although according to the Evalrom's Statute, only individual professionals may become members, the association is interested in establishing connections with the following categories of institutions/ organisations:

- central and local public authorities;
- associations of the public authorities and the National Institute for Administration (INA);
- private consulting companies (multinationals, small local consultancies, public opinion research companies);
- independent consultants;
- other professional networks (AMCOR – The Romanian Association of Consultants in Management, National Register of Experts, The Association of the Romanian Sociologists, etc.);
- universities;
- academic research institutes;
- National Institute for Statistics;
- think-tank NGOs;
- chambers of commerce;
- Romanian Court of Audit;
- commercial banks;
- EC Commission Delegation, embassies, UN country offices, World Bank Country Office; and
- mass-media.

#### Challenges for the future

The critical issues in the development of the organisation are the followings: uneven contribution of the founding members in the actions aiming the sustainability of the association a limited number of stakeholders of the association ever heard of it the association does not have a fundraising plan the association does not have a portfolio of projects.

In order to better address all these challenges and to consolidate the organisation, we plan to design and to launch a virtual resource centre including the electronic Evalrom Review which will serve as a platform for promoting practices and innovative ideas in evaluation, as well as a tool for promoting evaluation use.

More information about Evalrom is available at [www.evalrom.ro](http://www.evalrom.ro).