A European Evaluation Society Event
'Evaluation in Democracy'

Should evaluation change as the democratic context evolves?

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Starting premise:

- I accept that evaluation has a key role in democratic societies in terms of accountability and transparency

However

- Democratic models in evaluation are often parochial and small scale – the implicit model is the small community or the disenfranchised group that deserves a voice
- Our democratic societies are evolving and so must the focus and content of evaluation if it is to reinforce democratic governance and democratic institutions

Two evolving aspects of democratic society

- The changing character of policy making and of related policy instruments

and

- The globalisation of policy and society

Policy making in the mid 20th Century

In the foundation period of EU institutions in the mid 20th century policy making was simpler:

- Goals were usually material – reconstruction and providing routine services to citizens
- We knew what success looked like – and could usually measure it
- Time scales were counted in years not decades
- Citizens were consumers – the recipients of services
- There was a unitary administrative system
- Regulation was legitimate and consensual

Nowadays on the other hand:

- Policy often addresses complex and ‘wicked’ problems requiring innovation and behavioural change
- Policy success is less certain & can be difficult to measure
- Outcomes may only become clear well after today’s policy makers have moved on
- Citizens and civil society demand an active voice in the policy process
- Policy delivery is likely to involve non State actors – via markets or NGOs through partnerships & consortia
- There is less consensus – trust in public authorities has reduced and regulation is resisted

Public management beliefs

This formative context is reinforced by contemporary public management beliefs and contemporary theories of policy-making:

- These blur the roles of policy makers and citizen and the distinction between policy making and policy implementation
- The ‘rational’ top down perspective (following Lasswell and Palumbo) has given way to a ‘political’ bottom up perspective (following Lindblohm and Sabbatier)

Critics of rational frameworks argue:

- Hierarchical control is imperfect – there is significant discretion at all policy levels
- Information is imperfect, making measurement of outcomes difficult
- Frequently problems & objectives are not clearly defined – & limited consensus
- Differences in 'local' context make uniform implementation impractical
- Actors outside of bureaucracies have a strategic input, including for example, civil society, networks of experts and the private sector
- There is often resistance to implementation and continued attempts at political re-definition and re-negotiation – policy is not linear

New ‘policy instruments’

Policy now works through:

- Negotiation, consensus building, coalition-building
- New regulatory frameworks combined with self regulation
- Governments as facilitators and ‘orchestrators’
- Coordination between public agencies and governments – in partnerships & consortia
- Peer-review and the exchange of good practice

Less linear, top-down view of the policy process

Democracy in this context?

- Many stakeholders and interests – deliberative democracy addresses this
- Renewed interest in direct as well as representative democracy
- Search for alternatives to regulation
- Intergenerational concepts of rights & obligations – features in debates on sustainability and public debt
- Renewed importance of public engagement and consent
- Notions of ‘inclusive policy making’
- Importance of consensus building and social and institutional learning

Implications for evaluation?

- New focus on policy making – tracking the dynamic process of policy development & implementation
- Move upstream from projects to programmes and now to policies
- Iterative, real-time methodologies that help steer policy as well as measure outcomes
- Better integration of process evaluation and indicators
- Engagement with multiple stakeholders – and *criteria*
- Challenging the evaluation monopoly of administrations

Globalisation: ‘wicked’ problems without borders

‘Wicked’ policy problems spill over jurisdiction boundaries:

- Carbon targets and climate change
- Public health
- Gender Equality & Child Rights
- Corporate taxation
- Economic inequality and growth
- Fisheries
- Water basin management
- Labour markets, migration and skills

None can be resolved entirely at State or regional levels

Emergent forms of global governance

- A host of new actors, arrangements & networks - intergovernmental and international organisation, global forums, civil society coalitions, private-public-philanthropic alliances
- These can properly be described in terms of emergent forms of global governance

How does democracy express itself in these settings?

Risks of ‘closed-off’ policy making

Global arrangements tend to follow a 4 stage evolution:

- Issue identification/ sense-making
- Consensus building/political processes
- Norms and standard setting/ framework-building & capacity development
- Conventions/compliance mechanisms

But by whom and in whose interests?

Opportunities for participation & openness at every stage – multiple opportunities for democratic practice

Scope for participatory democracy?

Specific mechanisms require ‘authorisation’, ‘gate-keeping’, ‘bridge-building’ – they need nodes and hubs that support:

- Information circulation
- Networking
- Inter-institutional cooperation
- Epistemic communities
- Alignment between multiple levels of governance
- Inclusive policy making

New roles for policy makers?

Implications for evaluation

- Higher profile for internal evaluation units and functions
- Risks of fragmentation – need for more 'joint' stakeholder evaluations
- Importance of knowledge 'sense-making' across multiple evaluations
- Integrating evaluation into policy learning
- Openness to new types of stakeholders

'Village-pump' visions of democratic evaluation are not enough!

Role for policy makers?

- As users of evaluation
- As agenda setters for evaluation – e.g. by aligning the global, regional, national and local
- As initiators of distinctive evaluations asking different evaluation questions
- As an authorising 'hub' to bridge fragmented evaluation knowledge

It remains an open question where in the policy system these potential roles are located….