

**LEARNING
FROM IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION
OF THE EU COHESION POLICY**

LESSONS FROM A RESEARCH-POLICY DIALOGUE

Edited by
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Regional Studies Association

COHESION*POLICY*

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Lessons from a research-policy dialogue.**

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8. WHY DOES POLICY LEARNING HAVE LIMITED IMPACT ON POLICY CHANGES?

Marek W. KOZAK (University of Warsaw)

ABSTRACT

Evaluation studies are important for the adequate allocation of public financial resources and for the checking of the adequacy of the needs of the EU Cohesion Policy as well as structure and structural policy of the EU and member states. The main hypothesis of this chapter is: the drivers of policy change are outside the evaluation and monitoring system.

Methodology: the article is based on literature review and overview of documents and statistical data available in one of the MS and on the experience of the author as evaluator, author of numerous papers, empirical researcher.

PRESENTATION

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 WHY DOES POLICY LEARNING HAVE LIMITED IMPACT ON POLICY CHANGES? Marek W. KOZAK (University of Warsaw, EUROREG)
LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE EU COHESION POLICY LESSONS FOR A <i>RESEARCH-POLICY</i> DIALOGUE. Brussels, 13 June 2016

AIM AND HYPOTHESIS

- **AIM**
ANALYZE WHY POLICY LEARNING
(BASED ON EVALUATION & MONITORING) HAS LIMITED
IMPACT ON POLICY CHANGE
- **HYPOTHESIS:** DRIVERS OF POLICY CHANGE ARE EXTERNAL
TO THE EVALUATION & MONITORING SYSTEM, WHICH HAS
INTERNAL CHARACTER

THE WORLD IS CHANGING

- THE WORLD IS COMPLEX AND GLOBAL,
THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM IS CHANGING
(MORE IN REALITY THAN IN OUR MENTALITY)
- DEVELOPMENT DRIVERS ARE MORE INDEPENDENT
FROM INTERVENTION MANAGEMENT INFLUENCE

IT HAS IMPACTED THE ADMINISTRATION:

- **FROM** CLASSICAL MODEL OF IDEAL ADMINISTRATION
(WEBER)
- **TO** NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE: MULTILEVEL
GOVERNANCE, NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, ...

EVALUATION AND MONITORING AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- THE EU CAUSED INCREASE OF FUNDING FOR POLAND;
- POLAND ESTABLISHED «EVALSED»
AS METHODOLOGY FOR EVALUATION AND MONITORING
- OPEN ISSUE: WHAT HAPPENS TO «EVALSED»
AFTER 2020 (WHEN THE EU POLICY POSSIBLY ENDS)?

EVOLUTION OF EVALUATION

- FOUR PERIODS:
 - PREACCESSION, 2004-2006, 2007-2013 AND 2014-...
- QUANTITATIVE RATHER THAN QUALITATIVE DEVELOPMENT
REPORTED
 - 5 IN 2004, 172 IN 2010, 99 IN 2013, INCREASE PLANNED
- DOMINANT OPERATIONAL STUDIES,
NOT ABOUT RESULTS OR IMPACTS

MAIN BARRIERS AND CONCLUSIONS

- EVALUATION UNITS ARE PART OF MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
- MANY OPERATIONAL STUDIES BECAUSE OF LARGE SPENDING
- EX-POST EVALUATIONS DO NOT HELP TO DEVELOP NEXT PROGRAMMING PERIODS

CONCLUSIONS

- EVALUATION HAS SMALLER IMPACT THAN EXPECTED
- IF EVALUATION IS DEPENDENT ON MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (OR POLICYMAKERS), RESULTS WILL BE OVERLY OPTIMISTIC
- THE DRIVERS OF POLICY CHANGE ARE OUTSIDE THE EVALUATION AND MONITORING SYSTEM.

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**WHY DOES POLICY LEARNING HAS LIMITED IMPACT
ON POLICY CHANGES?**

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation (based mostly, but not exclusively, on monitoring data) is officially supposed to contribute to policy quality and its adequacy to the development needs. In fact, against our expectations, the learning process is not that easy: evaluations are neither used for the next programming period, nor used to develop the subsequent programming period. There is a simple reason for this. In the first case, this is due to the fact, that as the programming period is developed (strategies approved, operational programmes drafted and negotiated) the previous period is still fully operational, not finished. Therefore, no final conclusions stemming from ex-post evaluations can be used, as they do not exist. In the second case it is just too late: policy changes are much more important than previous experience. That is why the main hypothesis says that the drivers of policy change are outside the evaluation and monitoring system, therefore evaluation has more than limited impact on policy creation. In order to corroborate this hypothesis the following issues shall be analysed:

- The basic definitions;
- The quantitative and qualitative evolution of evaluation studies (with Polish examples);
- Reflections on barriers to the learning process.

The main methods used include literature, documents (both Polish and EU documents) and statistics review plus own experience as an evaluation lecturer. Sources of information are obviously limited by the methods described above. The analysis will be primarily focused on the 2007-2013 programming period. For a very simple reason: the 2007-2013 period was most active up to the end of 2015. Based on this analysis, conclusions and policy recommendations will focus on how to change the evaluation process and improve its impact on the quality of intervention.

DEFINITIONS

Against expectations, the definition of evaluation is relatively stable, but its role in policymaking is changing considerably. Evaluation in case of

organization is generally defined as a set of activities done with the idea of organisational performance and efficiency (Griffin 1986). One of the first well-known definitions of evaluation in the case of the Cohesion Policy is simple: “judgement on the value of a public intervention with reference to criteria and explicit standards” (European Commission, 1999, vol. 6, p.17). Recently the majority of researchers put additional emphasis on systematic collection and analysis of data gathered. The largest is the evaluation system created by the European Commission for the needs of the Cohesion Policy. While at the end of the 2007-2013 programming period evaluation was seen as “boosting regional innovation performance as a key EU priority that will directly contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy. (...) The Member State managing authorities are tasked with delivering and evaluating Structural Fund co-financed innovation measures. However, in some EU regions, the design and delivery of innovation measures is still a relatively novel form of policy intervention”. (European Commission, 2012, p.8).

Based on the EU regulations, evaluation is divided between ‘operational’ (monitoring needs and providing assessment of the implementation progress) and ‘strategic’ (relating to socio-economic objectives and horizontal policies), and can be carried out before (ex-ante), during (ongoing) and after (ex-post) the policy intervention. It is clear that evaluation started to be used instrumentally with increasing emphasis as a cohesion driver. As against expectations, many individual countries (in particular those less developed) did not use this opportunity to change internal development policy, in the period 2014-2020 the innovation policy (among others closely related to the strategic goals of Europe 2020) put serious emphasis on macro- and micro-conditioning and controlling of every member state. This influenced evaluation in this period, which was considered more subordinated to the goals and needs of the monitoring system. Interestingly, according to Common Provisions Regulation (European Parliament and Council, 1303/2013, p. 105-107, which was amending the regulation no. 1083/2006 for 2007-2013) evaluation is an instrument serving better monitoring (and not the other way round). This is definitely a very instrumental approach to evaluation.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE EVOLUTION OF EVALUATION STUDIES

In the field of evaluation studies, Poland is considered one of the top evaluation experts due to a number of studies, the institutional evaluation system and the amount of funding spent (supposedly proportional to the large amount of evaluation studies). However, is evaluation itself better due to the quantity or quality of studies?

According to Bachtler (2012), **evaluation** refers to different elements of knowledge and learning processes, **but its utility depends** first of all on the proper **formulation of research (evaluation) questions by those commissioning, adequate knowledge and skills evaluators and general ability to communicate with the policymaking community**. The quality of evaluation, though, depends to a large extent on evaluation culture. What is the situation like in Poland, as it is one of the countries undergoing the transformation from a less developed to a better developed EU country?

In practice, the first condition seems to be met. From 2008 to 2014, the Poland's 'Evaluation Academy' (organized by EUROREG, University of Warsaw), trained the majority of the staff of the National Evaluation Unit at the Ministry of Regional Development (later Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, and recently Ministry of Development) and those in charge of evaluation in other national ministries as well as regional evaluation units. The high quality of the lectures and workshops ensured high quality of the staff trained, visibly influencing the quality of yearly evaluation plans and increased the quality of evaluation studies commissioned. However, in practice it turned out that the quality on this level depends not only on the quality of the evaluation staff (knowledge and skills), but also on the questions and topics imposed by top administrators and politicians (national and regional). This probably explains why meta-analyses of evaluation concentrate on the quantity rather than the quality of evaluations, and why so few studies were focused on systemic questions. The same goes for the knowledge and quality of staff members of Managing Authorities on the regional level. In practice, most of the numerous evaluations were of operational character only. Only in the case of ex-post evaluations more general questions were raised, however the most difficult problems were not explored and evaluation mainly focused on operational characters. Finally,

these evaluations did not have significant influence on the next programming period (for reasons explained).

In the development of evaluation practice, the following phase can be identified.

1. Pre-accession (until 2004). Few studies, no methodology adjusted to pre-accession programmes, painful shortage of monitoring and monitoring specialists (Kozak 2004a; 2004b).
2. Construction of the evaluation system (period 2004-2006). During the first post-accession period, a 'preparatory period' is managed by the National Evaluation Unit. This period was characterized by numerous weaknesses of the centralised management system of the numerous operational studies with problems on the identification of sources and formulation of proper recommendations. Shortage of staff and delayed financing were additional problems (MIR 2014a). Due to the fact that relatively simple Operational Programme Complement, required at that time by the Commission, had the status of Polish regulation, the process of any change was time consuming, thus leading to high uncertainty level among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries.
3. Period of stabilisation (programming period 2007-2012). This period slightly reduced the pressure on operational studies. In the case of evaluation, this period was characterized by evaluation training and development both on the national and regional levels, thanks to the newly established Ministry of Regional Development. This, to a large extent, was possible thanks to the decentralization of structural funds management in Poland (2006) with regional operational programmes and managing authorities. The consultancy and advisory market developed steadily, there were more and more publications by, first of all, the Ministry and the Polish Agency for Entrepreneurship Development (PARP). Those publications increasingly referred not only to foreign, but also Polish experiences and concepts. The Polish Evaluation Association was strengthened. Increasingly, evaluation became an area of research innovation (see Olejniczak, 2012), which brought a number of valuable observations concerning the real impact of 'Europeanization' on ministerial structures. The Evaluation Academy established in 2008 played a significant role in this process (MIR 2014b).

In that period, the requirement of ex-ante evaluations of national planning documents was introduced, which additionally had a positive impact on the quality of evaluation studies.

4. The maturity period that started around 2012. In this period, the number of evaluation studies started to diminish slightly, while their quality increased. The subsequent editions of the Evaluation Academy plus numerous publications played a significant role (MIR 2014b).

According to most of the publications based on ministerial data, the answer sounds: yes, up to date, the quantitative issues matter. What can we learn from them?

The most informative is the publication of MRR (2014b) which is trying to summarise the evaluation system and its evolution over time (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). Unfortunately, despite various remarks, the main presentation is based on quantitative, not qualitative assessment of evaluation. Most studies were done in 2007-2013 period (73%) and minor significant share in 2004-2006 (17%).

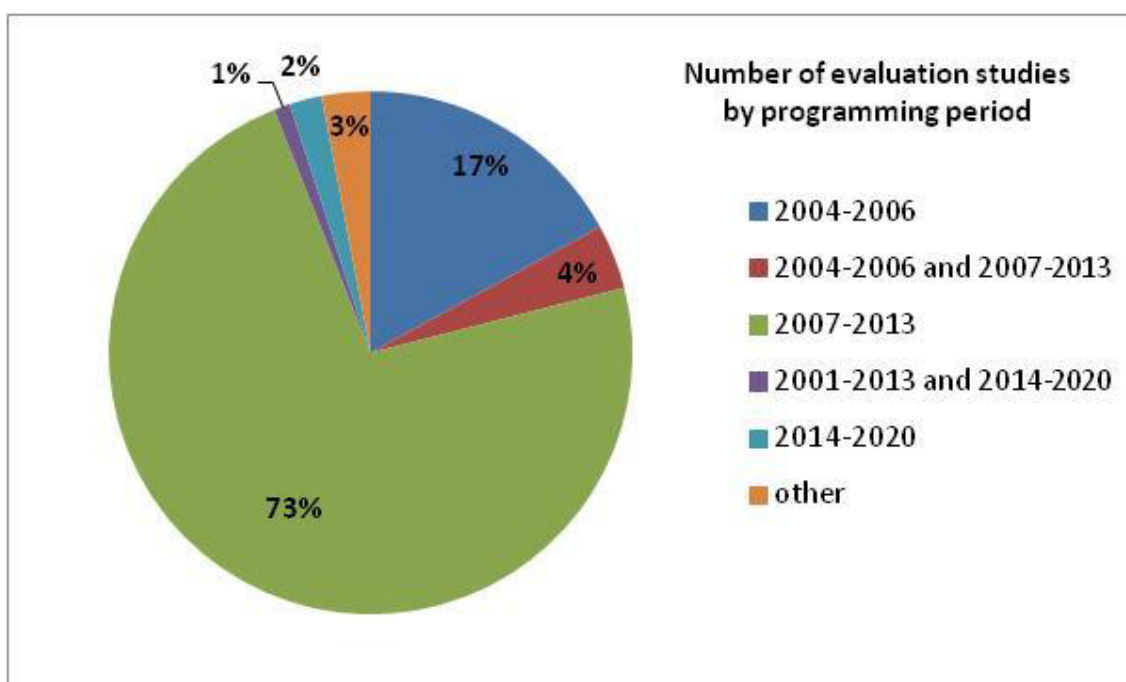


FIGURE 4. THE EVALUATION RESEARCH STUDIES BY PROGRAMMING PERIOD (SOURCE: MIR, 2014b)

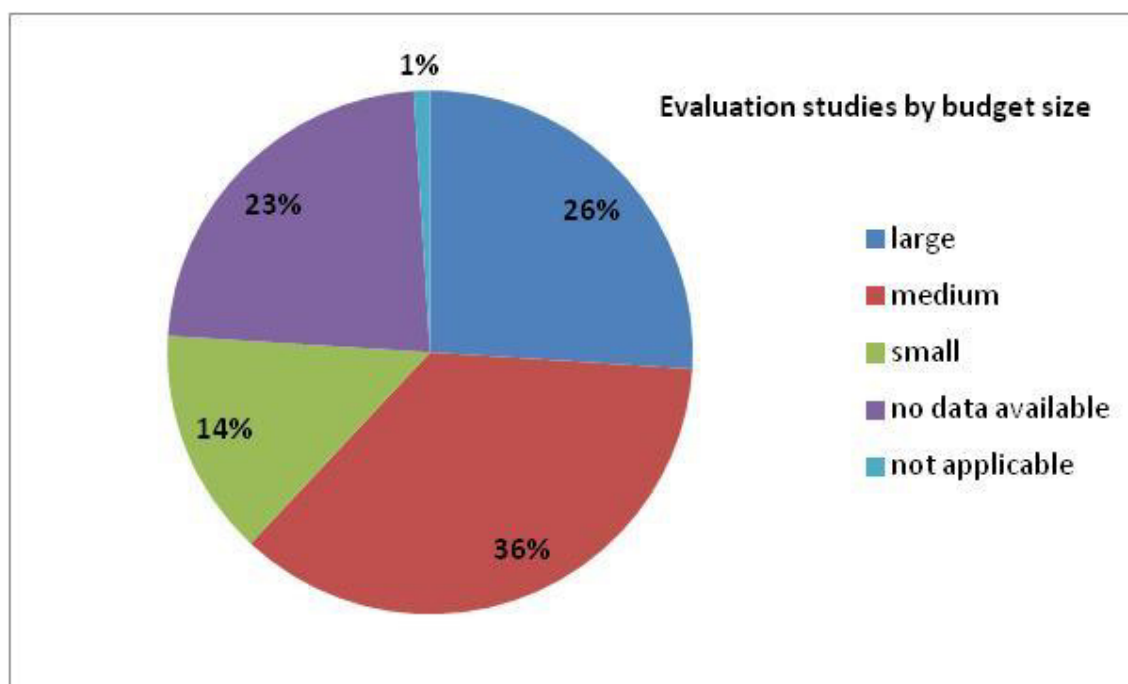


FIGURE 5. THE EVALUATION RESEARCH STUDIES BY SIZE OF THE BUDGET (SOURCE: MIR, 2014b)

In terms of budget size, one fourth of the study was over 75,000 PLN large studies), one third were medium (30-75,000 PLN) and about one sixth were small (below 30,000 PLN), thus data for other evaluations are not available. Relatively high percentage of medium-budget evaluations confirms an increasing activity of evaluation units on the regional level, where many studies were of operational character (MIR 2014b). It also proves that on many occasions the studies were limited to solving minor managerial problems. Figure 4 suggests that the number of evaluation studies increased significantly from the accession period (5 in 2004) to 172 in 2010 and decreased to 99 in 2013. For the period 2013-2014 a significant increase is envisaged, probably due to the change of the programming period (MIR, 2014b). Until August 1, 2014, most studies reported were mainly dedicated to 'good governance' (28%), human resources development (26%), regional and territorial development (20%), infrastructure development and modernization (11%), economy innovativeness (10%), other 5% (MIR, 2014b).

The majority of evaluation studies concentrate exclusively on quantitative data (output indicators). It does not say anything about the results, not to mention impacts. This is well visible in the meta-evaluation carried out by

the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, which is based on all sources of information available (MIR 2014b), where all information refers mostly to a number of projects, monies spent, kilometres of infrastructure built, and - only occasionally - the results indicators are used (e.g. shortening the time needed to access main cities). The 2013 MRR report gave a short explanation of the low influence of evaluation studies on general assessment of impact: ‘in the longer perspective along the demand factors there will be supply effects visible, caused mostly by public capital accumulation and support to private capital accumulation’ (MRR 2013). In short, this says that up to 2013 no supply effects were visible. In other words, this means that most European support was used to improve the quality of life instead of entrepreneurship and competitiveness of Polish economy. And despite the fact that Poland is among the fastest developing economies, there are countries developing faster (Lithuania with 25 percentage points, while Poland records 19 pp) (EUROSTAT GDP).

BARRIERS OF LEARNING PROCESS

The main problem is that the drivers of evaluation change are outside the evaluation (of Cohesion Policy) system. This change was even easier as evaluation of this policy was (and is) a part of the management authorities (or central state authorities). **In theory evaluation is independent, but in fact it is just a myth.** For safety sake, the majority of evaluation units’ employees follow the rules and requirements of managers. Evaluation done by administrative staff should always be treated as part of managerial efforts to achieve the goals politically defined. This probably explains the dominating, very instrumental approach to evaluation, despite high skills of the staff. This goes both for the EU as well as for some Member States. Of course, to a large extent, this depends on national specificity (Jasiecki, 2013).

Another barrier seems to stem from a high propensity to lock-in trend, mainly in less developed countries with short experience in the post-industrial era and its paradigm. For instance, these countries tend to use industrial era development drivers (mostly infrastructure) in a post-industrial era, whereas the main development drivers are of ‘soft’ character such as human capital,

social capital, institutions, culture, innovation etc., as confirmed by the Europe 2020 strategy. This clearly says that nowadays **physical changes are much faster than mental ones**. This goes not only for main beneficiaries but also for the elites politically dependent on the voters.

The third barrier is once again of systemic character. As we know from the Learning Ministries study (Olejniczak, 2012), in some countries 'Europeanization' is limited to departments directly involved in various aspects of EU programmes dealing with siloes-type organisation and not cooperating departments and units, even within single ministries.

To sum up: the quality of the evaluation system is still too weak to impact the learning process, as it is determined by other factors, remaining fully outside the policy system.

AUTHOR

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