International webinar on understanding cross country practices for policy evaluation

Impact evaluation: what can France learn from the most advanced countries?

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23 June 2020
A rapid increase of impact evaluations

Trend by country

Evolution of annual number of scientific articles including an impact evaluation (except US)
Cross-country comparisons – total number

Total number of scientific articles including an impact evaluation until 2016
Cross-country comparisons – per million inhabitants

number of scientific articles including an impact evaluation per million inhabitants until 2016
Political use of impact evaluations

➢ **Between interest and reluctance:**
  • Despite a growing demand, insufficient use of evaluations by policy makers
  • No organised coordination of evaluations in France
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- Key obstacles to foster public policy decision making based on *ex post* evaluation:
  - Data: non-existent, partial, too late, hardly shared
  - Policies: intricacies and complexity
  - Results: often partial, sometimes contradictory or unintelligible

⇒ *How to make evaluations more useful and more used?*
Motivation and methodology

- The place and influence of impact evaluations… in search of best practices
  - A limited scope for comparisons: impact assessment based on econometrics
  - Monographs of six advanced countries: US, Canada, UK, Sweden, Germany and France
  - Interviews, institutional reports, and academic articles
Motivation and methodology

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- Country analysis of three key dimensions
  - Degree of collaboration between administration and research
  - Design and implementation of formal evaluation processes
  - Pro-active dissemination and use of results
Institutionalization of impact evaluation

➢ **A political impetus**
  • Emerging from the US (1960s) then the UK (late 1990s)
  • Other countries started to catch up in the 2000s
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- **The primary role of governments**
  - Official recognition of impact evaluations
  - National reform and acceleration in the production of impact evaluations
  - Modest role of Parliaments in most countries (despite a role defined in the constitution in Sweden and France)
Deciding on impact evaluation

- **Generally, no explicit and formalized criteria:**
  - *Ad hoc* criteria: experimental nature of the reform, economic stakes, timetable for the implementation of the reform, etc.
  - Social demand for evaluations from the Parliament, social partners, media, citizens, private foundations, professional evaluation societies, etc.
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➢ **Demand and supply from ministries:**
  • Particularly in the domains of labour market, education, and health
  • Human and financial resources often very unevenly distributed
Production of impact evaluation

- **Major producers: universities and research centres**
  - Mainly economics departments of major national universities
  - In response to governmental commissioning or on their own initiative
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➢ **Some specific important players:**
  • UK, US, Germany: independent institutes
  • France / Canada: ministerial statistical institutes / administrations
  • Sweden: public policy evaluation agencies
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➢ **Bridges between academia and administrations:**
  • Eg: the *Intergovernmental Personnel Act Mobility Program* (US)
Governance, methodological corpora and standards

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- A more (Canada/US) or less (UK) structured framework
- Growing importance of pluralism and of scientific expertise
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  - Eg: Methodological guides on impact assessment published by the British Treasury, and widely used, guarantee a common framework
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- **Peer recognition processes:**
  - Eg: *Credentialed Evaluator* designation (Canada) recognizes evaluation competencies and ensures a common ethical standard
Funding of impact evaluations

➢ **Primary role of public administrations in most countries:**
  • Specific funds may be earmarked for the impact evaluation of a programme or scheme, or to support the activity of a particular evaluation body
  • Importance of private foundations in English-speaking countries
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➢ **Incentives approaches:**
  • Eg: Social impact obligations such as « *Social Impact Bonds* » (UK) and « *Pay for Success* » (US)
Capitalization and dissemination

- Facilitating the appropriation of the results and their translation into real policy adaptations
  - Eg: What Works Centres (UK) and Clearinghouses (US) centralise the results of evaluations to classify public systems according to their effectiveness and to make them accessible
  - Eg: The establishment of panels of experts CG-TAP (UK) to support the design and implementation of public programmes
  - Nudge units: behavioural sciences and RCT
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- Awareness-raising and training of senior officials
  - Eg: *Policy Profession Standards* (UK) define the competencies for the effective use of evidence in the design of public policy
  - Eg: Government departments publishing “*Areas of Research Interest*” (UK) for researchers
Main conclusions

- No single institutional model:
  - Different factors of success: academic vitality, political impetus, access to administrative data, etc.
Main conclusions

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- **Three major levers:**
  - Strengthening the link between the demand for and production of impact assessments
  - Importance of the definition of common principles guaranteeing independence, credibility, transparency of evaluations
  - Sharing issues, practices and results of impact evaluation within an alliance bringing together the widest possible community of interests
Thank you for listening!

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