Evaluating Public Participation in Policy Making

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Foreword

This book reviews the theory and practice of evaluating public participation in policy making based upon the current experience of OECD countries. It builds upon the findings of a previous OECD report, Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making *(2001) which highlighted the lack of systematic evaluation of government efforts to engage citizens and civil society in policy making. The book represents a first step towards closing the "evaluation gap" and draws heavily upon the insights, contributions and guidance of national experts from OECD countries participating in the OECD Expert Group on Government Relations with Citizens and Civil Society (2001-2002).*

The publication was prepared by Joanne Caddy of the OECD Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development.

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Executive Summary

New forms of public participation are emerging in all OECD countries. These developments have opened new avenues for citizens to participate more fully in public policy making within the overall framework of representative democracy. Citizens are increasingly demanding greater transparency and accountability from their governments, and seek opportunities to participate actively in shaping the policies that affect their lives. In response, governments in all OECD countries are seeking new ways to include citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) in policy making.

But are these new forms of engagement effective? Do they support or undermine our traditional mechanisms for public policy making? Many commentators see these new practices, when taken together with declining voter turnout, political party membership and levels of trust in public institutions, as contributing to the progressive erosion of representative democracy. Others have suggested that rather than the demise of representative democracy, we may now be witnessing its transition from a traditional "contractual" democracy to one of "permanent representation" – where the initial "contract" formed during periodical elections is weaker and where citizens subject decision makers to greater ongoing scrutiny and judgement.[1] When compared to the time-honoured and robust constitutional "technologies" of representative democracy, our tools to support these new forms of interaction are new and often experimental (*e.g.* deliberative polling, focus groups, citizens' panels). In the midst of this transition, the real question becomes how to construct stronger channels for constructive citizen engagement within the framework of representative democracy. Part of the answer may lie in the potential for learning provided by the evaluation of public participation in policy making.

Filling the evaluation gap

As noted in the 2001 OECD report, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making,* there is a striking imbalance between the amount of time, money and energy that governments in OECD countries invest in engaging citizens and civil society in public decision making and the amount of attention they pay to evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such efforts. That a significant "evaluation gap" exists is hardly surprising. If public engagement in policy making is a recent phenomenon and evaluation

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is itself a relatively young discipline, then it may safely be said that the evaluation of public participation is still very much in its infancy.

Recognising the need to fill this evaluation gap, the OECD Expert Group on Government Relations with Citizens and Civil Society decided to review how governments evaluate their own activities in the fields of information, consultation and public participation. Their meeting of 14-15 November 2002, which assembled representatives of 11 OECD member countries, the European

Box 0.1. **Evaluating citizen participation in Finland**

In the course of developing an evaluation framework for Finland's Citizen Participation Policy Programme, officially launched in Spring 2004, a number of specific challenges have been identified:

Success

- How to deliver measurable improvement and collect relevant data to prove it?
- Whose success is it? How to choose the right indicators that truly report the success of the programme and not just developments that are underway at the same time?
- How can we compare the current situation with the one that would have resulted had the programme not existed at all?
- How will the evaluation be used?

Time

- How to produce high quality, usable and relevant evaluation results within a limited time period (*i.e.* within the term of office of political decision makers)?
- How to achieve compromises between methodological purity and the need for useable results?

Resources

- Evaluation requires resources – both financial and human – but also expertise on the part of the public authorities commissioning evaluations. Do we have enough such expertise?
- Does evaluation matter? Will the results of the evaluation be used as a basis for allocating resources or will it just be "nice to know" information?

Citizens

- Evaluating citizen participation can be done in many ways, including with the use of participatory evaluation techniques. How can we ensure that citizens' inclusion in evaluations will not be so rare in the future?

Source: based on Holkeri K. (2004) "First steps in evaluating citizen participation in Finland: past, present, future", paper presented to the OECD Public Governance Committee, Paris, 15-16 April 2004. For more information on Finland's Citizen Participation Policy Programme see Niemelä, S. (this volume) and see: *www.valtioneuvosto.fi*.

Commission, the World Bank Institute, scholars and civil society practitioners, represented a first step in this direction. The results of their discussions, based on the prior collection of country examples and a series of expert papers, are presented in this book.

Rather than a technical handbook for professionals charged with conducting evaluations, this book offers strategic guidance for policy makers and senior government officials responsible for commissioning and using evaluations of public engagement. It provides an indication of the key issues for consideration when evaluating public participation and offers concrete examples drawn from current practice in 8 OECD countries.[2]

Evaluating public participation

Key challenges

The first section of the book identifies some of the key challenges for the evaluation of public participation. Its first chapter, by Seppo Niemelä (Programme Director, Citizen Participation Policy Programme, Finland) offers a first-hand account of the issues faced by senior decision makers responsible for designing and implementing public participation policies. The author reminds us of the broader perspective in which the evaluation of public participation is set, underlining that all such efforts to strengthen democracy and citizen participation are important because effective democratic decision making is needed for the development of society and the economy as a whole. He notes that as the process of change in this field is slow, we need to develop a long-term approach to evaluating the state and condition of democracy. As the director of Finland's innovative Citizen Participation Policy Programme, the author is well-placed to offer some preliminary observations on the role of evaluation in ensuring accountability.

Richard Murray (Chief Economist, Swedish Agency for Public Management, Sweden) tackles the challenging issue of the respective roles of citizens and politicians in the evaluation of public participation. He notes that evaluations constitute an increasingly important forum for citizen participation in policy and decision making within representative democracy. He highlights two points that are generally forgotten: first, evaluations of past or proposed actions should be based on comparisons with alternative actions and second, citizens should be given the opportunity to formulate these alternatives. He argues that to do so, citizens should have access to professional assistance which will allow them to create viable alternatives.

This section concludes with a discussion of ethical standards in evaluation by Ilpo Laitinen (Member of the Finnish Evaluation Society, Finland). He observes that several professional evaluation societies have

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adopted ethical standards for evaluation, often including reference to competence, integrity and accountability. But standards cover such a wide range of situations, contexts, individual evaluators and their motives that they can hardly be the ultimate solution to ethical evaluation. For ethics to be applied in action, evaluators need to be enthusiastic and committed to them. The chapter focuses on the values that actually steer concrete evaluation practices and introduces the "value framework" developed by the Finnish Evaluation Society which rests on four key values: truth, justness, ability and responsibility.

Tools for evaluation

The next section offers an initial review of different approaches to evaluating public participation based on a wide selection of tools currently used in OECD countries in this emerging field. The first chapter by Kim Forss (Andante, Sweden), an experienced professional evaluator, develops an evaluation framework for public information, consultation, and participation. He underscores the importance of clarifying from the outset: the purpose of the evaluation (*i.e.* whether it is being conducted for audit, management or learning); and what is being evaluated (*e.g.* a policy, programme, or single event). The choice of evaluation method is discussed in the broader framework of: selecting the focus, developing models and hypotheses, and addressing practical issues of timing and budget. An evaluator can collect data through observation, surveys, interviews or documentation. The advantages and disadvantages, as well as some of the technical issues linked to each approach, are discussed. Another strategic choice relates to the level of citizen participation and how that participation is organised. The results need to be communicated if the evaluation is to be useful. Indeed, communication must be two-way and conducted as an iterative process throughout the evaluation. Numerous examples drawn from OECD countries serve to illustrate key points throughout the chapter.

Based on their practical experience in evaluating public participation exercises in the UK, Lynn J. Frewer (Department of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour, University of Wageningen, The Netherlands) and Gene Rowe (Institute of Food Research, United Kingdom) review the strategic and practical issues faced by evaluators and those commissioning evaluations. The chapter highlights the need to engage citizens in policy development as a necessary element in developing and maintaining public confidence in public institutions and decision-making processes. The authors note that public trust in public participation may actually decrease if such efforts are not evaluated in terms of: how they are conducted; the transparency of the process; and the impact on policy development. This chapter describes a number of instruments to measure effectiveness according to a set of evaluation criteria developed by the authors. It also identifies the difficulties

faced when conducting evaluations – from the perspectives of the evaluator, organiser and exercise sponsor. Despite such difficulties, the conclusion drawn is that the systematic assessment of public participation is essential to ensure the continuing quality of the process and public confidence in the outcome. Finally, the authors provide some hints for sponsors regarding the strategic planning of the evaluation process and the use of its results.

Participatory evaluation

The last chapter by Giovanni Moro (Programme Advisor, Active Citizenship Network, Italy) addresses the issue of evaluation squarely from the citizen's perspective. It opens with the observation that if the promotion of citizens' participation in policy making is a relatively new task for governments, citizens' evaluation of public participation policies represents a litmus test of their real propensity to consider citizens as resources for, and not as obstacles to, governing. This chapter aims to clarify the role of citizens in the evaluation of public participation, on the basis of their own condition and point of view. The author begins with some methodological remarks and proceeds to define a theoretical framework and provide a review of current practice, drawn particularly from Italy. The chapter concludes by defining a set of operational steps of the evaluation process in terms of: what must be evaluated, with which criteria, who should evaluate and what are the tools of the evaluation.

Initial policy lessons

Evaluation as learning

If indeed, "Evaluation is the systemic inquiry into the worth or merit of an object", as defined by the American Evaluation Association in 1994, then the evaluation of public information, consultation and participation in policy making should give us some measure of "success" – both with regard to the process and its outcomes. However, this presupposes that policy makers will have clearly defined their objectives for, and expectations of, citizen engagement in advance – which is often not the case. The ten guiding principles set out in the OECD report, *Citizens as Partners* (2001), provide just one possible basis for developing concrete indicators of success.[3]

Given that the engagement of citizens and civil society in policy making is itself a new practice characterised by significant experimentation it is likely that, at least initially, its evaluation will be undertaken less for the purposes of audit or management support but rather to advance our understanding. If the purpose of evaluation is to learn, then internal evaluation conducted by the body responsible for the public participation programme or exercise would appear to be the best option (see Table 0.1).

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Table 0.1. **Advantages and disadvantages of internal, independent and participatory evaluation**

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Internal evaluation	• Full information • Maximises learning • Immediate application of lessons	• Limited competence • Can avoid difficult issues
Independent evaluation	• Competence • Legitimacy • Speed • New perspectives	• Incomplete information • Minimal internal learning • Low dissemination • Limited impact
Participatory evaluation	• Mutual learning • Lessons applied	• Low competence • Requires commitment • Slow

Source: Based on Forss K. (this volume).

Participatory evaluation as mutual learning

Most evaluations involve some form of target group participation. If nothing else, some of their representatives would at least be asked about the value of the policy or project under examination. Participatory evaluation goes one step further and requires that all major stakeholders of a policy be actively involved in its evaluation.

The development of participatory evaluation invites us to consider a new role for evaluation; not as an exercise where external or internal evaluators simply question target groups and discover the "truth", but as a process of mutual learning. This approach suggests that evaluation should be a process of self-strengthening and consensus building and thus be a way to build sustainable activities where key actors have a stake in seeing the findings applied. The main issues to consider are when, why and how different stakeholders enter the evaluation process. Their involvement may range from simply answering evaluation questions to actually defining questions, analysing responses and using the results. Participatory evaluation requires a substantial investment in building capacity amongst participants and providing methodological support. Its great advantage is that it raises the likelihood that the outcome of the evaluation will be accepted as relevant and will actually be used as a basis for future actions – one of the most common shortcomings of independent or external evaluations (see Table 0.1).

Based on this review of current practice in the evaluation of public participation in OECD countries, the following preliminary policy lessons may be drawn:

- Governments need to develop tools for the evaluation of public information, consultation and participation in policy making given that such initiatives

Box 0.2. **Preparing to evaluate public participation: A checklist of key questions**

1. What is the **object** of evaluation?

- Information provision
- Consultation
- Public participation
- The use of electronic tools

2. What is the **purpose** of the evaluation?

- To find out whether objectives were reached? (*i.e.* audit)
- To adjust the process under evaluation? (*i.e.* management)
- To document experiences? (*i.e.* learning)

3. Who is **commissioning** and who is **conducting** the evaluation?

- The government service directly concerned
- Other government services (*e.g.* internal audit unit, evaluation unit)
- External oversight bodies (*e.g.* parliament, supreme audit institution)
- Others (*e.g.* civil society organisations, think tanks)

4. If **participatory evaluation** is to be used, how will it be conducted?

- Participation in formulating questions
- Participation in answering questions
- Participation in analysing the results
- Participation in using the results

5. What **methods** will be used?

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Observation
- Reviews of documentation

6. How is the evaluation to be **organised**?

- How much will the evaluation cost?
- How long will it take?
- Who will receive the evaluation results? (*e.g.* only the commissioning body, the public)

7. How are the evaluation results to be **communicated** and **used**?

- Is there a communication strategy?
- Which communication channels are to be used?

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Box 0.2. **Preparing to evaluate public participation: A checklist of key questions** *(cont.)*

- How much will it cost to disseminate the results of the evaluation?
- Will the evaluation results be used? How?

8. Does a **policy** on the evaluation of citizen engagement exist?

- Do general guidelines for evaluation exist?
- Are specific guidelines for evaluating citizen engagement being developed?
- How is capacity for evaluation being built within government? (*e.g.* recruitment, training, partnerships).

are, like any other activity, financed by the public purse and in order to make them more effective.

- The evaluation of both process and impact are important.
- While evaluation is a technical issue, it is based on values – evaluation is not neutral.
- The distinct perspectives and respective roles of government, parliaments and citizens during evaluation must be considered; and finally.
- The results of evaluation must actually be useful to, and used by, decision makers in improving future performance in the field of information, consultation and public participation.

As this book clearly illustrates, much remains to be done in terms of developing technical tools and specific methodologies for the evaluation of public participation.[4] Work currently underway in the OECD Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development on the evaluation of public policies and the development of governance indicators may contribute to such efforts.

Perhaps an even greater challenge lies in fostering a "culture of evaluation" among policy makers and senior officials responsible for public information, consultation and public participation in policy making. For those charged with commissioning and using evaluation results, the following indicative checklist of key questions may be useful to consider before launching their own evaluations (see Box 0.2 above).

One clear conclusion that emerges from the OECD's work to date on the evaluation of public participation is that further comparative analysis of current practice is needed to improve governments' understanding of what constitutes success and how to achieve it.

Notes

1. Coleman S. (2004) "From the Megaphone to the Radar Screen", written evidence submitted to the UK Review of Government Communication (see: *www.gcreview.gov.uk*).
2. Based on country submissions from: Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, and the UK.
3. These 10 guiding principles for successful citizen engagement include: commitment, rights, clarity, time, objectivity, resources, co-ordination, accountability, evaluation and active citizenship. For more information, see OECD (2001) *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making*, Paris: OECD, p. 15.
4. For guidance on the evaluation of online citizen engagement using information and communication technologies (ICT), see OECD (2003) *Promise and Problems of e-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, Paris: OECD, pp. 73-77.

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Chapter 1

Towards an Evaluation of Finland's Citizen Participation Policy Programme

by

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Strengthening democracy and citizen participation are important, because effective democratic decision-making is needed for the development of society and the economy as a whole. Given that the process of change in this field is slow, we need to develop a long-term way of evaluating the state and condition of democracy. This chapter presents some preliminary observations on the role of evaluation in ensuring accountability, based on the initial experience of the Finnish Government's Citizen Participation Policy Programme.

The evaluation of democracy in our time

Democracy has been going from strength to strength ever since the Second World War. However, the future of democracy is not self-evident. Even in stable democracies, voter turnout in elections has been falling. Membership of political parties has been dwindling, which is weakening one of the central pillars of representative democracy. Opinion polls reveal that citizens' confidence in public institutions is declining. These trends, to which the OECD has drawn attention in recent reports, can also be seen in Finland.

It is easy to agree with the advice offered by the OECD, namely that "governments must invest adequate time and resources in building robust legal, policy and institutional frameworks, developing appropriate tools and evaluating their own performance in engaging citizens in policymaking" (OECD, 2001, p. 11).

Another reason to focus on citizen participation stems from the awareness and reassessment, witnessed in recent decades, of civil society and the social capital it generates. As noted by Robert D. Putnam in his address to the OECD Forum on Education and Social Cohesion held in Dublin on 18 March 2004, a growing number of studies in recent years have reported robust correlation, "between vibrant social networks and important social outcomes like lower crime rates, improved child welfare, better public health, more effective government administration, reduced political corruption and tax evasion, improved market performance, and so on".

It is essential to recognise 1) the factors for change which influence democracy as well as the prerequisites for democracy, especially, 2) civil society as its social basis and 3) learning active citizenship. Of equal importance is the ability to assess and ensure the accountability of government actions. In what follows, I will present some preliminary comments on the role of evaluation in ensuring accountability, based on the Finnish Government Citizen Participation Policy Programme.

Democracy in flux

In several countries, especially Finland's Nordic neighbours, the state of democracy and ways of improving it are the subject of an ongoing debate. In Finland, the matter has been given little attention in recent years despite the

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fact that the framework of democracy is undergoing significant change. That is why it is now time to subject our democracy to a kind of "general check-up".

For over a century, our thinking about democracy has been intimately intertwined with the framework of the nation-state; indeed one of the tasks of adult education has been to ensure that everyone has been able to participate in this enterprise. However, the problems that globalisation has engendered cannot be regulated by the nation-state alone; to do so we need larger-scale institutions, in the case of Finland, those of the European Union (EU) and international organisations. The new threats of today, such as terrorism and international crime and, as a consequence, the growing need to protect and control citizens, also pose difficult questions from the point of view of democracy.

Supra-national decision-making in tandem with dwindling public resources imposes limits on the nation-state's power of decision. However, this does not mean that the nation-state is losing all of its significance. This was underlined by the ILO's World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization whose recent report notes that the behaviour of nation states as global actors is the essential determinant of the quality of global governance. How they manage their international affairs influences the extent to which people will benefit from globalisation and be protected from its negative effects (ILO, 2004).

At the same time, the importance of local action is growing. In place of the earlier nation-state-centred thinking, we must learn to see democracy and citizenship as being multi-level in character. Citizenship of the nation-state is still the inner core, but layers of identity range across the spectrum from citizenship of immediate communities to national, European and ultimately world citizenship.

New learning is also needed in the field of gender relations. Women today are better educated and their contribution to working life has been constantly increasing over the past decades. Women continue to take up their equal place within the public sphere, yet keep facing invisible barriers against equality. The process towards achieving equality is a complex one even in Finland, which will be the first country in Europe to celebrate 100 years of universal suffrage in 2006.

One widely-recognised factor of change is the emergence of the knowledge society and the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT). People are becoming better-educated and have new instruments at their disposal to obtain information and wield influence. A new culture of decision-making is coming into being.

Civil society

A citizen who is active both as an individual and as a member of communities and associations is the foundation of democracy. In recent years we have also made use of the concept of civil society in the Nordic countries. Civil society has many definitions, but for our purposes it is enough to say that it covers all activities, which are independent of the State and market, based on voluntary activity with a non-profit character.

The relation between the State and civil society is nowadays a very complex and problematic one. Traditionally the State has (especially in the Nordic countries) supported the activities of civil society as a matter of principle simply because they are expressions of citizens' rights of association. Today, this principle faces mounting pressure through the emphasis on management by results and the growing need to contract out service delivery to civil society organisations (CSOs).

Information on the state of civil society and CSOs is to some degree contradictory. As their members grow older and withdraw from active roles, a large number of traditional organisations will face major difficulties in the next few years. At the same time, new organisations are emerging, but some of them seem to be what Z. Bauman calls "coat-peg communities", a way of sharing an experience or a fear, but one which lacks the strength to alter the social reality (Bauman, 2000).

My own view is that globalisation is encountering substantially weakened community structures. What lies ahead of us is a conscious effort to build citizenship. In parallel to civil society, fostering active citizenship has become a focus of attention, also as a goal of lifelong learning.

It is important to remember that citizens direct the State rather than *vice versa*. In this process open and free discussions in civil society are essential. Nevertheless, both bottom-up and top-down initiatives are necessary. The State can support active citizenship through education. It can create a favourable framework and put in place the prerequisites for citizen participation. It must likewise ensure that the structures and functions of democracy are clear, up-to-date and relevant from the citizens' point of view. It is obvious that actions on the part of the State are needed for both strengthening democracy and strengthening social capital.

Initial steps in evaluating civic participation in Finland

Strengthening democracy and citizen participation are important, simply because well-functioning democracy and decision-making is needed for the development of society and the economy as a whole. The process of change in this field is slow and there is only so much that can be achieved during the

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relatively short duration of a single government term. Therefore we need to develop a long-term way of evaluating the state and condition of democracy.

It would be advantageous to have special "democracy audits" at our disposal. In fact, in Finland we are currently developing such tools for use by the municipalities. The democracy audits provide necessary early warnings of possible problems and help to focus on where improvements are needed.

The Finnish Ministry of Finance has been developing evaluation policy and methods of public management since the 1980s. One of the evaluation criteria has been "the impact of the reform from the citizens' point of view". Several evaluation projects have been launched, including that of the well-known online discussion forum "Share Your Views with Us" – which was launched in 2000.

These evaluations provided the background for the report which was presented by the Finnish Government to the Parliament regarding citizens' opportunities for participation in 2002. The main conclusion was that the dialogue between citizens and authorities must be strengthened. In this regard the new technology and information networks offer great opportunities for new ways of interacting. Also, the more traditional ways of interaction should still be used (meetings, feedback, etc.). Nevertheless, it is still as important as ever to continue the development of methods of representative democracy.

First steps towards evaluating the Citizen Participation Policy Programme

The Citizen Participation Policy Programme is one of four programmes adopted by the current Finnish Government. The other three policy programmes of the present government relate to the information society, entrepreneurship and employment. Each programme is directed by a group of ministers headed by the co-ordinating minister, who is supported in his or her work by a programme director and an assistant. Responsibility for the Citizen Participation Policy Programme has been assigned to the Minister of Justice, and the ministerial group comprises the Ministers of Education, Culture, Finance and the Interior.

The content of each programme is decided on by the government in an annually-updated strategy document. A policy programme has only a small amount of funding at its own disposal. The programme management system has not changed formal decision-making authority between the ministries. The essential work is done in the ministries as their own projects. Most of the funding derives from ministries re-channelling their activities. The projects are monitored and reported on collectively. For the success of the horizontal

programme management, the political support and adequate pre-conditions to discuss cross-cutting government issues is critical.

Despite the lack of formal authority, the Government Policy Programmes are expected to have remarkable factual influence thanks to strong horizontal political support. The programmes are a source of new innovations in society. They gain a good amount of publicity and have a legitimate role in the social debate.

One of the great potentials of the Government Policy Programmes lies in the system by which their outputs, and even more importantly, outcomes will be measured and evaluated. From the very beginning of launching this programme management reform a lot of expectations have been placed on their ability to strengthen the evaluation of Government action. Thus, at present the ways to analyse impacts and outcomes is under intensive work. As part of this, finding proper definitions to the objectives as well as the technicalities of measurement are to be developed.

Evaluating on the basis of clear objectives

Evaluation must take place in relation to objectives. In its Government Strategy Document of spring 2004, the Finnish Government summarized the objectives of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme in four main points, aiming to ensure that:

1. School and educational institutions support the growth of active and democratic citizenship according to the principle of lifelong learning. Along with Finnish citizenship, education programmes must take into account both EU and global citizenship.
2. Juridical and administrative preconditions are supportive and up-to-date with respect to civic activity. Third sector research, education and development services are further developed.
3. Traditional and new ways of citizen participation are developed so that they foster the full participation of citizens in the work of communities and society as a whole. The public administration has adequate tools and attitudes in order to undertake dialogue with citizens.
4. The structure and practices of representative democracy function well at all levels of decision-making and take into account extensive societal changes engendered by the information society and globalisation.

Each of these objectives need core criteria by which the status of citizen participation and democracy can be evaluated at the national and municipal levels.

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Learning and teaching active citizenship

Education

Teaching active and democratic citizenship is something that pedagogical philosophers have always emphasised, but which has been given relatively little attention in recent decades. Indeed, the central goal of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme is to bring about a change in this respect. Schools and other institutions of learning are important arenas, as are vocational bodies, civil society organisations and liberal adult education organisations (the latter being characteristic of Nordic countries).

The problem in Finland is not so much the level of knowledge of societal matters, but rather the lack of interest in participating, which amongst young people is one of the lowest in Europe. Active citizenship does not necessarily come into being on its own, it requires knowledge and skills. If anywhere, the principle of "learning by doing" is the key method in learning how to live together. One of our goals is that the rates of learning active and democratic citizenship will double during the programme.

Research

There is a need for a better understanding of how the growth of active citizenship can be supported. This question is a focus of attention in many countries and international organisations, including the Council of Europe. At least three questions are of central relevance from the perspective of schools: What knowledge should a school impart? How can democracy, and the competences it needs, be developed in the operation of schools? How can schools encourage pupils to take part in the work of associations and other voluntary activities?

In evaluating progress towards achieving objectives (1) and (2) of the Government's Citizen Participation Policy Programme, it is possible to gather information from different sources. An excellent source is the European Social Survey, which began in 2002. In addition, comparative studies have been carried out concerning the civic knowledge and activities of school children. We can also draw upon statistical data on citizen participation as well as records of time dedicated to civil society activities.

Strengthening participation

The three categories of civic engagement – information, consultation and active participation – developed by the OECD in its report *Citizens as Partners* (OECD, 2001) – have also helped us to build the Citizen Participation Policy Programme, particularly with regard to objective (3). We divide civic participation (objective 3) into three parts: information, representative

democracy and citizen participation (the latter covering consultation and active participation in the OECD typology). I am sure that new approaches and tools for participation in political and administrative decision-making are necessary if we want to strengthen democracy.

Obviously, consultation and participation must be seen in relation to representative democracy. They cannot compete with nor replace each other. On the contrary, citizen participation has many positive effects on representative democracy. For example, active participation helps citizens understand the increasingly complex political world of today. Active participation also enhances the knowledge, values and experience available and therefore has a positive effect on the quality of decision-making and administration.

Of course, voter turnout figures are one clear and measurable criterion of the state of democracy. The preliminary objective for this Policy Programme is that the voter turnout in national elections will return to the level of other Nordic countries, and of EU countries in the coming elections. Moreover, the objective is that voter turnout in national elections should not be under 50% in any age group or in any geographical area.

It is important to study to what extent low polls are attributable to electoral systems, voter activation or the information provided during election campaigns. To this end, Minister of Justice Johannes Koskinen has set up a special commission to consider electoral arrangements as well as those of political parties.

Citizens must have access to up-to-date, correct and adequate information. Voting must not involve bother. Elections must reliably reflect the views of citizens. Improvements can be made in these respects. But perhaps it would not be correct to think that higher voting percentages achieved with some clever tricks – for example with the aid of marketing communications – would be a true solution to the problems faced by democracy. At the worst, it could be self-deceit. Voter turnout is still an indicator of the state of democracy, not democracy itself.

In terms of evaluation, the Prime Minister's Office has launched an assessment of the communications and public relations of the state administration which will assess the issue both theoretically and from the perspective of citizens and democracy. For its part, the Ministry of Finance continues to develop their extensive programme on consultation and public participation in the state administration and municipalities, including a focus on the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) and is also engaged in developing evaluation criteria in this new area. In all such projects the question of evaluation is a basic one, but so far we are only at the beginning.

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Finally, we have decided that a group of special experts in mainstreaming make a "creative evaluation" to clarify what gender equality means and how it will be implemented within the Citizen Participation Policy Programme.

Building social capital

It is almost surprising how close the objectives of the Finnish Government's Citizen Participation Policy Programme are to the concept of social capital, which the OECD, among others, is developing. For the purpose of measurement and evaluation the concept has been broken down into measurable dimensions as follows:

- Social participation (covering involvement and volunteering in organised groups).
- Networks of friends and support given or received.
- Civic participation (covering voter turnout in national elections and other civic participation).

If we add to these dimensions, "views of the local area", as some of the latest definitions do, social capital can be a good starting point for the evaluation of civic participation. It is important to continue to develop tools for measuring social capital, because it could, in the future, provide internationally comparable means for evaluating the state of democracy and citizen participation. One primary objective for the evaluation of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme is that social capital indicators will rise in all age groups.

Future challenges

The central question for our future work is how to find indicators that truly report the development of civic participation in Finland and, of course, the success of the Government's Citizen Participation Policy Programme. In an evaluation it is crucial to concentrate on the outputs and, even more importantly, the outcomes, rather than the inputs.

This approach to evaluation will also address how to: present relevant information to political decision-makers in a useful way; reform political and administrative procedures and processes, and develop appropriate forums for public discussion. The overall aim, from the point of view of the Government, being that, after an open debate, they would have in their hands sound evaluation data, on which to base their decision to review or redirect government policy in this important field.

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Chapter 2

Citizens' Control of Evaluations and a Different Role for Politicians

by

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Evaluations constitute an increasingly important forum for citizen participation in policy and decision making within representative democracy. However, two major points are generally forgotten: first, evaluations of past or proposed actions should be based on comparisons with alternative actions and second, citizens should be given the opportunity to formulate these alternatives. This chapter argues that to do so, citizens should have access to professional assistance which will allow them to create viable alternatives.

Engaging citizens in evaluation

Citizens' participation is, to some extent, realised through evaluations. With increasing frequency, politicians and decision makers call upon citizens to take part in evaluations – either to evaluate *ex post* what has happened, or to evaluate *ex ante* a proposed course of action. They are called upon either as stakeholders, taxpayers, concerned citizens or victims/beneficiaries of some action that has been taken or is proposed. They are called upon with different aims in mind: letting the steam out, listening, learning, influencing, creating new options. Evaluations therefore form an increasingly important forum for citizen participation in policy and decision making within representative democracy.

In order for citizens to have a real say in this connection, there are many things to remember: the citizens chosen should be those really concerned; both representative and able persons should be urged to participate; the time and remuneration allocated must be sufficient; enough time should be set aside for informing and listening; participants should be given the opportunity to formulate criteria for evaluation; and so on. However, there are two major points that, more often than not, are forgotten:

1. Evaluations of past or proposed actions should be based on comparisons with alternative actions that may be considered serious competitors to the action evaluated.
2. Citizens should be given the opportunity to formulate these alternatives.

The role of alternatives in evaluations

Any evaluation that purports to tell something about the effects and impacts of a given action must compare that action in relation to some other state. An effect is the difference between two states, one with the action undertaken or proposed, the other without that action. The specification of that other state is thus decisive for whatever effects are measured or calculated. The evaluation as a whole hinges on it.

That other state could be "no action", but this is usually of less interest than comparison with a "second best" action, an action thought to be the best conceivable alternative. Suppose that a proposed highway is evaluated by comparing it with no action. Since there is a demand for travelling, the

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outcome of the evaluation is certain. Compare the highway with public transportation, and the outcome is less certain.

Most evaluations pay no attention to the problem of formulating alternatives and compare (at best) with no action, sometimes referred to as the "counter-factual" development.

Controlling alternatives

Since the specification of the alternative determines the outcome of the evaluation, controlling the formulation of the alternative is essential for anyone wanting to have a say in the process. This is as true for politicians as for citizens. Unless either group formulates the alternatives, evaluators, administrators and bureaucrats will do it and thereby decide the outcome.

Citizens who take part in an evaluation should therefore be given the opportunity to formulate what to their minds constitutes a preferred course of action. If there are different citizens' groups taking part, they may have different proposals for the alternative action. These should all be used as measuring rods to provide comparisons with the action undertaken or proposed.

Formulating an alternative may or may not be an easy thing. Sometimes both feasibility and costs are difficult to judge. Citizens should therefore have access to professional assistance to help them create viable alternatives.

A different role for politicians

Are citizens there to help politicians realise their pet projects? Or should politicians look upon themselves as mere midwives who are there to help citizens realise *their* projects?

Citizens' participation, if it is to be taken seriously, should aim at giving power to the people. Elected politicians may well say they represent the will of the people – but they will find it more difficult day by day to uphold that image in the face of well-educated citizens who have long since ceased to see themselves as the subjects of some sovereign. At least, that will be the case when it comes to matters of local importance: town planning, public transportation, maintenance of parks, schools, public safety, etc. On a national and international level active political leadership is still very much needed, although there is also room for active citizens' groups to take part in policy formulation. If politics is viewed as the process by which collective projects to improve living conditions for groups of people are carried out, it becomes self-evident that those groups should be in control of the process. They need help, however, and it is the role of the politician to provide that help: supplying resources – time, money, expertise – for the process, creating a forum for resolving differences, steering the groups in question through the jungle of bureaucracy, implementing the conclusions, etc. In that process, evaluations

– *ex post* and *ex ante* – will play an important role. They should therefore be designed so as to give citizens the control.

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Chapter 3

Ethical Standards and Evaluation

by

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Due attention to both technical and ethical issues are needed during an evaluation. Several professional evaluation societies have adopted ethical standards for evaluation, with reference to competence, integrity and accountability. But standards cover such a wide range of situations, contexts, individual evaluators and their motives that they can hardly be the ultimate solution to ethical evaluation. For ethics to be realised in action, one needs to be enthusiastic and committed to them. The chapter focuses on the values that actually steer concrete evaluation practices and introduces a "value framework" developed by the Finnish Evaluation Society.

Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the values and ethics of evaluation in the EU, especially in relation to quality management. That should not be surprising, since many values relate directly to the utility of the evaluation process. Utility, in turn, hinges mainly on resources and sound techniques of gathering information. Thus, in discussing evaluation, both technical and ethical issues need to be addressed.

Until now, evaluation ethics and values have most often been described using a given set of parameters, such as accountability or even "common sense". But these are more "valuation" than values. Today, as national and trans-national evaluation communities and associations draw up their standards, the issue of ethics figures prominently. The question is, what is assumed to be gained by setting up these standards? To whom they are addressed? There are demands for cross-cultural transferability, but ethics standards cannot cover every possible situation and context without becoming trivial. What good, then, can be achieved? Is it not better that the evaluator act as a morally responsible agent rather than an obedient actor no matter what the situation?

Ethical standards for evaluation

In some evaluation societies, the goals constituting the society are stated. Some focus on defining the contexts of, and means to achieving professional goals.

The Canadian Evaluation Society has a set of three standards that serve as its guiding ethical principles: competence, integrity and accountability. Thus, for example, "Evaluators are to act with integrity in their relationships with all stakeholders" (*www.evaluationcanada.ca*).

In the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators, utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy are recommended as criteria for judging the quality of programme evaluation efforts. These are standards approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and endorsed by the American Evaluation Association and fourteen other professional organisations (*www.eval.org*) (see Forss, this volume).

Ethical standards may be seen as sufficient guarantee for proper evaluation. The objective being to ensure that similar decisions will be

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reached by all the other evaluators. That may be the two-edged sword of ethical evaluation. Building a model that will accurately guide even one evaluator is not a problem-free task. For some evaluators, standards probably will offer some degree of guidance.

The presumption is that rationalism provides the generalising means to accomplish goals – *i.e.* sensible and wise actions are essential. At the same time, this approach lessens the scope for acting for the good of society. Can the evaluator's *role* ethically bypass the *person* of the evaluator, the person who is part of society and social good?

Evaluation standards always operate at two main, firmly integrated levels, that of the individual evaluator and of society. This means that a body of doctrines – a group of principles – cannot bypass the evaluator's human role even as they guide his/her professional role. That human factor, and its linked morality, is more than just obedient role-playing. "Standards" thus cover such a wide range of situations, contexts, individual evaluators and their motives that they can hardly be the ultimate miracle solution to ethical evaluation.

Take, for example, fairness as a general standard applied to each individual situation. If fairness is lacking – for example, because the evaluator has not had all the information needed – has a mistake been made in applying the standard? That is to say, is the evaluator wrong? If so, should that result in some kind of a value sanctioning of the evaluator? If the evaluator did their best but the procedure failed, can we say the fairness standard had been applied nonetheless? Or, if the evaluation proved fair without any conscious application of a fairness standard, do we then conclude that the general standard of fairness is not a general standard after all?

An individual as a moral agent is in his/her role one and the same (*i.e.* he/she cannot separate their humanity from their professional role). The communal rights and demands related to the human factor are present in all situations; the role cannot bypass them. Thus "standards" cannot bypass the contextual base set by the individual's membership of a community. It is right to expect, on the part of both the evaluator and the public, a communal morality that regards individuals as human beings rather than as roles. Respect for human beings helps underpin the community's morals, as well as those of individuals.

Morals cannot be decreed as laws; therefore, morals cannot be sanctioned in the same manner as laws. Moral attitude is thus, in principle, voluntary.

Unspecific ethical principles – on which the majority of the evaluation community would agree – would lead to trivial ethics. But standards raise problems precisely because, as the norms of evaluation, they need to be concrete. Can standards ever really be universalised? Can they cover every possible unique situation and unique case? It must be remembered that there

is never just the act of choice – there is also the choice of *something*. So there is a risk that evaluation ethics will become merely ethics of the act of choice, not of goals and ends.

On the other hand, an evaluation environment without standards would ultimately lead to a market-place of values, where individual evaluators are left to choose their values – and their choices could become superficial and arbitrary. In such cases evaluators may not be functioning as autonomous moral agents. If evaluators follow standards within a values market, they are jeopardising their moral agency; they may be leaving the final moral choice to others. This would limit the evaluator's own moral identity to choice of membership in a community that grants them some ethical identity…or, simply, a role. Ethics is always about individual choices, moral justifications and responsibilities, not just manifestations. The concept of objectivity is based on rationality, lack of personal involvement, universality of the self, and the assumption that the self can be divided into intelligence and aspiration. For ethics to be realised in action, one needs to be enthusiastic and committed to them.

The central question here concerns the hermeneutic perspective from which the evaluation ethic is examined, and its possible norms derived. In order for the moral to be effective, each individual must commit to it. Morality is not a behaviour regulation system in which standards are binding. Evaluation ethics is therefore faced with a new challenge: to provide theoretical frameworks through which practical evaluation problems can be solved. Standards may be used as an expedient in the process, but they do not guarantee the whole system of ethics evaluation.

Moreover, in applying standards, it is essential to appreciate the difference between goals, principles, operative rules and concrete solutions. In the ethical context standards are not commensurate; they refer to different matters that call for different scales. Ethical evaluation cannot be rated according to the overall technical skill of the evaluator.

Being an "Evaluator" is never just a role. The evaluator is always a human factor, part of wider society and societal ethics. The ethics of evaluation are not separate from the surrounding community but a part of the societal context. The evaluation process is never carried out in closed conditions; an evaluator as an individual and society as a whole are not ethical counterpoints but connected to one another.

The ethics of evaluation should be attractive rather than intimidating and enforced. Professional evaluation associations could instil morals by being transparently ethical and promoting the process of evaluation ethics – for a process is indeed involved, one that cannot be reduced to simple and pure outcomes or indications. Instead of merely having plain common standards,

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there should be different ways to process the evaluator's inner sense of public reason, the morals of society, and the moral conduct of evaluation communities.

A value framework for ethical evaluation

General surveys of evaluation ethics show that the definition process for values is not simple. They also prove that these values exist regardless of the definition process. In fact the main question is, which values can be seen to actually steer concrete evaluation practices? One way of answering that question is to use a value framework, originally drafted as a basis for ethics work in the Finnish Evaluation Society (FES).

The risk of having moral language applied to a value definition process is that it presents impersonal descriptions, when in the end moral choices are always personal acts. Theories and frameworks can nonetheless be used to outline one's moral choices. Intuition alone is never enough for moral justification.

The ethics behind a value framework do not give concrete indications of what is right and what is wrong. They only supply methods and measures for one to conclude what is right and good. Ethics lie between the levels of morality; they aim at making that area visible and understandable.

If values are seen as the mainstream of Western moral philosophy teachings, they are more than just a parcel of words or descriptions. Actually, values can be seen as ambitions or aims that are valid in practically all circumstances. It can therefore be said that a person equals the values they stand for. Interpreted this way, values are not realised as lists of words but as one's personal choices, and actions taken in accordance with those choices.

The defined values of the Finnish Evaluation Society are presented in Figure 1. The necessary point of departure for this approach is that the evaluator is a moral person. The assumption is that the evaluator's human essence and function as a moral agent in a societal context remains the same even if the circumstances change.

The framework is constructed so that the left side introduces the dimensions of an evaluator and an evaluation process – *i.e.* certain value-based rights and responsibilities. The right side introduces the other actors, the individual objects of evaluations and the surrounding community. The framework indicates that the evaluator and the community are interactive and inextricably linked; it consists of the different aggregates of an evaluation process. The values of evaluation are based on these aggregates. Therefore, the core of evaluation ethics is an assumption that the good of another and the good of oneself are of equal importance.

Table 3.1. **A framework of defined values**

Evaluator *Truth* – Freedom of research. – Truth and knowledge-based approach.	**Object of evaluation** *Justness* – Treating people with dignity, protection of an individual. – Ability to adjust to the role of those being evaluated. – Providing those evaluated with sufficient information about the use of evaluation results.
Evaluation process *Ability* – Expertise, holistic process management. – Professional capacity required by the evaluation project.	**Community** *Responsibility* – Accountability for, and implementation of, results; securing the inviolability of communal rights. – Responsibility for actions following the evaluation results.

Source: FES.

Evaluator – Truth

According to the framework, good evaluation refers not only to value-based evaluation practices but also to the way of perceiving evaluators' rights and responsibilities. An evaluator must have free access to information and freedom to seek the truth. Truth is therefore the ultimate qualifier of his or her actions.

Object of evaluation – Justness

The fair treatment of an evaluation object means taking into account their rights and treating them in a just manner. Also implied is the concept of reciprocity: equal rights, equal responsibilities, freedom and well-being are the ultimate goals of the exercise. To gain this perspective, an evaluator might try to place themselves in to the object's position, become the "victims" of evaluation so to speak, and investigate their own values and motives from that angle.

Evaluation process – Ability

The evaluator is expected to manage evaluation methods and procedures. The value behind this is ability. Some of the evaluator's responsibilities tend toward those of a researcher; there are also the responsibilities to the community that grants the evaluator permission to perform the evaluation and also forms evaluation practices. In authorising the activity, the community also sets up norms of evaluation. Therefore, ethical evaluation means more than just a proper use of evaluation methods. Discussing the values of methods, one refers to the norms within evaluation practice – in other words, to the validity of procedures. The external norms of evaluation are factors that connect the results of the process to the larger societal context. Evaluation is also always a product of co-operation and

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therefore linked to the surrounding community, at least indirectly. The premise is that integrity and fairness are achieved in the evaluation process, and that the process provides socially relevant information.

Community – Responsibility

Finally, it is about how all this is interpreted in a society that enables the evaluation practices, maintains responsibility for the results, and authorises the ensuing action – thus adopting the perspective both of an evaluator and of a client commissioning the project. Even when all aspects of a framework are of equal importance, the starting point should be the community. The collegial evaluation community validates the evaluation. It must always be remembered that the evaluator, the object, and the commissioner of an evaluation are always a part of their surrounding community, and thus *not* independent or self-sufficient.

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Chapter 4

An Evaluation Framework for Information, Consultation and Public Participation

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This chapter aims to set out a framework to evaluate policies and programmes to engage citizens in various forms of dialogue, such as public participation, consultation, and provision of information. When embarking on an evaluation, it is necessary to be clear about two things: 1) the purpose – whether it is done for accountability, decision support or learning, and 2) what is being evaluated – whether a policy, programme, or something else. The choice of method is framed in a broader selection of focus, the development of models and hypotheses, and practical issues of timing and budget. An evaluator can collect data through observation, surveys, interviews or documentation. The advantages and disadvantages, as well as some of the technical issues linked to each approach, are discussed. Another strategic choice relates to the level of participation and how that participation is organised. The results need to be communicated if the evaluation is to be useful; the final part of the report discusses communication strategies and emphasises that communication must be two-way and an iterative process throughout the evaluation. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research.

Introduction

The present chapter offers preliminary guidelines for approaching the subject of evaluation. It has benefited greatly from guidance and input provided by the OECD Expert Group on Government Relations with Citizens and Civil Society, whose members also contributed numerous country examples in the course of 2002 and 2003. In particular, this chapter seeks to develop a framework for the evaluation of government performance in informing, consulting and engaging citizens in public policy making. The analysis sets out the key issues, elements and options for consideration when building such a framework. The aim is to provide practical guidance and offer concrete examples.

But why is evaluation such an important topic? The purpose of evaluation is to help government agencies strengthen their efforts to inform, consult and engage citizens in public policy making. The one overriding reason to evaluate is to ascertain what works in this respect, what does not work, and why.

Definitions

First of all, it is necessary to agree on definitions. Evaluation is a young discipline in the social sciences, and although it is the focus of several professional organisations, annual conferences, scientific and popular journals, university programmes and shorter training opportunities, there is actually no common definition of the subject. The closest one can arrive at is the definition adopted by the American Evaluation Association (Joint Committee on Standards, 1994), which says that:

"*Evaluation is the systematic inquiry into the worth or merit of an object.*"

This is a brief and elegant definition, and it is also the lowest common denominator of elements that researchers in the field have been able to agree upon. There are a few things to note about it.

- *First, the definition does not specify that evaluations have to be independent* – that is, undertaken by independent, unbiased experts. Evaluations can also be internal, and they can build on stakeholder participation.
- *Second, an evaluation is not defined by its purpose.* Whether undertaken for monitoring and control, learning, decision making or any other purpose, the study can still be called an evaluation.

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- *Third, the definition does not specify what the object is.* An evaluation can assess a project, a programme, an organisation, a policy or even a discrete object (such as an information toolbox or a Web site).
- *Fourth, the definition does not specify what constitutes worth or merit.* This could be goal achievement, efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, beauty, durability, survival capacity, or any other quality or combination of qualities.
- *Fifth, the definition does not say anything about how the evaluation is disseminated* – whether it should be formally presented, open to the public, or even presented in writing. Presumably, an evaluation process could end in a seminar, and it does not necessarily have to lead to a written final report.

Consequently, evaluation in practice varies; different organisations specify more precisely what evaluation is in their context. It is, for example, common to state that evaluations have to be undertaken by independent experts. The definition cited above is firm in two respects. First, evaluation has to be an assessment of worth or merit. This distinguishes it from research (pure and applied), which does not necessarily have to arrive at a value assessment. Second, evaluation has to be a systematic process of inquiry – it has to build on the methods of social science research, on a systematic collection and analysis of data.

Evaluations within the field of information, consultation and participation thus have to assess the worth and merit of those processes. The people who commission and actually do the evaluations will thus have to define what constitutes a good process – for example, in terms of number of participants, the quality and effects of participation. Furthermore, the assessment has to be systematic; that is, when the evaluation team arrives at conclusions about whether the processes were "of worth and merit", the conclusions should be based on empirical data and a logical process.

The text that follows is based on this understanding of what an evaluation is – and what it is not. But the reader should be aware that there are other definitions and other approaches (see annex for further information on the subject). The definition used here has several advantages: it is the one most commonly accepted by all professional associations, it is clear and simple, and it can be applied flexibly. There are many other, more specific approaches, but these fall within the broad family of activities under this definition.

The chapter is organised in three main sections. The first deals with how an evaluation is set up and its possible focus and purposes. These are basic parameters that influence how the process is organised; it is very important to be clear about the focus of the evaluation. It is obvious that evaluators will go about the practical task differently if they are assessing citizens' participation in a legislative process, for example, than if the object of the evaluation is an information campaign.

The second section addresses the process of the evaluation. Those who fund an evaluation have a right to expect that the process will be sound. There is a discussion of what constitutes a good evaluation, followed by a brief survey of methods and how these may be applied to specific evaluation purposes and objects. One of the most important design features concerns the level of public participation. The question is not whether to have public participation but how it can be organised and at which stages of the process it will be useful to invite a wider participation of stakeholders.

The third section treats the final stages of the evaluation process – putting the findings to use. There is much to say on this subject, an area as methodologically significant as any other though it deals with the methods of communication rather than methods of scientific inquiry. Finally there is an annex, which provides sources of information on evaluation.

The organisation of this paper into three sections underscores the fact that the preparation, conducting and conclusion of an evaluation process are equally important. It is not uncommon that the conducting of the evaluation receives the most attention, but if we neglect to think clearly about the starting point, and if we fail to conclude the process well, it will have been wasted effort. To begin with a provocative statement: when allocating resources to an evaluation process (the time and money of all involved), a good rule of the thumb would be to spend 30% on preparation, 40% on implementation, and 30% on communication to make sure that the findings are used.

Preparing for the evaluation

What is the purpose of the evaluation?

It is commonly said that evaluations are undertaken for three specific purposes: 1) audit, 2) management, and 3) learning. Evaluations are expected to verify whether results are delivered in line with objectives; at the same time they are meant to improve performance (Stokke, 1991). It is through evaluations that one can document good practice and learn from experience (Cracknell, 2000). Quite apart from the inherent value of evaluation as a management information system, it is impossible to conceive of a "modern" organisation that spends public money not having an evaluation system. Evaluation systems establish legitimacy. Evaluators do, however, sometimes come up with embarrassing information. There is no doubt that evaluation systems can create trouble.

While evaluation reports can be uncomfortable, it is through diversity of opinion and argument that learning occurs (Majone, 1989). Learning means changing ideas and getting new information. It means that old and customary ways of thinking are challenged. This cannot always be a smooth process

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(Weick and Westley, 1996). There is an inherent tension in evaluation: in order to pave the way to decisions, evaluators need to speak the same language as the people in those organisations. Evaluation reports can indeed challenge their audiences, but if their messages deviate from views commonly held, they will be deemed irrelevant.

Is any one purpose more common than others with respect to informing, consulting and involving citizens? The answer, really, is no – it is just as relevant to evaluate for purposes of monitoring and control as for learning or obtaining decision support. However, in the near future it is likely that evaluations will be undertaken for purposes of learning, as the field itself is rather new and there is much to learn from the experiments currently under way in different countries. That will influence a number of design issues, as for example who does the evaluation, when and how.

The need for an audit?

Most evaluations are undertaken because there is a wish to establish control, to audit the subject of the evaluation. In the public sphere, there is obviously a need to find out whether public funds have been put to good use. Civil servants need to show managers, board members and political leaders – not to mention the media and the public at large – whether the funds entrusted to them serve their intended purposes. To point to some examples: national school boards evaluate the performance of schools to ensure that they follow the national curriculum; regional development authorities need to convince their constituencies that targets of growth, employment, migration, etc. are met. The emphasis in these and many similar examples lies in auditing – were objectives met, have funds been wisely spent, were programmes efficient and effective?

Evaluations in the private sector are equally if not more concerned with auditing. Those of marketing campaigns show whether the messages in media have the desired effect. Most companies carefully evaluate human resources and undertake specific evaluations of training and development programmes. Banks evaluate credit performance, and venture capital firms evaluate the business prospects of their clients. Evaluation for audit purposes is as pervasive in the private sector as in the public field.

When the primary purpose of an evaluation is to audit, it is more common to subcontract it to independent experts. The fact that the view is one from the outside would presumably guarantee that it is unbiased, and hence more likely to establish the true state of affairs. Similarly, it is common that audit evaluations are conducted with little or no participation from other stakeholders. The methods used in such evaluations are often quantitative

and usually rely on studies of documents and analysis of costs, while surveys and interviews are rarely used as the main source of empirical data.

To support decisions?

There is not always a clear dividing line between the different evaluation purposes. An evaluation initiated because of an auditing need may lead to decisions based on what is found in the process. But there is still a practical difference. When evaluations are performed for audit purposes, they are usually ordered from above or even from the outside. These evaluations may not be that concerned with establishing facts about goal achievement, the use of funds or the like. Instead their primary emphasis is often to find out what went wrong or what worked, and why. The *process* becomes more important, because the knowledge of process issues is what will be used in future decisions.

If an evaluation of an information campaign is established to gain input into how the next campaign will be undertaken, the evaluators would be more interested in finding out how target audiences were identified, whether the messages were understood and appreciated, and whether the audiences have suggestions on how the campaign could be improved. If the focus is on auditing, the questions would concern the use of funds, measures of efficiency, etc.

An evaluation that is meant to support decisions often needs to be undertaken in close contact with the decision makers. They must be involved in establishing the terms of reference, and they may need to be briefed about the progress of the evaluation when it is under way. An external evaluation team can be contracted, but more for the sake of convenience and comparative advantage than for the legitimacy of the findings.

To document experiences?

In recent years, evaluation has increasingly come to be seen as an instrument of learning. In such instances its purpose is to document experiences, make sense of them, and store the information and analysis in reports, databases and the like. The knowledge thus accumulated could then be disseminated to provide others with a more general intellectual understanding – as opposed to the concrete recommendations needed for a specific decision-making situation.

Studies of evaluations have often found that they are not much used, but these findings have in fact given rise to new types of use. Conceptual use is one such idea: the lessons learned in an evaluation may come to surface in a very different context many years later. An agency that designs a referendum

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Box 4.1. **Sweden – Evaluating a pilot project to initiate dialogue and citizens' charters**

In January 2001 the Swedish Government commissioned a number of agencies dealing with citizens and private companies to participate in a pilot project involving service charters and dialogue, as part of a government initiative called "Public Administration in the Service of Democracy – an Action Programme". The objective was to adapt the service of the agencies more closely to citizen needs and to clarify what citizens and private companies can expect from the agencies. An improved quality of public services and developed mechanisms of participation would help to generate public trust in democracy and democratic institutions.

About 21 public agencies were invited to take part in the project. Among them were such large organisations as the national tax board, the police, the social security board, the migration board and regional authorities. Project activities were co-ordinated by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (SAPM) and the National Council for Quality and Development (NCQD). The agencies taking part in the project were expected to:

- Develop and publish a Citizens Charter – a service declaration that gives clear, relevant and binding information about the range of services and level of service.
- Conduct a continuous and systematic service dialogue with citizens and businesses. Establish internal processes for dealing with complaints and the external feedback of customer surveys and citizen consultations. Use modern ICT for these purposes.
- Integrate the views of the citizens and businesses in developing their own activities.

The pilot project lasted two years. The agencies taking part were requested to evaluate their own experience and report back to the government by the end of 2001, and then to conclude with a final evaluation in 2003. From the beginning it was specified that the project as a whole should be evaluated at the end of the trial period, which would lead to recommendations as to whether service dialogue and charters should be introduced throughout the public administration.

The evaluation was expected to provide the government with the basis for deciding whether the pilot project should be continued and extended – a decision that is clearly of great significance to the entire public sector. The 21 agencies decided to do a participatory evaluation, as this was felt to generate the best learning and also provide decision support in the course of the pilot project. A working group was established to coordinate data collection and to draw conclusions of an evaluative nature. The working group

Box 4.1. **Sweden – Evaluating a pilot project to initiate dialogue and citizens' charters** *(cont.)*

regularly reported to the whole group of agency in plenary sessions. The full report was published in 2003 by Statskontoret (Swedish Agency for Public Management) but is only available in Swedish. The evaluation concluded that service charters were welcome by the public, and by many in the organisations, but had to be connected to planning and management. The evaluation contains many detailed operational lessons on how to introduce service charters and improve service dialogue.

in one country may take note of lessons learned from an evaluation in a different country – an impact not initially intended but direct nonetheless.

When learning is the primary purpose of evaluation, there are two things in particular to keep in mind. The first is that those who learn most in the process of evaluation are those who actually do the job – who interview, process surveys, etc. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that those who are meant to learn also get involved in the process. Secondly, the ways that results are managed and disseminated are of extreme importance. What media are to be used? How is the information to be stored? How can it be retrieved? – and so on.

To discover unexpected effects?

Interventions in social processes always have unexpected effects – positive as well as negative. Sometimes these are more interesting than ascertaining whether targets were met or analysing how a project was implemented. But it is often difficult to commission an evaluation to detect unexpected effects, precisely because they are unknown at the time of commissioning. Conventional evaluations seldom discover either positive or negative unintended consequences – and when they do, such effects are usually underestimated.

Michael Scriven (1982) has long been a proponent of goal-free evaluation. In the pure form of this type of evaluation, the evaluator is not told the purpose of the programme; the mission is to find out what the programme actually does, what it has achieved, without being cued as to what it is trying to do. Thus unintended effects will show up just as clearly as accomplishments. If there are reasons to believe that a programme is producing unintended effects that are substantial and of some interest (as is often the case in the realm of government-citizen connections), it may be worth the risk to conduct goal-free evaluations, at least occasionally and as methodological experiments.

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Box 4.2. **Norway – New forms of civic participation in government administration**

Norway's Ministry of Labour and Government Administration has commissioned an exploratory evaluation of new forms of civic participation. The study focuses on two main areas: 1) participation in political processes that take place outside the parliamentary channel, and 2) participation characterised by the presence of voluntary organisations and citizens and their representatives. The study shows that Norwegian ministries generally do make use of many new forms of participation. Seventeen different initiatives in the period 1997-2001 came in four main varieties:

1. Surveys.
2. Contact meetings and conferences.
3. Committees, panels and boards for non-specialist and voluntary organisations.
4. Electronic participation.

Contact meetings, conferences and consultative panels made up about two-thirds of all measures. The ministry of health and social affairs has acquired the most wide-ranging experience and uses different forms and measures, while the ministries of justice and foreign affairs also reported more activities than the other ministries.

Compared with the other forms, the level of electronic participation was not very high. The ministry of finance has developed a Web site and created its own interactive portals. The ministry of foreign affairs provides electronic information aimed at the press and organisations; two-way communication is currently being developed. The data indicate that participation efforts aim at having (primarily) ordinary people and voluntary organisations exercise influence over the implementation of political decisions.

The exploratory study raises many new questions, the most interesting of which is whether these new forms function in compliance with the original intentions. Without real influence, the participatory measures could end up as mere symbols. On the other hand, one could examine the way in which participants react to proximity to government, or the way the new forms work in relation to ordinary channels of influence. Do they represent an unproblematic complement or do they challenge – even threaten – ideals central to traditional notions of democratic governance?

Writing terms of reference

The concrete starting point of an evaluation is to write terms of reference. This is a fine art, and there are many different approaches to the subject. Good

terms of reference are not overly burdensome or detailed – they give the evaluator a relatively free hand to pursue the subject matter. The purpose of the evaluation must be clear and the evaluation team must be set a precise task. It is a fine balance between specifying too many details and leaving too much to the discretion of the evaluator.

Terms of reference may consist of some three to four pages of text. If they are longer, it is likely they are too detailed, and if shorter they may not be sufficiently clear. A major portion of the terms should go into providing an understanding of background and context, so that the evaluator can get an overall picture of the programme. The most important part specifies the purpose of the evaluation, and formulating the questions that the evaluator has to answer.

Terms of reference do not usually specify methods, as that is considered the choice of the evaluators. But if those commissioning an evaluation have specific requirements with regard to the process – for example, whether it should be a participatory evaluation – then this must be noted. Finally, the terms of reference should specify practicalities such as deadlines, treatment of draft reports, and forms of publication. The budget usually appears as an annex.

Some organisations facilitate evaluations by providing standardised terms of reference. This has drawbacks as well as advantages. It makes life easier for the person in charge of commissioning the evaluation, but may come at the cost of not thinking through the purpose of the exercise. In the long run, well-meant assistance may produce evaluations that are mediocre, trying to do too much and without focus or specific purpose.

It is usually expedient to have a consultation process around the terms of reference, first among the stakeholders directly involved. It is also common to have a dialogue with the evaluators on the terms, not least to ensure that the task is properly understood by all partners.

What is the object of evaluation?

Evaluation is a concept with such general applicability that it is easy to forget that in practice it must be tailor-made to specific situations. Evaluating, for example, a process of participation in policy making is an entirely different task from evaluating a public information campaign. Even if the purpose of the evaluation itself is the same (*e.g.* to learn from the experience), the resources needed and methodological approaches taken will differ. This section underscores the need to consider the object of evaluation. It builds on the definitions set out in the OECD (2001a) publication *Citizens as Partners*.

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Information provision

When evaluating provision of information, the primary questions to ask are whether the information really reaches those for whom it is intended and whether the provision of information has the intended consequences. There are naturally other questions, but these two would be at the core of any evaluation of provision of information.

The object of evaluation could be *a)* information products, such as education materials, brochures, guides, handbooks, leaflets, catalogues and annual reports; or *b)* the mechanisms for delivering information, for example direct mailing, information centres, events, advertising campaigns, or the use of civil society organisations.

An evaluation can build on public surveys to find out what knowledge people have of an information topic, where they got that knowledge from, if there is any information lacking, and what they think of the substance. If a survey is carried out, it is important to consider the sample and so avoid any bias in regions, social status, age and gender. If a telephone survey is taken during the daytime for example, those phoning would not find a representative portion of a population at home. The choice of telephone as a media thus has a built-in bias from the outset. There is a similar bias in a mailed questionnaire. The point is that bias is unavoidable, but one has to choose complementary methods to reduce the risk of bias overall.

Many governments take steps to collect data on requests for information and monitor the impact of their information campaigns. As an example, the Norwegian Central Information Service obtains monthly statistics of documents recorded, requests for access to information, refusals of such requests and the reasons for refusal. These statistics are published in annual reports. In Switzerland, a standard public opinion survey is conducted among a representative sample of the electorate after each referendum or election. The purpose is to find out, *inter alia,* how people obtained information prior to the vote.

Consultation

Evaluating consultations becomes more complex, as there are more questions to address. These may concern the extent of consultation; those who were invited/selected and the reasons they were; comments from others (not invited) about the process of inclusion/exclusion. It is also interesting to discover the substantive information generated in the process of consultation. What was the news value? Was there any consensus among the opinions expressed?

A process of consultation has several objectives; generating more policy options and better response to citizens' concerns are but two. The evaluation

Box 4.3. **Czech Republic – Information campaign on the European Union**

The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a project to inform citizens on EU matters. A number of activities were evaluated, such as:

- Study tours for journalists.
- A conference on non-profit organisations and the EU in 2001.
- The so-called "European Ride", visits to towns and direct personal meetings with the public.

For feedback identification, the following tools were used:

- E-group discussions (iFocus) and, in the case of study tours, quality analysis of articles written by participating journalists.
- Observation with "mirror participation" and short interviews in the case of the conference.
- Public enquiries and observations in the "European Ride" case.

The evaluation of the communication strategy found that an information infrastructure had been established and target groups had indeed become more knowledgeable. The results were achieved at relatively low cost (compared to other countries). However, some problems remained – such as how to address the passive part of the public; and insufficient use of information in regional mass media.

would have to address whether such objectives were met, and also to probe whether the citizens' ideas, suggestions and concerns really influenced the decision-making process. In evaluations of information provision, the key informant would normally be the public that was the target group of the campaign. But when evaluating consultation, there are more informants. The public involved in the process would be an important stakeholder group (as well as those not consulted), but the public administration concerned would also have important views/knowledge of the process. Civil servants may have comments on the quality and quantity of public consultation, as it cannot be taken for granted that all ideas collected in a consultation process are equally insightful.

Surveys may here serve as a useful evaluation tool, but interviews and other more qualitative methods of data collection may also be considered. The process of consultation may be as important as the results; an evaluation may thus need to compare different consultative processes. To offer an example of this sort of exercise in practice, the United Kingdom undertook an evaluation of its government departments' use of the Cabinet Office's 1998 guide on "How

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to Conduct Written Consultation Exercises – An Introduction for Central Government". The evaluation found that the quality of consultation varied between departments, suggesting a lack of common standards. An analysis of complaints revealed inadequate response times, a lack of background information, use of leading questions, and a lack of feedback.

Box 4.4. **Finland – Developing the process of consultation**

In Finland, the local authorities (municipalities) are highly autonomous. Since they provide 60-70% of public services, they are much closer to citizens than the central government ministries. A major challenge, therefore, is finding ways of bringing the ministries closer to the citizens so that the latter feel that they too can participate in some way in the preparatory processes. The "Hear the Citizens" project was set up to find new ways to increase communication between the citizens and the central government. Formulating a consultation code was one part of the project.

The code was drafted as part of a two-year project. Representatives of citizens' organisations participated in the drafting process together with civil servants from ministries. A wide consultation was organised around a draft version. The code was sent for comments to 196 organisations; 58 responses were received, 45 from citizens' organisations and 13 from central government departments. The draft version was also available on the Internet discussion forum *www.otakantaa.fi* to allow individual citizens to comment. The revised version of the code was published in December 2002.

"Hear the Citizens" has been part of a major central government reform launched in June 2000. In May 2000 the government had stated the principles and goals of the reform, which are based largely on a survey conducted by three international experts (Potential Governance Agenda for Finland *www.vn.fi/vm/julkaisut/tutkimuksetjaselvitykset/selvitykset.html*). One of those goals was to increase citizens' opportunity to participate.

Public participation

When moving from consultation to public participation the stakes are raised higher still, as the evaluation task becomes even more complex. When a participation process is started there are usually many interacting objectives, relating both to the efficiency and effectiveness of administration and to more intangible aspects linked to process quality. Furthermore, different actors may have different objectives in participating, and so an evaluation has to balance interests. If some actors have their objectives met and others do not, what does that mean for the overall assessment of the participatory process?

Whereas public participation is generally seen as a value in its own right, there is growing criticism of how participatory processes are started, implemented and used. There is thus a keen need for evaluation, not least in the early stages to inform the emerging process and allow stakeholders a real voice with regard to the means as well as the ends. It should be stressed that the choice of methods is open. At the same time however, there is a trend towards qualitative methods as evaluation tasks become more complex. There are certainly occasions when it is appropriate to evaluate public participation with surveys, but on the whole evaluations in this field rely on other social measurement methods – not least qualitative interviewing, focus group methods, and participatory observation.

Using electronic tools

All participating OECD countries have high expectations with regard to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in strengthening government-citizen connections. Many make substantial use of these new tools in providing access to information via the Internet, while some are beginning to explore their application to online consultation and active participation. At the same time, there is a need to clarify the costs and benefits of using ICT as it may easily become more expensive than foreseen, and perhaps prove less substantively interesting.

Box 4.5. **Norway – Electronic access to public mail lists of incoming and outgoing correspondence within public administration (EPJ-project)**

A project was launched in 1993 to arrange for journalists to have access to the mail list of incoming and outgoing correspondence within public administration. This has become very useful and popular among journalists as a source of information, and important for communication between public administration and the press. By October 2002 almost 150 editorial offices participated in the project, which is planned to run through 2003.

The government evaluated the project and found that this initiative made it easier for journalists to have access to public information, particularly since these mail lists are available on Internet. However, the information does not give access to the document itself, only to the list (meta-data) and it is only available to participants in the project, not to the public in general. In addition, each document demanded by journalists is carefully reviewed by executive staff to see if it is exempt from publicity. The government will make a decision whether to make the mail lists available to all citizens.

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While it is not more complicated to evaluate information provision, consultation or public participation using ICT than through any other channel, a focus on ICT does have some specific characteristics. It means that a particular channel of communication becomes the object of evaluation, rather than the purpose of engaging citizens as such. The evaluators need to remember that distinction. An evaluation of ICT would pay more attention to costs than do other evaluations, and the question of sampling needs very careful attention. Furthermore, the dynamics of ICT must be kept in mind. Technologies develop as rapidly as people's capacity to make use of them. Conclusions of an evaluation may have very limited applicability, particularly if the evaluation is meant to strengthen learning more generally.

Evaluating policy principles

The OECD report *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making* (2001a) emphasises ten guiding principles for successful implementation of projects to involve citizens. These represent the essential elements of good practice in OECD countries and they have – through experience – been found to be decisive for success (see OECD, 2001a, p. 15 for full text). They are:

Commitment	Objectivity
Rights	Resources
Clarity	Co-ordination
Time	Accountability
Evaluation	Active citizenship

An evaluation should focus on these principles. The evaluation process could be used to throw light on how the policy principles are put into practice, whether they *are* put into practice, and whether they need to be refined, further developed, or possibly even replaced as time goes by.

Evaluation in practice

What is a good evaluation?

Those investing in an expensive evaluation process have every right to expect high-quality results. But what is quality, and what distinguishes a good evaluation from a bad one? The question merits reflection. In the past, quality was presumably assured by adhering to scientific discipline. But with the adoption of a set of "Programme Evaluation Standards" by the American National Standards Institute (Joint Committee, 1994), things changed. These are now commonly agreed standards that define quality and the properties that a good evaluation process should have. The actual content was developed

over several years by the Joint Committee on Standards – set up by the American Evaluation Association – and a large number of professional associations, consultants, academics and public authorities.

The Standards are used in professional contexts as a guide. They are intended to reflect best practice in the international evaluation community, and were set in order to encourage useful, feasible, ethical and sound evaluations that will in turn contribute to the betterment of social interventions in diverse settings. The Standards were not established for any particular type of evaluation, and so are as relevant for evaluating citizens' participation as for anything else.

The Standards are organised around four important attributes: *utility, feasibility, propriety, andaccuracy.* These four attributes are necessary and sufficient for sound and fair evaluation. They are also interrelated: an evaluation that is not feasible is not likely to yield accurate conclusions, and conclusions that are not accurate are not likely to be used. Similarly, an evaluation that is conducted according to high standards of propriety will generally have much higher utility than one with shortcomings in these respects (Burke-Johnson, 1995).

Utility standards

Utility standards guide evaluations so that they will be informative, timely and influential. They require evaluators to acquaint themselves with their audiences, define the audiences clearly, ascertain their audiences' information needs, plan evaluations to respond to these needs, and report the relevant information clearly and in a timely fashion. The author chose to put utility at the top, and so did the authors of the Standards. This is no coincidence. Evaluations have a mandate to be useful, and if they are not put to use – in one way or another – they have been a waste of time and effort. This is the distinguishing mark, and what makes evaluation different from social science research in general. It is the most important quality.

Accuracy standards

Accuracy standards determine whether an evaluation has produced sound and trustworthy data, leading to valid and reliable conclusions. The evaluation of a project must be comprehensive – that is, the evaluators should have gathered data on all the features judged important for assessing the project's worth or merit. Moreover, the information must be technically adequate, and the judgements rendered must be linked logically to the data.

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Feasibility standards

Feasibility standards recognise that evaluations usually are conducted in a natural – as opposed to laboratory – setting, and consume valuable resources. Evaluation designs must therefore be operable in field settings and must not consume more resources, materials, personnel or time than necessary to address the evaluation questions. The sections below will come back to practical feasibility issues, such as budgets and time planning.

Propriety standards

Propriety standards reflect the fact that evaluations affect people. They are intended to protect the rights of individuals. They promote sensitivity to and warn against unlawful, unscrupulous, unethical, and inept actions by those who conduct evaluations. The standards require that individuals conducting evaluations learn about and obey laws concerning such matters as privacy, freedom of information, and the protection of human subjects. They charge those who conduct evaluations to respect the rights of others. The Finnish Evaluation Society has done an overview of evaluation ethics and published a value framework, which is one of the few efforts to develop this field (see Laitinen, this volume).

The set of four Programme Evaluation Standards outlined above apply to all kinds of evaluation, but the risks are not equally large – or of the same kind – in all fields. What then are the particular threats to quality in evaluation of government-citizen relations? The ethical issues are often very complex. An evaluator has to pay far more attention to issues of representation than is normally the case, and in the process of evaluation one has to be aware of the hidden stakes and interests of all partners. Depending on the context, the issue of anonymity can be very sensitive.

Accuracy is always an issue, but it is particularly difficult when the evaluation has to assess not only facts but opinions, values and attitudes. These fuse into each other, though they are very different empirical realities. In the course of an interview situation or a survey, the respondent may become as confused as the evaluator.

The quality standards are important steering instruments. If evaluators are aware of the criteria against which their products will be assessed, they will likely be more concerned about the quality of their products. Disseminating quality standards and using them in follow-up processes are good ways of making sure that the money allocated to evaluation is well spent.

Legitimacy of the evaluation

Legitimacy is a precondition for the evaluation to be useful. If those who are to use the evaluation results – whether for learning, control or decision-

making purposes – do not perceive the process as legitimate, they will not be inclined to put the findings to use. This is equally true for all purposes, but the conditions that create legitimacy, and the possible objections to the process, vary (Dahler-Larsen, 1998).

In some cases, an evaluation would not be considered legitimate if the main stakeholders in the object being evaluated were not consulted, or if they did not participate. In some countries for example, labour unions must be represented on evaluation teams if the evaluation is expected to have an impact on employment opportunities.

There are also cases where an evaluation is not considered legitimate unless it is undertaken by independent experts. In other circumstances, the opposite holds. There are no general rules as to when the independent assessment is most appropriate and when a stakeholder approach is best. It depends on the actual interests, the problem to be investigated, possible conflicts in the project setting, and the organisational culture of trust and objectivity (or the lack of these attributes).

If monitoring and control is a prominent objective, then an external, unbiased assessment is probably necessary to create legitimacy. But if learning is the most important objective, participatory methods may make for greater legitimacy.

The methods of evaluation

Structure the process of inquiry

One of the most difficult challenges for an evaluator is to structure the inquiry. The terms of reference are usually of help, but only to an extent; their primary task is really to define the purpose and facilitate commissioning the evaluation.

The most important tool that can be used to structure an inquiry is a model of the phenomena to be studied. Models are representations of states, objects, and events. They are idealised in the sense that they are less complicated than reality and hence easier to use for evaluation purposes. The simplicity of models lies in the fact that only the relevant properties of reality are represented. Evaluations of government-citizen connections enter a field with complex causal relationships, and it is likely that there will be non-linear dynamics in the interaction (Uphoff, 1992). Clear evaluation requires a good descriptive model of events.

Another very useful approach to structure an inquiry is to develop a set of hypotheses concerning the expected results. This is a very useful way of structuring an inquiry: it helps the evaluator define a focus, discuss the relevance of that focus, and assign priorities in the choice of methods. By

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formulating hypotheses early on in the evaluation, the evaluators will have an instrument to assess whether their thinking is relevant and whether it will generate any new lessons. It leads to an economical use of the evaluation resources. The evaluators can then focus on whether to prove or disprove the hypotheses. And if the issue is trivial this will soon become obvious.

In discussing choice of methods, this chapter will primarily deal with methods of data collection and analysis. In fact, several methodological choices are made even before that, as for example whether or not to develop models or to use hypotheses. There are other than strictly methodological choices, as for example whether to involve stakeholder groups in participatory evaluation (discussed below). There are those who prefer to start with an overall choice between quantitative and qualitative methods. The latter seems of limited relevance, as the qualitative and quantitative nature of data tends to merge in the course of a practical evaluation (deVaus, 2001).

In essence, an evaluator has a choice between four basic ways of collecting data: interviews, surveys, studying documentation, and observation. The aim of a discussion of methodology would be to ensure that evaluators make flexible, sophisticated and adaptive methodological choices. The following notes introduce the nature of choices, but at this stage they are nothing more than an indication about what a manual of evaluation needs to explain and elaborate upon.

Surveys

Questionnaires are probably employed more often than any other technique in evaluation. It is not difficult to write questionnaires, but one does need some clear thinking about the kind of information that is needed and an understanding of what kind of questions to ask to get that information. Questionnaires also probably generate more worthless data than any other technique; greater attention to a few fundamentals of questionnaire writing could improve many evaluations (Patton, 1997).

First, it is important to be clear on what is to be ascertained. Apart from background information, there are four basic types of questions, all of which can be seen to relate to information provision, consultation and public participation. They are:

- *Knowledge questions* – to find out what factual information the respondent has. Is he or she aware of opportunities for consultation? Do they know of participatory processes? Did they receive the information delivered by a campaign?
- *Feeling questions* – about emotions. People could, for example, be asked how they feel about a participatory process. Does it inspire confidence or does it generate mistrust? Public responses to information campaigns can also be

Box 4.6. **Canada – Evaluation of public consultation for Health Canada**

In November 1997, Health Canada sponsored a National Forum on Xenotransplantation – Clinical, Ethical, and Regulatory Issues. The forum report included several important recommendations, such as the need to inform and involve the public on issues related to xenotransplantation, and to develop safety standards that can be used to regulate xenografts if and when they are approved for use in Canada. Health Canada also prepared a public involvement plan for xenotransplantation, to address the recommendation made at the National Forum to involve the public on the various related health, ethical, legal, economic and social issues.

The Health Minister Allan Rock confirmed that the very breadth of the issues raised by xenotransplantation required consultation with Canadians and consideration of their views in the development of policy. He announced that the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) had received funds to form a public advisory group and to conduct a cross-Canada public consultation on the issue of xenotransplantation. On the basis of additional analyses and input provided by the public, a policy recommendation will be developed on whether or not clinical trials should be allowed to proceed.

Health Canada has started an evaluation of the consultation that will enumerate the lessons learned from the public involvement initiatives on xenotransplantation. The evaluation covers:

- The implementation of the public involvement plan's six phases.
- The degree of success in achieving the principles and the objectives of the plan.
- Consideration of the recommendations made by the public advisory group in developing policy recommendation for xenotransplantation in Canada.

This framework, in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Guide for the Development of Results-based Management and Accountability Frameworks*, will be divided into three primary issue areas: relevance, success and cost-effectiveness. Baseline data collected prior to the public consultation will provide information on the impacts of the processes on the public and Health Canada.

The following sources of information will be used to answer the evaluation questions: *i)* a document review; *ii)* key stakeholder interviews, and *iii)* a review of administrative records.

1. Document review

This will involve a literature search. The documents that should be reviewed in addition to the public involvement plan include, but are not limited to: "Animal-to-Human Transplantation: Should Canada Proceed? –

Box 4.6. **Canada – Evaluation of public consultation for Health Canada** *(cont.)*

A Public Consultation on Xenotransplantation" (Canadian Public Health Association, 2002); "Survey on Human Organ Donation and Xenotransplantation", The Berger Monitor (survey conducted for the Therapeutic Products Programme, March 1999); Wright, James R., Jr., "Alternative Interpretations of the Same Data: Flaws in the Process of Consulting the Canadian Public about Xenotransplantation Issues", Canadian Medical Association Journal, Volume 167, page 40. Other literature, such as media coverage and journal articles deemed useful for the evaluation, should also be consulted.

2. Key stakeholder interviews

These will mostly include interviews with Health Canada staff involved in the development of the public involvement plan and policy recommendations; members of the public advisory group and the Canadian Public Health Association; and the citizen forum panellists.

3. Review of administrative records

This will involve a thorough search through the transcripts of the citizen forums, minutes of the working group on xenotransplantation and other documents containing, *e.g.*, information on decisions made.

emotional; indeed, factual information is often embedded in an emotional cloak to make it more appealing. But does it work? Are the emotional responses the ones expected?

- *Opinion questions* – to find out what people think of something. If the topic is an information service, was it easy to get access to the information? Was the information clear and understandable? Was it relevant? Was it credible? Opinion questions tell us about people's goals, intentions, desires and values.
- *Behaviour questions* – about what a person does or has done. These questions are aimed at descriptions of actual experiences, activities and actions. They ask about behaviour that could have been observed had the evaluator been present when it occurred.

There are many guides on how to write questionnaires, all of which have to do with writing clearly focused questions. It must be clear to the respondents what is asked of them. A common mistake is to ask for two things at the same time ("Did the annual report contain clear and relevant information?"). Furthermore, the response categories and scales must be

consistent with the type of information being sought. Knowledge questions imply true/false answers. Opinion questions ask respondents to agree or disagree.

A survey must get a high response rate – as a rule, no less than 80%. There are three things to keep in mind to get a high response rate: 1) write a clear and engaging introductory letter; 2) keep the survey short and give it an attractive design; and 3) make sure that the questions seem relevant from the respondents' point of view, not just that of the writer.

Interviews

An evaluator interviews people to find out from them the things that he or she cannot directly observe. Interviewing permits entry into another person's perspective. The point of departure is thus the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). The quality of the information obtained during an interview largely depends on the interviewer. Perhaps more than is the case with surveys, interviewing is an art that requires some basic skills plus plenty of experience (Kvale, 1996).

There are three basic approaches to interviews. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and each serves a somewhat different purpose. The three alternatives are:

- The informal conversational interview.
- The general interview guideline approach.
- The standardised interview.

The main advantage with the informal conversational interview is that it can generate surprising information. The other types of interviews are constrained by the imagination of the interviewer in formulating questions; if no questions are formulated, the interviewer is perhaps more likely to hear things not anticipated. But there are several drawbacks. Interviews may be difficult to compare, thus making it hard to aggregate data. There are ethical considerations, and the risk that the evaluation process could become less focused.

The standardised interview should be carefully worded and the questions set, in order to ensure that each response is given in the same context. Leading questions/contexts are then avoided. The main strength of this kind of interview, apart from the rigour of questioning, is the comparability of responses. They can easily be aggregated and one can use frequency tables to present the findings. But it is not a flexible instrument.

The general interview guideline approach is flexible, but as open as the informal conversational interview. The approach involves outlining a set of

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Box 4.7. **Norway – Surveys on citizens' opinions of public information**

In any democratic process it is vital that citizens, non-governmental organisations, trade and industry have information on public activities. Norway's Directorate for Communication and Public Management has carried out surveys on citizens' opinions of public information. In order for citizens to be fully aware of their rights, civic duty and opportunities, that information must not only be communicated but also adapted to their needs.

The survey aims to find out how citizens receive public information, which sources they use when they actively seek it out, how satisfied they are with it and their attitudes in general towards public information.

A series of surveys has been carried out since 1995. More than a thousand people, chosen according to gender, age and geography, have been interviewed by telephone. Their compared responses provide information on the development of public opinion and any changes in people's choice of information source. The results are of considerable interest to public administration and politicians. Among them are the following:

- Citizens' level of interest and the number of persons seeking public information have not changed but remained relatively stable since 1998. Some 47% claim they have requested public information in 2001.
- Personal contact and the telephone are the most commonly used information sources. The Internet is, however, steadily gaining on the telephone. Whereas use of the latter dropped from 60% to 40%, that of the Internet increased from 9% to 20%.
- Seven out of ten of Norway's inhabitants have access to the Internet and, as indicated above, use it with increasing frequency.
- It seems that Internet users do not mind interacting with government using this tool, provided there is adequate protection of privacy.
- Challenges for public organisations are to fit information provided on the Internet to users' needs and to make the online information secure.
- Getting information outside of public opening hours is the most important advantage of the Internet as an information source.

issues that are to be explored with each respondent. The guidelines serve as a basic checklist to make sure that all relevant topics are covered.

Interviews can be undertaken individually or in-group. A focus group interview is quite difficult, and a method not recommended to the untrained. The proceedings can easily get out of hand, and the validity of data could become undermined (Lonner and Berry, 1986).

There are a number of other issues to consider in an interview – for example, how to record the data, how many interviewers there should be, how to write out and verify protocols, and how to protect the integrity of the respondent. As for government-citizen interactions, interviews are likely to be a prominent part of most evaluations. Public participation often involves interviewing, as does consultation and, to some extent, provision of information.

Observation

What people say in interviews and what they express in questionnaires are actually the most common sources of information in evaluations. However, it is a fact that people do not always do as they say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon may be the best method. It is one thing to ask people how they keep themselves informed when they use Internet access in a public agency. Looking at their actual behaviour may yield different insights.

It is often useful to observe participatory processes. An observer may focus on patterns of interaction, sense-making, exclusion and other aspects of group dynamics. Such issues would normally be very difficult to capture in an interview situation; people forget and perhaps are not even aware of how events unfold when they are part of the process. Becker and Geer (1970), leading practitioners of qualitative methods, expressed their preference for observation as follows:

> *The most complete form of [data] is the form in which the participant observer gathers it: an observation of some social event, the events which precede and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants and spectators, before, during, and after its occurrence. Such data give us more information about the event under study than data gathered by any other sociological method (Becker and Geer, 1970).*

Furthermore, observation can often be a relatively inexpensive instrument of evaluation, and it has the advantage of providing "hot" information. As observation occurs while the event occurs, the evaluative assessment comes more or less immediately when the event takes place – for example soon after a process of consultation is finished.

The results of observation can be reported verbally, but they are usually written down as well. Here a drawback arises. The point about observation is that it draws the evaluator and his/her audience into the setting that was observed. This means that observational data must have depth and detail. The data must be sufficiently descriptive so that the reader really understands what was heard and seen. Hence, it is a method that tends to result in rather long evaluation reports. They must be addressed to an audience that has a keen interest in details – that is, the most immediate stakeholders who also

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have an influence on the future shape of the process. It is a particularly good method when the purpose is to learn.

Documentation

Finally, there is the study of documentation: written materials and other documents from organisational or programme records, memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; diaries, letters and artistic works; annual reports, budgets, expenditure accounts, bookkeeping. These entail different kinds of analysis. They form the basis for quantitative data – efficiency rates are calculated on the basis of cost information in expenditure records. But some texts will require qualitative analysis, for which there are now a variety of analytical tools.

Measurement and scales

Measurement and scales are considered at the same time as the choice of methods. At this point it would be useful to indicate some of the issues that must be considered when the choice of methods is made, and put to use. The word measurement requires some attention. It is of course possible to assess government-citizen relations without "measuring" them.

Measurement must be understood as the procedure by which the evaluators obtain symbols that can be used to represent the concept to be defined (Ackoff, 1962). The purpose of measurement is to represent the content of observations by symbols, which relate to each other in the same way that the observed objects, events, or properties do. Ranking involves what is known as an ordinal scale. There are those who limit the word measurement to operations that involve an interval or ratio scale. However, it is more common to speak of measurement in a wide sense, involving both ranking and assessments on nominal scales.

The design of the scales raises a number of interesting issues. Is it better to have an odd or an even number of alternatives? Should there be a directly negative option, or is the worst possible outcome that something is "negligible"? If direct value expressions are used, for whom is an outcome deemed satisfactory? What really are the differences between "high" and "substantial", or between "modest" and "negligible"? Which forms of bias in reporting are inherent in the scales used?

It is worth noting that there is no scientifically agreed ideal of how a scale should be constructed. The author's personal preference is scales with six alternatives. These have the advantage that they can be shortened to two, three or four graded scales when results are presented. The choice then depends on what the results are – if one should point to an even distribution around a mean, to a central tendency, or to a skewed distribution around a

mean. Utility is the key word, and the six-graded scale makes it easy to emphasise the true nature of data in a presentation.

Sociological research often uses ranking scales where respondents report on something being satisfactory or not. Opinion polls of various kinds do the same, as well as studies exploring corporate cultures. It is also quite possible to assess project efficiency and effectiveness in terms of how satisfactory it is. But one should bear in mind that the question of whether an activity has been satisfactorily completed or not can be debated, and defined, in relation to whether objectives have been reached, targets met, etc. The credibility of the statement whether something is satisfactory or not rests on the assumption that it is fairly clear why it is satisfactory. There must be some norm that both the evaluator and his/her audiences can refer to. The statement of whether that impact is satisfactory or not thus risks becoming very personal, and the validity of the observation can be very low.

It is often useful to develop indicators that can help the evaluators establish whether an objective was reached or not, or for that matter when and to what extent the object being evaluated should be considered successful. Indicators help evaluators to be clear about the foundations for value judgements, and thus increase the transparency of the evaluation process.

Participatory approaches to evaluation

Participatory evaluation means that those who are the subjects of an intervention are involved in its evaluation. To be precise, it means that all major stakeholders of a policy should be involved. It is currently the case that target groups and stakeholder groups are involved to some degree. Their involvement may range from simply answering questions to full participation in defining questions, answering them, and using the results. In programmes to strengthen the connections between governments and citizens, a participatory approach to evaluation would seem particularly pertinent.

Such approaches became common during the late 1980s (Forss, 1989); and were increasingly better articulated, for example by Rebien (1996) and Fetterman *et al.* (1996). The key issues to consider here are when and why different stakeholders can enter the evaluation process.

Participation in formulating questions

A problem with evaluations performed by external evaluators is that the criteria for evaluation are not known and/or not accepted by the target group (Uphoff, 1989). The open-ended and informal interview is a way to avoid that problem, but for other reasons this may not be the best data collection method. However, the members of the target group could participate in

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formulating the questions of the evaluation, discuss how to answer the questions, and set criteria on how to interpret the data.

If they do so, it is more likely that the outcome of the evaluation will be accepted as relevant. If we look at the different approaches to strengthen the government-citizen relationship, those that are experiments in public participation would seem to be obvious candidates for participatory approaches to evaluation also. As they already extend the partnership (so to say), there is a danger that a non-participatory approach to evaluation would ruin the quality of an ongoing process.

A critical issue is whether there should be any mandatory questions that the groups must have on their agenda (critical, that is, against the background of present project settings; compulsory questions and methods would of course violate the nature of the participatory exercise). If the evaluation is also undertaken for external usage, some of its questions – while perhaps well defined externally – may violate the nature of participation if imposed for internal usage.

Box 4.8. **Mexico – Developing indicators for the National Participation Programme**

Goal	Indicators
1. To develop and improve existing citizen participation spaces and promote new ones.	• Number of entities of the federal administration that participate in the National "Programme" of Citizen Participation in Public Policy. • Number of municipal governments that have signed agreements to develop citizen participation schemes with the federal government.
2. To increase the ability of citizens and their organisations to participate in public policies.	• Quality of citizens' proposals and recommendations (grades obtained from questionnaires answered by public officials and third parties).
3. To increase the ability of public officials to develop public policies according to citizen participation schemes.	• Quality of information given to citizens by public officials (grades obtained from questionnaires answered by CSOs and third parties).
4. To develop participation schemes characteristic of new forms of governance and administration.	• Depth and width of participation (matrix) for each of the programmes derived from the National Plan for Development 2000-2006.
5. To develop indicators of citizen participation in public policies.	• Degree of development of indicators for all programmes of the National Plan for Development 2000-2006.

Box 4.9. **Mexico – National Participation Programme**

A special programme within the National Participation Programme has been designed to fight corruption: Sistema de transparencia municipal (SETRAMUN, a system for transparency at the local government level). More than 100 municipalities take part in this pilot social comptroller project.

A model has been created to describe the character and degree of participation as well as the place of participation in the policy cycle. The model specifies the defining features of citizen and government roles at various points on *information*, *consultation* and *participation* scales. These describe how active and willing participants are in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

As an example, a point at the high end of the consultation scale would indicate a situation where citizens are considerably active and the local government carries out democratic and efficient consultations. Here, a key feature is the existence of independent civil society mechanisms to provide feedback and make proposals to government; correspondingly, the government values open deliberation and uses valid consultation tools systematically.

On the basis of that model, two questionnaires have been designed, one for citizens and one for government officials and employees. It includes questions designed to ascertain whether government provides information on the following:

- Public works.
- Government services.
- Local laws and regulations.
- Government's income and expenditure.
- Civil servants' salaries.
- Acquisition and contract allocation procedures.

The questionnaire also asks when and how this information is provided and why the mechanisms employed are succeeding or failing. Reactions to the initiative have been encouraging. People show pride in having their municipality take part in the project; networks of transparency-promoting local governments are being formed; and all local governments in two states have already expressed the will to adopt SETRAMUN permanently. Local governments, federal government agencies and CSOs are together planning the steps that will follow the use of a validated questionnaire. These include the development of training programmes for government employees and the design of new complaint resolution schemes, as well as the production of procedure guides for citizens and web pages with clear government information.

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Participation in answering questions

Most evaluations involve some form of target group participation. If nothing else, some of their representatives would at least be asked about the value of whatever is undertaken. The participation can thus be called active or passive (Oakley, 1988). It should first be noted that making general statements about passive participation in answering questions is of limited value. Within this vast field, methods of evaluation as well as of participation vary a great deal. We can, for example, distinguish between *quantitative* and *qualitative* methods.

In quantitative methods the target group participates in answering predetermined questionnaires, where "... the wordings of the questions, their number, sequences, etc. are given and, therefore, cannot be altered and no additional questions put" (UNESCO, 1984). This method does not leave any room for the respondents to express opinions that are not preconceived. The method might reveal the existence of some characteristics among the sample population but it does not reveal the relationships between them, since "... quantitative data by themselves cannot explain how factors or events affect each other" (Poluha *et al.,* 1989).

Qualitative methods usually involve the target groups more directly. Information is often collected through open-ended interviews. Thus how much information respondents give and how open or secretive they are depend on the skills of the data collector. In theory, the respondent should be able to lead the interview in new directions and raise issues that were not expected by the evaluators. When the data are collected, the external evaluators do a contextual analysis to reveal the logical consistency between the observations (Poluha *et al.*, 1989).

Active participation in answering questions would mean that members of the target group take part in generating data – as interviewers as well as respondents if such methods are chosen, or through any other means. In any case they should take on additional roles. The methods could also be more or less "scientific", depending on the competence of external as well as internal actors, and on the time and money available for the evaluation. The point is that there is really nothing more inherently participatory about qualitative methods – quantitative methods can be equally participatory.

Participation in using the results

Participatory activities are characterised by a bottom-up approach. It is important that evaluations are carried out in the same manner (Choudhary and Tandon, 1988). It is also important that the results and findings of the evaluation are used to support decision making and action in the field. If they are not, the project can no longer be called participatory. The reverse is also

Box 4.10. **Sweden – Participatory evaluation of a pilot project**

The project, on service charters and dialogue, was implemented over two years, 2001 and 2002. A participatory evaluation was organised by the implementing agencies and delivered to the government in early 2003.

- One of the major advantages of this approach was that the agencies were encouraged to think about what would constitute a successful outcome very early in the process. Preparing for the evaluation served to reinforce commitment to the project and to clarify its objectives.
- Yet another advantage was that those who participated in the evaluation group learned a great deal about evaluation while actually doing the job. No training had been involved, and some of those who took part had limited experience of evaluation work. Nevertheless the tasks were accomplished, not least through the support of the co-ordinating group.
- What an external evaluation would have concluded cannot be known, but it is not likely to have had as much in-depth presentation of concrete experiences as the present evaluation appears to contain.
- Even though costs are not fully accounted for in this particular process, it is likely that the total budget for evaluation is lower than an externally commissioned evaluation would have necessitated.
- The co-ordination between the mid-term and final reports facilitated data collection, provided a structure, and led to continuity of message that is useful to all partners.

The evaluation was more sensitive to context and practical implementation problems, and at times also somewhat less frank and critical than traditional evaluations. Perhaps this is to be expected in a participatory evaluation, and if so it is a cost that may or may not be compensated by the advantages mentioned above. It is important to bear in mind that none of the agencies blocked any particular piece of information. What they sometimes insisted on influencing had to do with how that information was interpreted and which conclusions to draw.

true: if a participatory evaluation is introduced on a traditional project, the process of co-operation is likely to be transformed.

Participatory evaluation cannot be conceived as a mere evaluation method. It is a process whereby citizens are increasingly engaged in dialogue and interaction with their governments. If they formulate questions, answer them and use the answers for their own good; then by definition they participate in planning activities, setting objectives, decision making, control and responsibilities.

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The participatory approach gives us reason to consider a new role for evaluation – not as an exercise where external evaluators come to the target groups and discover the truth, but as a process of mutual learning. Evaluations should be concerned not only with finding absolute and objective truths, but also with finding new questions and perspectives. At the same time, it should be recognised that evaluation is intended to bring a new element of method. There is no such thing as a free lunch. The path to increased participation may well go over participatory evaluation, but it requires effort to master some of the jargon and some methodological skill. The key question is, how much of the methods can be used without alienating the participants.

Today, as suggested above, evaluation often tends to be a matter of justifying expenses, or rather ensuring that expenses are justified (Oakley, 1988). The idea of participatory evaluation suggests instead that evaluation should be a process of self-strengthening and consensus building, and thus be a way to build sustainable activities (Patton, 2002).

Planning the evaluation process

Whether one chooses a participatory approach or not, there are a number of practical management decisions to take in the course of an evaluation. The basic elements have been outlined above, particularly those that relate to the methodological aspects – which in turn are linked to the object and purpose of the evaluation.

Internal, external, or a combination

It was noted that there are good reasons to undertake an evaluation – or to design an evaluation system – building on internal resources. Doing so will maximise learning opportunities, set more relevant evaluation tasks, and connect to decision makers. But it has some drawbacks as well. In particular, it will mean that the organisation has to build competencies internally that can perhaps be had on the market at a lower cost. Evaluation is an evolving field, so an investment in evaluation capacity also entails substantial follow-up costs in human resource development to keep up to date with methodological and conceptual advances.

Also, it should be remembered that in many contexts, an independent – external – assessment has more clout. It may improve the legitimacy of the evaluation findings. Even if the legitimacy argument is spurious, the perception is nevertheless real on many policy scenes, and hence it may be wise to accommodate the prevailing public opinions.

It is of course possible to combine the approaches. An external evaluator can enter the process as an adviser while internal staff does much of the "humdrum work" (which is actually far more interesting and instructive). In

many organisations, evaluations are traditionally performed by external experts. There is a resistance to letting those engaged in projects – not to mention those who benefit from them – also evaluate them. But there are also proponents of participatory approaches (see for example Fetterman *et al.*, 1996). The advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches are summarised in the table below.

Table 4.1. **Advantages and disadvantages of independent and participatory evaluation**

	Evaluation by an outside expert	Participatory evaluation
Advantages	• Usually solid competence • Creates legitimacy for many • Usually faster • Can be subject to competitive bidding • Brings new perspectives	• Maximises learning • Findings can be put to use immediately • Benefits stay in project • Can be adjusted according to new needs and new findings
Disadvantages	• Can be irrelevant • Mostly evaluator who learns • Gap to decision makers • Difficult to change the process • Hard work to disseminate results	• Can hide unpleasant findings • Often low competence with regard to methods • Takes longer • Requires commitment

How much will an evaluation cost?

It is important to see the costs of an evaluation in their totality. There are not only the direct costs of negotiating terms of reference, choosing methods, collecting and analysing data, writing a report, and publishing the findings in some form. There are also the costs of taking the idea for an evaluation from its birth to the first drafting of terms of reference. An evaluation process requires time on the part of all those who are interviewed, respond to questionnaires, or take part in meetings. The processing of final results can include many activities – and these need to be in the budget.

The cost of evaluation varies widely. A very simple organisational evaluation of an institutional mechanism for public participation may involve a few weeks of data gathering, some days of preparation and a few days of writing a report and presenting findings. Many evaluations are undertaken with a total budget covering some four weeks of work.

Large public opinion surveys are, however, more complex and thus more expensive. The going market rates of these polls vary between countries, but the costs will often be considerable. Evaluations of, for example, the effects of information campaigns usually will cost some three to four weeks of methodological preparation and testing, another six to eight weeks gathering and analysing data, and then some weeks to prepare a report. A medium-sized evaluation may cost some ten to fifteen weeks of work altogether.

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There are also larger evaluations that combine many types of data collection, build on extensive participation and involve ambitious publications. It is not uncommon that large evaluation tasks are commissioned for some 80-120 weeks of work.

The magnitude of an evaluation will depend on the budget available and the purpose, as well as the size of the activity being evaluated. There is no rule of the thumb, but it would probably appear strange if an evaluation cost more than some 3-5% of the budget of the activity being evaluated. Still, there are occasions when it is important to systematise learning from a pilot experiment because the relative costs of evaluation are considerably higher.

When preparing the budget for an evaluation, it is advisable to start from the basics of data collection. If the main source of data will be interviews, it is necessary to find out how many interviews will be conducted. (It is seldom useful to undertake more than 40 interviews in the course of a "standard" evaluation.) The actual interview situation normally lasts around an hour, but then time should be added to contact the respondent, travel, and – most time-consuming – write interview notes afterwards. So, the total time for a one-hour interview would normally be around four hours. A total of 25 interviews would thus take 100 hours, requiring a budget of some twelve days' work.

A survey requires less time from professional staff, but there are a number of clerical tasks that can be time-consuming, such as selecting addressees, mailing questionnaires, keeping track of responses and sending out reminders. Even if less time is required for a survey, the amount of working time will be spread out over a number of weeks, allowing people time to respond and to have one or two reminders. Thus, a survey can seldom be completed in less than two to three months' time, even if the total working time is not more than two to three weeks during that time.

Estimates of the costs of using other instruments follow the same basic formula: look at the work to be done, estimate how long each step will take, and then derive a total estimate of time. The actual costs will then depend either on the internal costs of personnel or the consultancy fees that can be negotiated.

How long will it take?

Evaluations are usually completed relatively quickly. It is quite common that the total time from start to finish will be somewhere between two and four months. However, there is usually a longer preparatory process in the administration, and the processing of a draft report into a final report may also take time. Hence, even if the real field work and production of a report are completed within a couple of months, the organisation commissioning the

evaluation may have spent half a year in preparation, and will spend another half a year in absorbing the results.

Speed is essential. Evaluations should be bursts of creative energy. If they are to engage people and the impact is to be maximised, those who are engaged should see results quickly. For example, people interviewed will be interested in seeing how their contribution is treated. They would eagerly read a report that lands on their table a couple of weeks later. If it takes half a year, they will have lost interest. It is vital to keep momentum in the process.

Not only is speed essential – timing is as well. An evaluation that arrives too early may find that there is no audience for its message that the ground is not properly prepared for decision making. If the evaluation arrives too late, the important decisions are taken and it may be too late to change the programme. It is thus essential that those who commission evaluation co-ordinate closely with decision makers, and make sure that the evaluations are planned to feed into the organisation's decision-making system (Thomas *et al.,* 1998).

Using the results of the evaluation

Ensuring that the evaluation will be useful

Whether we like it or not, the acceptance or rejection of evaluation results often rests on how that evaluation is justified and how the justification is presented. Communication therefore is an important aspect of evaluation. Evaluation results can be politically sensitive, and successful communication of results involves complex judgements and a sense of timing.

Evaluations involve finding out about people and organisations and people in organisations. Results are prepared for those charged with formulating and implementing policy, but will also often need to be communicated to and approved by a range of other stakeholders. Communicating results to those directly affected is a particularly delicate and important task (Thoening, 2000). This section deals with some aspects of communication strategies.

Designing a communication strategy

For those managing an evaluation, thinking through how to communicate results itself often involves investigation and planning. Ideally, communication between evaluators and other stakeholders is a two-way process: flexibility and some degree of sensitivity to a range of different interests and concerns are necessary (Torres *et al.,* 1996).

Communicating results is an activity often thought of as coming at the end of an evaluation. This is often not the best way of conceptualising the process. Good evaluation (high utility) often requires layers of iteration. Preliminary investigation often reveals that the initial design of the evaluation

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Box 4.11. **Czech Republic – Development of a National Education Strategy**

Public discussion was used by the Ministry of Education in 1999-2000, during the preparation of a major document called The National Programme of Development of Education in the Czech Republic. "The White Book", as it is also known, proposes ideas, general outlines and programmes as guidelines for developing education policy. A public discussion organised by the ministry under the name "Challenge for Ten Million" was the main source for the objectives, intentions and recommendations included in the document. The government approved The National Programme of Development of Education in the Czech Republic in February 2001.

The follow-up phase of the discussion took place in 2002 and brought together public opinion and the views of stakeholders, educational institutions, and academics on the entire draft of the White Book, which has been discussed several times in the Council for Educational Policy. A Secretariat managed the public discussion and sorted letters and email messages which were submitted to those responsible for drafting the final version of the White Book.

could be improved. Alternative questions and methods will need to be discussed. In the process of communication, the stakeholders may, already at an early stage, start to think differently about their activities (Chattaway and Joffe, 1998).

It has been argued that an evaluation process is (or can be) useful even before it starts, as those who are evaluated start thinking about their activities before the evaluation team has appeared on the scene. These and other aspects of the process indicate that evaluations become more useful if a communication strategy is designed for the entire duration of the work, rather than merely to communicate results (Forss and Rebien, 2002).

Chattaway and Joffe (1998) suggest that the development of a communication strategy could build on answering five basic questions: who, what, why, when and how.

> *It is necessary to know whom you are communicating with; what are their levels of knowledge? What are their roles in the organisation (or outside)? How many are there? Who holds the power? How are they likely to react?*
>
> *Before outlining the presentation, the evaluator needs to think through what the different stakeholders want. What are their needs, their concerns, and their expectations? What matters to them?*

The purpose of communication must be considered. Why are we doing it? Why this or that message? What is the objective, what kind of feedback do we want?

It has already been noted that it is useful to start communications early. In addition, a communication strategy must indicate when in the process various presentations should be made, and in what form.

As for the how, different media can be used throughout. Possible communication instruments are oral presentations, Web sites, newsletters, pamphlets and interviews in the media, not to mention reports, books and conference presentations.

Hints for writing a readable report

An evaluation need not necessarily end in a written report of x number of pages. Evaluation is a process of inquiry, and whether that process ends in a verbal presentation, a radio programme, a TV message, a web presentation, or a written report is open to discussion.

That being said, there is no doubt that written reports are the most common way to disseminate evaluation findings, and as such they have many advantages – not least that they usually document the process and display empirical evidence. If the medium is to be a written report, great care should go into the writing.

The main challenge for the author is to grab the attention of their audience. The key is that the evaluator must be clear about what action they want. The report needs to be written with that outcome in mind. Most people only read the summary or introduction, which thus becomes more important than the main report.

Some other hints on how to capture the audience (according to Torres, Preskill and Pontiek, 1996) are:

- Write in a clear and jargon-free style.
- Avoid technical or bureaucratic language.
- Use direct expression and an active mode.
- Use first and second person voices, rather than third person or indirect expressions.
- Use tables, figures and boxes to liven up the text.
- Integrate qualitative and quantitative data.
- Let the data come to life through quotations and stories.
- Pay attention to page and chapter layout – make it attractive.

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Using different communication channels

As suggested earlier, it is helpful to communicate evaluation results throughout the process to participants, funders and other stakeholders in order to clarify analysis, try out ideas and deepen understanding and knowledge. There are various channels to consider:

- Formal and informal presentation.
- Breakfast/lunch/dinner talks.
- Newspaper/popular journal articles.
- Public workshops.
- Web discussion groups/Web site updates.
- TV and radio coverage.

Decisions about how to organise communication will depend on a range of factors, including the scale of the evaluation; the relationship between evaluators, funders and others in the process; the extent to which the evaluation is public and participatory, and so on. How the presentation of results is structured will depend on the stage of the process and what is expected from the communication.

How much does it cost to spread the message?

Some communication channels are very expensive, others very cheap. Some of the most expensive and most effective channels can offer the opportunity of having the message spread for free (TV and other media). The opportunities are many and the risks considerable.

The point here is that communication costs should be made part of the budget for the evaluation. It should by now be clear that communication costs extend beyond the printing of reports. They may also involve time for presentations (many and for different audiences) and time to build the message. It is not uncommon that a message developed for one medium (a report) is transferred to another (a Web site), with limited impact. Another medium may well require a totally different style of communication, and hence time and money should be allocated for the necessary modifications.

A comprehensive communication strategy could easily absorb some 25-30% of the total evaluation budget. However, that figure should be put into proper perspective. There must be something of value and interest to communicate, and that is something that cannot be known until the evaluation is under way. Interesting findings not communicated are as much a waste as uninteresting findings widely publicised. At present the former is far more of a problem than the latter, but the competition is fierce.

Evaluation policy

Though evaluation is usually about policies and their effect, there is also such a thing as evaluation policy. Evaluation is a process that needs to be organised. The evaluation function can be centralised to a specific evaluation unit, or it can be dispersed. It can be seen as a function of a ministry or as a function to be carried out at lower administrative levels (and presumably higher levels as well, as parliament could have a stake in evaluation). Practice varies among countries, and in addition the multilateral organisations have many approaches to organising evaluation.

The scope and functions of an *evaluation unit* are not necessarily the same as those of an evaluation system. Indeed, an essential variable in the design of the evaluation function concerns the role and responsibilities of an evaluation unit. Some of the design variables of an *evaluation unit* are:

- Position in the system.
- Board and management.
- Funding and budget.
- Personnel.
- Subject of studies.
- Publication and openness.

The integrity of an evaluation unit also depends on how it is financed, as well as on the overall size of its budget. Quality and coverage come at a price, and an evaluation unit could easily be crippled if it has to manage on a tiny budget. But perhaps more important than the budget is the source and stability of funding. Most evaluation units receive their funds in accordance with budget proposals from one year to the next, depending on the decision of the executive director (meaning that it is subject to his or her perception of the usefulness of the unit). However, evaluation units that are more controversial and innovative often have their funding from external sources (*e.g.* parliament, relevant ministry). A measure of financial independence usually gives an evaluation unit more leverage to present awkward results.

Evaluation research is a profession in its own right, and it is essential that evaluation units have personnel who master these skills. The structural position of an evaluation unit appears to have some consequences for its human resource base. Evaluation units with more independent positions may find it easier to secure the necessary expertise, whereas those that are integrated in the personnel policies and rotation systems of larger organisations fail to get employees with evaluation-specific skills (Boyle and Lemaire, 1997).

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The overall trend is that evaluations are becoming more open to the public. Many evaluation units publish series of reports, and many present reports on their Web sites. Still, most publicise only a selection of their reports after they have been accepted. An external observer cannot find out which selection criteria are used, and whether there are some critical reports that are not accepted by the evaluation unit (or by the management of the agencies). Only in institutional contexts where the activities of the agencies are subject to complete public openness – where diaries are kept and any document is retrievable on request – can one speak of real transparency. In most organisational systems, the majority of evaluation reports are kept confidential. Whether that is an indication that the information in them is more frank and critical, or in fact mediocre, is an open question.

Focusing attention on evaluation systems rather than on specific evaluation units raises complex issues. The choice of design for an evaluation unit has consequences for the overall system. Evaluation may actually be going through a process of change much like that of strategic planning in the corporate world in the 1980s. When strategic planning rose as a prestigious management science, many corporations established centralised planning units. Two decades later, strategic planning is deemed far too important a function to be kept at the level of central headquarters; there are now many types of strategic planning diffused throughout organisations (Mintzberg, 1994). Similarly, evaluation as a discipline may in the future be absorbed within the broader field of knowledge management.

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ANNEX 4.A1

Finding Out More About Evaluation

Evaluation research is a young science that is growing rapidly. It is also a technical subject, and hence lends itself well to writing manuals and other "how to" instruments. This section provides some hints as to where more information can be obtained; in fact, the annex is more of a framework for different sources of information than a complete guide to all information available.

Guides on methods

There are many evaluation manuals, but it is important to distinguish between the types of manuals needed by different audiences. Many rather good manuals are written for people in public administration who normally commission evaluations but seldom do them. These provide clarification on the purpose of evaluations and show the reader how to write terms of reference and how to recruit and monitor the work of consultancy teams. Such manuals are produced by, for example, the World Bank, the UNDP, and many other agencies – not least in development co-operation. Some very good and oft-quoted examples are the manuals from the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs and the Danish Department of Foreign Affairs.

However, those wishing to learn how to choose between methods – whether to work with, say, quasi-experimental situations or case studies – will not find these manuals helpful. They do not tell the reader how to construct a random sample or how to design a questionnaire. For that, there are a number of manuals or books issued by Sage Publications (*www.sagepub.com*), with titles such as (see bibliography for full references):

- How to Design a Program Evaluation.
- How to Assess Program Implementation.
- Internal Evaluation.
- How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation.

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- Qualitative Methodology.
- How to Analyze Data.
- Evaluator's Handbook.
- Finding Out Fast: Investigative Skills for Policy and Development.
- Evaluation Strategies for Communication and Reporting.
- Empowerment Evaluation.

More specifically, two major handbooks by Michael Q. Patton, also published by Sage, provide all the essentials:

- Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (2002).
- Utilization-Focused Evaluation (1998).

One of the few fundamental textbooks on evaluation not published by Sage is *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons: Policy Instruments and Their Evaluation,* edited by Bemelmans-Videc, Rist and Vedung and published by Transaction (1998).

Evaluation networks

The oldest professional organisation in evaluation research is the American Evaluation Association (*www.eval.org*) while the European Evaluation Society was founded in December 1994 (*www.europeanevaluation.org*). These bring together administrators, consultants and researchers, and are usually lively intellectual meeting places. Anyone who wishes to familiarise themselves with the profession would be well advised to attend any of the annual meetings.

Apart from the international networks there are now national associations of evaluators in most countries, as for example in Denmark, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy. Most have annual conferences but some meet more regularly; the Swedish network has monthly meetings that usually draw some 50-100 participants.

The professional associations can be easily reached on the Internet, and most of them provide links to each other as well as to consulting firms, universities with evaluation research, and (particularly) relevant parts of public administration (such as national audit boards, or the evaluation units of major public agencies).

Training opportunities

Courses, university programmes, seminars and workshops are usually advertised via the professional networks. There are a growing number of consulting firms that specialise in training, but so far there are relatively few academic training opportunities. Most of the basic training in research skills is found in other programmes, and there is course a wealth of courses on

interviewing methodology, questionnaires, case study research, etc. in most social science programmes.

Journals

The scientific journals also provide an easy access to the state of the art in evaluation research. The major journals are:

- *Evaluation* – published by Sage, four issues a year.
- *Evaluation Review* – also from Sage, four issues a year.

There are a number of other journals that cover evaluation as a topic such as the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, New Directions for Evaluation, Project Planning and Management* and – perhaps best of all – *Administrative Sciences Quarterly*. However, those interested in evaluation as a general subject who do not wish to go into the technical details of various instruments will find *Evaluation* by far the best investment.

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Chapter 5

Evaluating Public Participation Exercises: Strategic and Practical Issues

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The need to engage citizens in policy development is increasingly recognised as necessary to develop and maintain public confidence in public institutions and decision-making processes. However, public trust in public participation may actually decrease if such efforts are not evaluated in terms of: how they are conducted; the transparency of the process; and the impact on policy development. This chapter describes a number of instruments to measure effectiveness according to one set of evaluation criteria. It also identifies the difficulties faced when conducting evaluations – from the perspectives of the evaluator, organiser and exercise sponsor. Despite such difficulties, the conclusion drawn is that systematic assessment of public participation is essential to ensure the continuing quality of the process and public confidence in the outcome. Finally, some hints for sponsors regarding the evaluation process are provided.

Introduction: the need for effective public participation

There are a variety of practical and ethical reasons for policy-making bodies to involve lay people in decision making on issues in which the public has a stake. Political theorists and ethicists discuss concepts such as democracy, procedural justice and human rights in providing the moral basis for involvement; but it is now recognised that making decisions without public support is liable to lead to confrontation, dispute, disruption, boycott, distrust and public dissatisfaction (Rowe, Reynolds and Frewer, 2001). Indeed, the decline in trust in policy makers has been widely noted, and is regarded as having compromised the perceived legitimacy of governance in policy development (see *e.g.* Frewer, 1999). One example of widened opportunity for public participation involves strategy associated with emerging sciences. Box 5.1 discusses the issue of trust and participation in biosciences.

Trust in public institutions

The concept of "social trust" has its origins in socio-political analysis. The term refers to people's willingness to rely on experts and institutions in the management of policy issues that have direct impact on the public or the environment, and thus relates to their confidence in the competence of institutions to protect them from harm (for reviews see Renn and Levine, 1991 and Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995). In this tradition, trust is a uni-dimensional socio-political attitude that is generalised over particular issues and institutions. Research suggests that public trust in institutions continues to decline, as does trust in the information provided by these institutions. Indeed, the decline in the public's trust in risk management has passed a threshold point where the legitimacy of scientific judgement is regularly questioned (Frewer *et al.,* 2002). Other factors have, however, contributed to this process: the rise of the "consumer citizen" with the emphasis on informed consumer choice; the diminished role of the "expert" as a result of the wide availability of specialist information; and broad shifts in the national (and in some cases international) political culture towards more open forms of government (Frewer and Salter, 2002). These authors also note the increasing emphasis on developing new ways of negotiating the relationship between the policy community and wider society, which has implications for all forms of policy development. They suggest that if public trust is to be regained, scientific advice will need to be evaluated against various criteria, such as

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whether decision-making processes associated with regulation take account of social impact as well as technical factors, and whether the decision – making process itself is transparent and intelligible. Frewer and Salter suggest there is a need for:

- Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of communication practices. Ineffective communication may be ignored or fail to reach target audiences. The public must be consulted regarding their information needs.
- Making public involvement in policy development explicit. If public involvement is to become a standard part of the process, information needs to be available on how it should be conducted and evaluated. This is to ensure that standardised procedures are used ("quality assurance") and that outputs are comparable in space and time.
- Explicit assessment of the impact of public consultation on policy development (Jasanoff, 1993). Consulting the public will be viewed negatively by society if the information resulting from these processes is

Box 5.1. **Public involvement in policy making for biosciences**

There has been much debate recently about the need to develop strategies for consulting and involving the public. For example, the European Commission has emphasised the need to introduce "new institutional relationships and forms" reinforcing the process of mutual learning between the public and the scientific community [*e.g.* the European Commission's Research Directorate General and the Joint Research Centre (JRC)]. In particular, the "science and society" agenda identifies the need to change institutional terms of reference and procedures, with the development and use of broader, more inclusive public consultation and dialogue on risk issues and more transparent institutional processes.

A good example of an issue in which this trend is evident is provided by the emerging biosciences, which is a current focus of public discourse about technology implementation (Levidow and Marris, 2001). In this example, the policy community has recognised that public concerns about emerging bioethical issues, the potential for unintended effects and the societal consequences of technology applications are liable to affect public reactions to technology implementation and must be taken into account by policy makers if the technology is to be accepted (*e.g.* Miles and Frewer, 2001). Although the recent focus of "science and society" issues have tended to be within the policy community, the implications of broader public involvement and development of guidelines for that involvement are likely to be equally applicable to all interested sectors, including industry and the private sector.

not incorporated into policy in a transparent and measurable way that can be explicitly evaluated against some criteria of successful implementation.

The emphasis of this chapter is on the issue of *evaluating the effectiveness of participation*, an essential first step in developing best practice. The next section highlights experience in this regard before summarising some key findings and observations on the issue.

Lessons from experience

In 1999 the authors were commissioned by the UK Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive to develop a number of instruments to enable the evaluation of participation exercises against a set of general criteria.[1] Such instruments might, theoretically, be used to establish the effectiveness of any participatory exercise, and might ultimately lead to the development of a model or theory concerning *when* to use the different mechanism types in order to increase chances of an effective exercise, as well as indicating *how* to operate the mechanisms to achieve this. This project followed on from a short previous project for the Department of Health that addressed the evaluation issue and led to the publication of an "evaluation framework" (Rowe and Frewer, 2000) that stipulated a number of evaluation criteria necessary for a participation exercise to be "effective". These are described in Table 5.1 below.

It is interesting to compare these to the ten "Guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation of citizens in policy making" that appear in the OECD report *Citizens as Partners* (OECD, 2001, p. 15).

Table 5.1. **Nine criteria for evaluation**

Criteria	Definition
Representativeness	The public involved in the exercise should comprise a broadly representative sample of the population affected by the policy decision.
Independence	The participation exercise should be conducted in an independent (unbiased) way.
Early involvement	The participants in the exercise should be involved as early as possible in the process, as soon as societal values become important to the development of policy.
Influence	The outcome of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy.
Transparency	The process should be transparent so that the relevant/affected population can see what is going on and how decisions are made.
Resource accessibility	Participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to fulfil their brief.
Task definition	The nature and scope of the participation exercise should be clearly defined.
Structured decision making	The participation exercise should use appropriate mechanisms for structuring/displaying the decision-making process.
Cost-effectiveness	The process should be cost-effective from the point of view of the sponsors (for example, in the case of proportionality of response).

Source: Rowe and Frewer (2000).

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Several of these criteria/principles have strong parallels – for example, "Early Involvement" is similar to the OECD's principle of "Time", "Task Definition" to "Clarity", "Independence" to "Objectivity", and "Resource Accessibility" to "Resources". The criteria here are generally focused on the participation task *per se* (that it be well-structured to enhance decision making, use representative samples of the population, be transparently run, and so on), whereas the rest of the OECD principles seem to relate more to the higher-level strategic issues of organising engagement. Indeed, it might be interesting in the future to merge the two sets of principles/criteria.

The result of this two-year project in the UK was a "toolkit" for use in evaluating participation exercises according to the authors' stipulated evaluation framework. This comprised a short nine-item questionnaire, a longer 58-item questionnaire, and an "evaluation checklist". The two questionnaires are intended for participants: the first involves one question per each evaluation criterion, and the second involves several questions per criterion. All questions are rated on 7-point scales. Only one of the two versions should be used in any exercise (preferably the longer questionnaire, which is liable to be more reliable and valid, though in practice the shorter questionnaire has been chosen by sponsors because of its ease of implementation). The checklist is intended for use by the evaluator, who scores the exercise on a number of items related to each evaluation criterion as "Very Bad", "Bad", "Moderate", "Good", "Very Good" or "Unsure". The annex to this chapter gives a brief description of the questions that the evaluator is required to answer in the checklist, though it should be noted that in the actual toolkit the checklist is accompanied by instructions and definitions of terms and is set out to allow the evaluator to insert evidence for their ratings on each question. Details of how to score and interpret the checklist – as well as the participant questionnaires – are also provided in the toolkit.

The questionnaires are aimed at establishing participant perceptions; the checklist is aimed at establishing more objectively the successful conduct of the exercise according to multiple perspectives and using all available information, including evaluator observation of process, meeting minutes, information from interviews with sponsors and organisers, and so on.[2]

A number of participation exercises in the United Kingdom were evaluated during the course of the project. These are detailed in Table 2 below. One or more elements of the toolkit were used in these evaluations, although it should be noted that because the aim was the *development* of the toolkit, the nature of the instruments changed throughout as they were refined in line with lessons learned from the evaluations. In particular, the issues considered were:

- *Reliability* – that is, does the instrument produce the same results across different times?

Table 5.2. **UK public participation exercises evaluated (2000-2001)**

Organisation	Exercise mechanism	Subject
UKCEED	Consensus Conference	Radioactive waste management
Suffolk County Council	Citizens' Panel	Council services
Human Genetics Commission	Consultation Seminar	Work programme
Human Genetics Commission	Paper Consultation	Work programme
Human Genetics Commission	Internet Consultation	Work programme
Department of Health	Focus Group	Risk messages
Norfolk County Council	Citizens' Panel	Council services
Suffolk Social Services	Stakeholder Conference	Social service standards charter
A County Fire Service	Public Meeting	Whether to close local fire station
Cambridge City Council	Citizen's Jury	Young people's concerns
Food Standards Agency	Consultation Seminar	Radiation dose assessment
Local Health Partnerships	Two-day Conference	Health priorities
Ipswich Primary Care Group	Focus Group	Health provision for coronary heart disease patients

Source: Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2001.

- *Validity* – does the instrument measure what it purports to measure?
- *Usability* – is the instrument easy and practical to use?

Assessment of the instruments' merits was often done in an informal manner, since lack of ability to exert experimental control on the participation situations undermined attempts to be as scientifically rigorous as would have been hoped. For example, "reliability" is often assessed by presenting the same subjects with an instrument on several occasions (test-retest reliability), but sponsors rarely agreed to this. This is just one example of the issues regarding the complexity of evaluation that will be discussed in the next section.

Additionally, one or more of the instruments from the toolkit were subsequently used to evaluate:

- A two-day seminar conducted by the UK Food Standards Agency on the issue of radiation dose assessment in food (Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2004).
- Four different exercises (a one-day deliberative conference, focus groups, postal questionnaires, and an Internet-based consultation) conducted for the UK Food Chain and Crops for Industry Foresight Panel on the issue of functional foods (Rowe and Frewer, 2001).
- Two workshops sponsored by the UK National Consumer Council (in partnership with the Food Standards Agency and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) on the issue of the future of food and farming (Frewer and Rowe, 2001).

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Among the conclusions to this research were that:

- The toolkit is sensitive to differences in public participation exercises in meeting the evaluation criteria.
- The toolkit is effective at evaluating electronic consultation as well as those conducted using other, more traditional mechanisms. Evaluation of this type, using pre-specified criteria, might usefully be considered as part of the emerging e-democracy agenda as described in a recent OECD *Policy Brief* entitled *Engaging Citizens Online for Better Policy Making* (OECD, 2003).
- Systematic comparison of the effectiveness of different exercises conducted at different times is made easy by use of the toolkit across different participation events.
- For different exercises, the weak part of the exercise is highlighted through application of the toolkit – which gives clear guidance to the organisers as to what might be done "better" next time if the principles of best practice (indicated by the evaluation criteria) are adhered to.
- Most of the public participation exercises were evaluated positively. From this perspective, it appears not to matter too much what participation mechanism one uses, just that the one used is appropriate to the policy requirements of the situation.
- The one criterion that most of the evaluations indicated was not successfully met was that of influence – in other words, participants did not believe that the exercise made any difference to the policy process itself. However, no attempts were made to conduct post hoc evaluations of impact on policy content, and the authors are not aware of any other independent attempts to do so.

The issues discussed in this chapter derive from the practical lessons learned from these evaluations and projects, as well as from further conceptual work on the participation and evaluation theme that the authors have developed in a number of academic publications and submitted papers.

At this point it is worth noting that the evaluation framework proposed here may supplement the in-depth qualitative approach described by Kim Forss in this volume. By providing an evaluation instrument that is quick and efficient to apply, it is possible for sponsors to make comparisons between public participation exercises in time and space. This may be all that is possible with limited resources. Ideally, however, the results of such an evaluation might best be integrated with a longer, more resource-intensive qualitative analysis focusing on specific characteristics of particular exercises conducted at a particular time with a specific focus and intent. We would argue, however, that at the very least an evaluation of the sort suggested by

these criteria is necessary if the credibility of the exercise and the sponsors is to be maintained.

The problem of evaluation: measures of absolute and relative effectiveness

The primary goal of the authors' early research has been to develop a number of instruments to enable the evaluation of the effectiveness of different public participation mechanisms. A subsidiary goal has been to evaluate a number of the main mechanisms to give an idea of their *absolute* and *relative* merits. Naturally, the sponsors and participants of any *particular* exercise are concerned with the absolute effectiveness of that exercise – in other words, whether it is effective/successful according to whatever criteria of effectiveness is explicitly or implicitly adopted by the respective parties. From the research perspective, however, and also from the perspective of most of the governmental departments and agencies that have funded the authors' work, there is also concern with the relative effectiveness of individual exercises, *i.e.* in comparison with other possible alternatives. Would they, for example, have been more effective had they been conducted using a different participation mechanism, or had they involved the same mechanism enacted in a different way? For funders such as the Department of Health the answer to the question "What mechanism works best when?" has practical implications. It would enable them to quickly select the appropriate mechanism or format for enacting a participation exercise, saving time and money and increasing the chances of a straightforward, uncontentious, successful endeavour.

An *ideal* research programme that would theoretically allow us to answer this question would involve:

- Identifying all available types of participation mechanism (*e.g.* consensus conference, public meeting, paper consultation).
- Identifying all potential environments or contexts in which one might wish to employ a participation mechanism (*e.g.* condition of high information, condition of low information).
- Measuring the effectiveness of the various participation exercises against common standards (evaluation criteria) in each of the contexts.

A multitude of mechanisms

Of course, there are a number of significant difficulties with conducting this idealised research agenda. With regard to the first step, research is hindered by the sheer number of mechanisms that need to be considered. In a recent paper the authors list over 100 of these, though there are certainly many more. Problematically, these mechanisms are not generally well defined. This lack of definition has led researchers to sometimes mistake one

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mechanism type for another. Alternatively, different researchers have described one particular mechanism using different names (for example, is there any meaningful difference between a "deliberative conference", a "consultation seminar", and a "2-day workshop"?). So, not only are there a multitude of mechanisms (*i.e.* too many to evaluate practically in a reasonable time frame), but there is a difficulty in drawing a line between these, and hence of producing a comprehensive and accurate list of mechanisms. One potential solution to this may be to develop a typology to reduce the plethora of mechanisms into a smaller, more manageable number of mechanism classes that are structurally similar on the most important variables (see Rowe and Frewer, submitted).

A range of different contexts

The problem with identifying contexts is similar: the number of potential contexts is huge, and these are also difficult to define. Consider a sponsor that wishes to run an exercise to involve stakeholders in discussing options for siting a waste facility. Which of the multitude of context features are of sufficient significance to potentially influence the success of the different participation mechanisms? Should the topic be considered (*e.g.* waste)? Or should the decision be made according to the physical activity being discussed (*e.g.* siting)? Perhaps the nature of participants (stakeholders) needs to be considered? Identifying context factors such as these is a complex and difficult task. For this reason, to the authors' knowledge it simply has not been attempted before in any serious manner (which is not to say that various researchers have not suggested one particular aspect of context that might impinge on the success or otherwise of particular participation initiatives). As such, there is no available list of contexts (as there is of participation mechanisms) that can be taken and studied: the list would need to be generated separately, in the absence of any theoretical or empirical justification.

The need for repeated evaluations

Furthermore, in order to be rigorous in the conduct of our idealised research programme, each of the mechanisms (or classes of mechanism) would need to be evaluated in each of the contexts a number of times in order to increase the reliability of results (to discount the fact that a particular exercise in a particular context might be atypical and might simply have been, for example, very poorly conducted). The difficulty of being allowed to evaluate poorly run exercises (and therefore of achieving a full range of exercises in each "mechanism X case cell") is another significant hindrance to this process that may lead to a bias in conclusions of general mechanism effectiveness. The lack of "poor" participation exercises is particularly

significant for scientific research, since more may be learned from these than successful ones.[3]

Leaving aside the difficulties inherent in these stages of conducting an idealised research programme, the discussion will now turn to the third stage, which is the focus of this chapter: measuring effectiveness in particular cases.[4]

The issue of measuring effectiveness of a participation exercise: evaluation or assessment?

The evaluation of participation exercises is important for all parties involved: the sponsors of the exercise, the organisers that run it, the participants that take part, and the uninvolved-yet-potentially-affected public. Evaluation is important for financial reasons (*e.g.* to ensure the proper use of public or institutional money), practical reasons (*e.g.* to learn from past mistakes to allow exercises to be run better in future), ethical/moral reasons (*e.g.* to establish fair representation and ensure that those involved are not deceived as to the impact of their contribution), and research/theoretical reasons (*e.g.* to increase our understanding of human behaviour). As such, few would deny that evaluation *should* be done wherever and whenever possible.

Unfortunately, evaluation of public participation is also difficult. Rosener (1981) listed four problems inherent in conducting evaluations:

- The participation concept is complex and value-laden.
- There are no widely held criteria for judging success and failure of an exercise.
- There are no agreed-upon evaluation methods.
- There are few reliable measurement tools.

Joss (1995) also notes that practitioners may argue that participation exercises (such as consensus conferences) do not produce the "hard data" necessary for analysis, while there may be resistance from those, like organisers, with a vested interest in success. It is perhaps for these reasons (among others) that evaluations are often rather informal. Indeed, a review of the academic literature indicates that, of those participation exercises that have been evaluated, many have been evaluated in an informal, subjective, and *ad hoc* manner without reference to any pre-defined evaluation criteria (Rowe and Frewer, 2004). It is thus useful to differentiate *evaluation* from *assessment*, the former referring to the structured process of establishing the success or otherwise of an exercise against *preset criteria*, the latter referring to the relatively unstructured analysis of an exercise *without* preset effectiveness criteria, as occurs in the conducting of descriptive case studies.

Although evaluation is more valuable, assessment may uncover issues unique to the exercise beyond any standard framework, and may thus serve to

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validate or call into question the evaluation. For example, in one evaluation the authors used two instruments they developed to evaluate a two-day stakeholder conference (Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2004). After the exercise, however, open telephone interviews were also conducted in which participants were asked, "What was best/worst about the exercise?" and "How might the exercise have been improved?" The responses were generally phrased in terms similar to those concepts identified in the evaluation – although one significant addition was noted. A number of participants discussed whether or not they had "learned" anything from the exercise – a criterion not covered in the evaluation, since the authors consider this a success criterion of "communication" (or "information" according to the definition offered in OECD, 2001) rather than participation. From this it was concluded that the evaluation framework was largely validated (*i.e.* it was appropriate to use to judge the effectiveness of this particular exercise), but also that there was a degree of confusion among participants. Some thought the exercise was a chance for them to learn (passively) as opposed to a chance to contribute to the debate (actively), which was the intent of the sponsors.

Difficulties in defining effectiveness: selecting evaluation criteria

Conducting a rigorous and structured *evaluation* essentially has three phases. The first involves *defining* what is meant by the term "effective" (or "successful", "quality" or whatever synonym one wishes to use); the second involves *operationalising* the definition; and the third involves *applying* the instrument/s to the exercise in order to determine its success. This section examines some of the difficulties in defining effectiveness. The context here is from the perspective of the evaluator; implications for sponsors will form the concluding section.

Unless there is a clear definition of what it means for a participation exercise to be "effective", there will be no theoretical benchmark against which performance may be assessed. The difficulty lies in the fact that "effectiveness" in this domain is not an obvious, uni-dimensional and objective quality (such as "speed" or "distance") that can be easily identified, described and then measured. There are clearly many aspects to the concept of "participation exercise effectiveness", and these are open to contention and need to be considered by the evaluator and, indeed, the sponsor.

Who defines "effectiveness"?

The first point of contention concerns the issue of "effective according to whom?" There are many parties involved in a participation exercise, with differing expectations, values, hopes and understandings. Hence, what might appear effective to some might not appear so to others. For example, participants

might be satisfied with a participation process and judge it effective on that basis, while its sponsors might be dissatisfied with the resulting recommendations and on that basis judge it ineffective. This fact both complicates the production of a definition (which needs to somehow take the various perspectives into account), and implies the need for an unambiguous, *a priori* statement of what is meant by effectiveness (and how it might be ascertained) in order to reduce contention and dispute about the merits of the exercise later. (This is a key reason why *evaluation* is more important than *assessment*.) The review of published evaluations revealed that use of questionnaires eliciting subjective responses was frequent (Rowe and Frewer, 2004). However, evaluation based *solely* on responses to these from particular constituents – such as the participants – runs the risk of biasing the evaluation. One way to get around this problem is to take an objective perspective in which the views of each of the parties involved (whoever they might be) are included and made part of an overall assessment of effectiveness that includes objectively measurable attributes of the exercise. In the authors' toolkit, the evaluation checklist is intended for this.

Process or outcome evaluation?

A second complication that impacts upon how one might usefully define effectiveness is the practical difficulty of identifying an end-point to a participation exercise (the point at which one can say that an exercise has ceased, and no further actions will derive from it). That is, institutional and societal responses to a particular exercise may be manifest months or years after an exercise has finished. Given that the reason for defining effectiveness is to enable its measurement, however, a definition that focuses upon qualities/quantities that are difficult to measure is of limited utility. One dichotomy in defining effectiveness is between the *outcome* of an exercise and the *process* associated with the exercise (Chess and Purcell, 1999; Rowe and Frewer, 2000). In many ways, the assessment of outcomes is preferable, because these will correspond more directly to the desired aims of the exercise. However, these may be difficult to ascertain in a timely manner, and outcomes may be due to a large extent to other political/technical/budgetary factors, such as the occurrence of simultaneous events or externally mediated pressures influencing policy processes (Chess and Purcell, 1999). As such, evaluation of exercise *processes* must often serve as surrogate to the outcomes of the exercise. Thus, if the exercise process is good (conducted well according to one's definition) then it would seem more likely that the outcomes will be good than if the process is bad. Arguably, it would seem more likely that decision makers will ignore the recommendation of an exercise (a "bad" outcome) if they perceive it to have been poorly run (*e.g.* with unrepresentative

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participants), than if they perceive it to have been well run (*e.g.* with representative participants) (Rowe and Frewer, 2004).

Do "universal" criteria of effectiveness exist?

A third issue, that relates to our idealised research programme as much as to the concerns of evaluating any particular participation exercise, concerns the extent to which one's definition of effectiveness can be generalised so as to allow comparison of the effectiveness of different – and potentially highly varied – exercises and mechanisms. This is an important issue, for it determines whether it is possible to employ an off-the-shelf definition of effectiveness (with commensurate instruments), or whether it is necessary to define effectiveness in some unique manner for each exercise, requiring the development and validation of a new set of instruments on each occasion. Clearly, a "universal" definition with standard instruments is preferable, and the search for such universals has been at the heart of the authors' research (and is greatly desired by a number of their funders); the question is whether this is feasible and appropriate. Many researchers conducting *evaluations* do adopt a universalist approach – though often implicitly – discussing their evaluation criteria in the sense of being appropriate for all participation exercises, or at least a major subset of these (such as "deliberative exercises") (Rowe and Frewer, 2004). (It should be noted that those conducting assessments appear more likely to disagree with this view, suggesting that unique criteria need to be established for each exercise – which can only be done in an inductive manner, with theory following observation.) The authors' view is that specific criteria may almost always be recast in terms of more general criteria – for example, a specific aim to "affect policy in a specific way" may be cast as the general criterion "to have an impact on policy".

The question then becomes – what are these universal effectiveness criteria? From a democratic perspective, for example, an effective participation exercise might be one that is somehow "fair", and a number of related criteria might be stipulated. From a decision-making perspective, effective participation might be indicated by an output that is in some sense "better", and alternative criteria related to decision quality might be stipulated. Likewise, an economic framework might be concerned with cost or resource characteristics. Alternatively, one could incorporate all of these perspectives into a definition of what it means for a participation exercise to be effective. However, this is not to say that researchers *should* accept a *single* universal definition – different interpretations of the participation concept may militate against this (indeed, debate about the relative merits of different definitions is liable to enrich the participation debate) – but simply that a more general phrasing of what is meant by effectiveness is necessary if we are to

acquire findings that are comparable. And ultimately, the use of a universal definition, and acceptance of associated instruments, may save evaluators from constantly having to "reinvent the wheel".

Difficulties in developing instruments to measure effectiveness

To be useful in a research sense, it is necessary that one's definition of effectiveness be *operationalised*. That is, it is necessary to develop one or more processes or instruments to measure whether and to what extent a particular public participation exercise has successfully attained the required state. The effectiveness concept/s may be operationalised in a number of ways, via *processes* such as participant interviews and evaluator observation, or via specific *instruments* such as participant questionnaires, and may be qualitative or quantitative in nature. The essence of a suitable procedure/instrument is that it is detailed and structured (to allow it to be reused or systematically applied across different situations), and that it should be tested for its appropriateness and accuracy. Certain criteria from the development of psychometric instruments (instruments for measuring psychological concepts or properties) and indeed from the evaluation of social programmes, may be apt here, namely, those of *reliability* and *validity*.[5] These concepts refer to whether the instrument measures what it intends to measure (validity) and does so consistently, such as across time (reliability). Unfortunately, determining the achievement of these criteria relies on the use of statistical procedures (*e.g.* correlations) that need relatively large amounts of data – *e.g.* large numbers of respondents completing large numbers of questions over a number of occasions. The typical participation exercise uses relatively few participants, however. Restrictions in the collection of adequate data may also arise from the unwillingness of sponsors/organisers to allow the distribution of instruments on more than one occasion (hindering the determination of reliability), or their reluctance to allow the assessment of poorly conducted exercises (which means that the validity and reliability of the instrument in all circumstances cannot be determined).

The impact of these difficulties on the development of standard evaluative tools is evident from the review of published evaluations (Rowe and Frewer, 2004). No evidence was found of any standard instruments being used across a number of studies, even though the evaluation frameworks stipulated in published research often claim – if only implicitly – that they are apt for participation exercises in general, hence *could* potentially be taken up and applied by others. The review also found that very few studies have actually measured effectiveness using objective criteria; most have done so by ascertaining the opinions of participants through interviews or questionnaires/surveys (Sinclair, 1977; Rosener, 1981; Crosby, Kelly and Schaefer, 1986; Kathlene and Martin, 1991; Joss, 1995; Petts, 1995; Coglianese,

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1997; Guston, 1999; Beierle and Konisky, 2000; Carr and Halvorsen, 2001; and Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2004). Particularly noteworthy, however, was the lack of detail in published studies on the processes and instruments they employed, and a lack of concern for issues such as the reliability and validity of the measures.[6]

In conclusion, advances in science rely upon the presence of standard validated procedures and instruments for measurement, which can be taken up and used by all researchers in a particular discipline, allowing comparability of findings. Few, if any, such rules presently exist in the public participation domain. Those commissioning evaluations need to be aware of this, and should seek to establish the extent to which the instruments and processes used by the evaluators have been previously validated. They should not be surprised if the answer to their question is that the instruments have not been fully tested, and they should note the consequent evaluation limitations. If an evaluation that is being commissioned is intended to be the first of several, then it may be ultimately to the sponsor's good to allow full data collection by the evaluators (*e.g.* allowing them to poll participant views on a number of occasions to test reliability), and thus to take a stake in the development of the instruments and processes.

Difficulties in applying instruments in practical evaluations

Assuming we have defined what we mean by effectiveness, and we have developed (and hopefully validated) some instruments, what now are the problems with conducting evaluations? These are mostly practical difficulties that have been alluded to previously, but which are worth emphasising.

Reluctance to undertake evaluation

The first difficulty arises from the reluctance of sponsors or organisers to allow evaluation in the first place. After all, there is relatively little to gain from an evaluation for those holding power. Given the often experimental and uncertain nature of the participation processes in question, their evaluation may be expected to generate criticism. This defensive stance militates against conducting research, but also against learning by the institutions or organisations running the exercises.

Evaluation as an afterthought

A second point concerns the timing of evaluations: the process should be initiated at the outset. For example, if an evaluator wished to establish the "fairness" of an exercise, they would need access to the decision-making body that sets the terms of the exercise and details who will be involved, how they will be recruited, what will be expected of them, and how their involvement

will be operationalised. In many cases, however, evaluation is an afterthought, and the process of organising and running the exercise may be well under way before the issue is even raised. If accurate documentation of initial decisions is available (minutes kept of steering committee meetings, for example), this problem may be partially overcome – but if not, substantial important activities that might have a bearing on the ultimate effectiveness of the exercise will have already passed out of the evaluator's reach, to the detriment of the evaluation.

Relatedly, sponsors of exercises that do involve evaluation generally desire rapid appraisal, which therefore might be included in some report of the activities (to the ultimate paymasters). As previously noted, the influence of an exercise on proceedings may occur at some point following the conclusion of the exercise (*e.g.* influencing future policy), in which case it cannot be considered. This somewhat limits the scope of the evaluation – which may, of course, be continued after this time though there may be no mechanism for further findings to be reported to the appropriate parties.

Limited access to data

Restricted access to information and the various parties involved is a third point of difficulty for those conducting evaluations. This problem ranges from the desire of sponsors and organisers to keep various aspects of their activities hidden, to a simple unwillingness of participants to complete questionnaires, leading to bias in sampling. Attempts need to be made (both political and methodological) to maximise data available for analysis, and in any evaluation, data gaps need to be properly noted.

The next section attempts to note some implications of evaluation for sponsors.

Implications for sponsors

The difficulties faced by evaluators are also problematic for the sponsors of information, consultation and participation exercises. Whatever system or framework the evaluator uses will seem sub-optimal to the sponsor, and almost certainly will be.

Accepting the limits of current evaluation tools

Evaluation is a relatively undeveloped discipline, and no evaluation framework can be said to be universally accepted or uncontentious; no tool or process for measuring effectiveness can be said to be perfectly validated. For the unconvinced sponsor – the sponsor who is compelled, perhaps by statute, to conduct a participatory exercise, against their better judgement – this realisation may well come as a boon. If the evaluation process is somehow

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flawed, then need it be conducted, or if conducted, need the results be heeded? For the convinced sponsor, the realisation can be worrisome – there are no perfect answers, and consequently any answers produced may be rejected by those against whom criticism is levelled. For example, if the participation process is found to be flawed in some way, the organiser might challenge the evaluation process or assumptions in return. If the process is deemed fair, or appropriate, or efficient, then those who do not like the outcome might find a way to challenge these conclusions based on evaluation difficulties. The sponsor or organiser might even find a way to influence the manner of evaluation in order to pre-empt discovery of some expected flaw.

Balancing control by sponsors and evaluators

In the authors' experience of evaluations employing their own toolkit, sponsors either attempted to have one or more of the instruments changed because it did not relate to their unique situation (in this they may or may not have been right – see Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2004) or placed restrictions on the evaluation process. At the end of the day the sponsor wields most of the power, and the evaluator, in order to gain the commission or to conduct the research, may need to concede and conduct the evaluation in a way they would not necessarily wish.

Unfettered evaluator control is not a good thing for a sponsor: after all, the situation may indeed be unique and the evaluation scheme proposed *will not* be perfect. On the other hand, excessive sponsor interference is also not good. It risks biasing the evaluation, and, if discovered by a competing stakeholder, might lead to charges that undermine the whole exercise and lead to more rancour than would be the case had the exercise and evaluation not been conducted at all. A solution lies somewhere in between: in the negotiation of the evaluation process in *an open and audited manner*, and preferably with the *involvement of significant other stakeholders* (if feasible or practical, given that these stakeholders are known). Failing this, the evaluation scheme accepted by the sponsor could be revealed to all involved significant stakeholders who could "sign up" to the process – perhaps literally so, signifying acceptance of the process and agreeing to respect its conclusions. Such a contract is an innovative process: the authors know of no case where it has been enacted, though the logic behind the approach seems sound.

Recognising the possibility of external evaluation

It is important to consider that an evaluation of the exercise may be performed regardless of sponsor wishes, either by academics or perhaps by evaluators sponsored by some of the other participants. If this is conducted outside the control or influence of the sponsor, then there may be bias towards

the position of the other groups – or at least, bias as a result of the evaluator lacking significant portions of information. Although such evaluation is unlikely to cost the sponsor financially, it may prove costly in other senses. As such, it is probably best for the sponsor to provide for an evaluation to be conducted at the outset, and ensure that the process will be fair from *all* perspectives, particularly its own.

Developing valid criteria for evaluation

Despite these difficulties, it should be emphasised that evaluation against validated criteria is essential if the public participation exercise is to be taken seriously by both sponsors and participants, and is to form the platform from which public opinion can be incorporated into policy processes. Failure to evaluate may result in cynicism on the part of both participants and external observers as to the merits and utility of the exercise. And once again, in addition, policy impact should be assessed. The results of both exercise and policy impact evaluations should be fed back to both participants and the general public, as it is the difference that the exercise makes to policy outcomes that may increase public confidence in the policy process.

Conclusions and implications for an effective public participation strategy

It is important to evaluate, in a systematic way, the effectiveness of public participation exercises. In order to control the quality of evaluation, this should be done so that different evaluations are comparable across time *and* across exercises. It is also essential that the evaluation of the exercise be commissioned at the same time as the exercise itself, to permit evaluation of the development of the exercise.

A set of validated criteria has been described briefly that may be used as a basis for systematic evaluation of this nature (though other criteria exist: see Rowe and Frewer, 2004). These criteria have been "operationalised" in the form of a set of "measuring instruments" or "toolkit" that can be provided by the authors to enable benchmarking of the effectiveness of different public engagement exercises (*e.g.* Marsh, Rowe and Frewer, 2001). The annex to this chapter provides a summary of the questions answered by the evaluator in the checklist. However, these criteria are not exhaustive. In particular, further work is needed to develop instruments for assessing the *policy impact* of public participation exercises.

Increasing public trust in policy development is not only likely to depend on conducting public participation, however, it is also likely to depend on that participation making a difference. Public distrust in the sponsoring body is likely to increase, not decrease, if the results of public engagement exercises

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are not *explicitly* considered in policy development and if the use of public input is not accounted for. Furthermore, the way in which the results of the exercise are incorporated into the policy process needs to be communicated in an effective way to both the participants in the exercise and the general public.

Box 5.2. **Ten tips for commissioning an evaluation**

1. Think about evaluation early, and make space for it when planning the information, consultation or participation exercise.
2. Ensure that you are clear about the purpose of the exercise. State clear criteria for success.
3. Negotiate the evaluation scheme with the evaluator, and ensure that their evaluation will answer your questions. Be prepared to expand or alter your criteria accordingly (the evaluator should have a more objective view).
4. Ensure that all negotiation relating to the evaluation scheme is done in an open, audited (*e.g.* via minutes) manner, to guard against future charges of sponsor bias.
5. If feasible, have the significant stakeholders in a participation exercise or their representatives "sign up" for the evaluation scheme, to acknowledge that they believe it to be fair/appropriate.
6. Be aware of the limitations of the evaluation, particularly the likelihood that the instruments and processes used may not be "valid" or "reliable" in a strict research sense. If the evaluation is the first of several planned, it may be appropriate to work with the evaluator in developing, testing and improving the instruments.
7. Communicate the results of the evaluation back to participants, and make sure the results are placed within the public domain and are thus open to public scrutiny.
8. Evaluate the impact of the exercise on the development of policy, and communicate the results back to participants and the public more generally.
9. If the exercise is intended to provide information (for example, about public preferences or values) to the sponsor, but is not intended to influence policy or decision making, then this should be made clear to participants at the outset.
10. If the results of the consultation are not used in the development of policy or do not influence decisions even though that was why the exercise was originally developed, the reason(s) should be communicated to participants and the wider public.

Notes

1. It should be noted that "participation" in this context refers to both "consultation" and "participation" according to the definition offered in the OECD report *Citizens as Partners* (OECD, 2001) but not "information", here described by the term "communication".
2. The toolkit is described in a report by Marsh, Rowe and Frewer (2001), and the project itself is described in detail in two reports (one for each year): Rowe, Marsh, Reynolds and Frewer (2000) and Rowe, Marsh and Frewer (2001). A brief summary of the project is detailed in a report by Frewer, Rowe, Marsh and Reynolds (2001).
3. Indeed, according to the hypothetico-deductive method, theories cannot be proved, only disproved – hence a "positive" result teaches us nothing, whereas a "negative" result teaches us that our theory is wrong and needs to be amended (Popper, 1959).
4. Much of the following discussion comes from our concluding report for the Department of Health and Health and Safety Executive funded project (see Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2001), and two recent conceptual papers (Rowe and Frewer, 2004; Rowe and Frewer, submitted).
5. It should be emphasised that reliability and validity are concepts of relevance to *all* social science methods (*i.e.* to *qualitative* methods, such as case studies, as well as to *quantitative* methods) – *e.g.* see Yin (1994) for a discussion of case study research in particular.
6. The few that have noted such details include Halvorsen (2001), Lauber and Knuth (1999), and the authors' own research (*e.g.* in Rowe, Marsh and Frewer, 2004).

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ANNEX 5.A1

The Evaluation Checklist

Evaluation criteria	Aspect of criterion	Questions
Task definition	Context	Was the context of this exercise clearly identified?
	Scope	Was the scope of the exercise clear and appropriate?
	Aims and outputs	Were the overall aims and outputs of the exercise clear and appropriate?
	Rationale for exercise	Was the rationale for choosing this particular type of exercise both clear and appropriate?
Representativeness	Stakeholders	Were all persons with a legitimate interest in the issue (and therefore the outcome of the participation exercise) clearly identified?
	Selection	Were participants appropriately selected from among the group of stakeholders?
	Participants' role	Was the right balance achieved between participants acting as representatives (delegates), and participants acting in an individual capacity?
	Commitment	Was enough effort made to get the right participants?
	Actual representativeness	Whatever the intentions, was the group of participants actually representative (and did it remain so during the course of the exercise)?
Resource accessibility	People	Were there enough people involved, with the appropriate level of skill and understanding, in setting up, running the exercise, and handling the outputs?
	Time	Was sufficient time available to run the exercise?
	Facilities	Were there enough suitable facilities and equipment to meet the needs of the exercise?
	Expertise	Was expertise brought in, at the right level, to meet the needs of the participants?
	Finance	Was sufficient finance available to meet the needs of the exercise?
	Information	Was enough good quality information available, at the right level of detail, in a usable format?

Evaluation criteria	Aspect of criterion	Questions
Structured decision making (structured discussion)	Operational management	Was the exercise well organised and managed on a practical level?
	Procedures	Were the decision-making (or discussion) procedures used appropriate for the exercise and the participants?
	Flexibility	Was the exercise flexible and adaptable, as necessary?
	Consistency	Were the decisions made (or conclusions drawn) consistent?
	Competence	Were the participants competent to contribute satisfactorily to the exercise?
	Validation of methods	Were any methods used validated with reference to standards or some other form of quality control?
	Shared understanding	Was there sufficient shared understanding of essential concepts and terms by all parties?
Independence	Procedures and outputs	Did participants have an appropriate level of control over the procedures and outputs of the exercise?
	Feedback	Did the assessment of the exercise adequately reflect the range of views available?
	External checks	Were there adequate external checks on independence?
Transparency	Legal / regulatory	Did the exercise comply with both the letter and the spirit of any relevant legislation or regulations on access to information?
	Publicity	Was there adequate publicity?
	Auditability	Was there a thorough audit trail, in a proper format?
	Availability	Was the audit trail available to all parties?
	Accessibility	Was information available in an appropriate format, at the appropriate level of detail?
Influence (Impacts)	Specific decisions	Were better specific decisions made as a result of the exercise?
	Corporate policy	Did the exercise have a positive impact on corporate policy-making procedures?
	Corporate style	Did the exercise have a positive impact on the general corporate approach to handling the issues?
	Media coverage	Did the exercise bring a significant amount of constructive media attention to the issues?
Cost Effectiveness (Cost-Benefit)	Familiarisation	Were all the parties involved early enough to become familiar with all the elements of the exercise, in order to make a proper contribution?
	Entry-point	Did the exercise take place early enough in the decision-making process?
	Effectiveness	Was the exercise effective? (Did it meet its aims?)
	Benefit/cost	Was the benefit/cost ratio high?
	Fairness	Were the benefits fairly distributed across all the stakeholders?

Source: Rowe, Marsh and Frewer (2004).

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Chapter 6

Citizens' Evaluation of Public Participation

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The promotion of citizens' participation in policy making is a relatively new task for governments and citizens' evaluation of public participation policies is a litmus test of their real propensity to consider citizens as resources for, and not as obstacles to, governing. This chapter aims to clarify the role of citizens in the evaluation of policies on public participation, on the basis of their own condition and point of view. Some methodological remarks will be the starting point both for the definition of a theoretical framework and for a review of current practice, drawn particularly from Italy. After which, a set of operational steps of the evaluation process are defined in terms of: what must be evaluated, with which criteria, who should evaluate and what are the tools of the evaluation.

Introduction

The status, perceptions, information, knowledge and resources of citizens and governments are irreducibly different, even when they are dealing with the same issues. That is why their cooperation is so worthwhile: not because it is "politically correct", but also, and above all, because it is effective. Under certain conditions, the relationship between governments and citizens can be a virtuous circle. Governance studies – which this paper refers to – aim at clarifying the conditions and paradigms of this relationship.

The promotion of citizens' participation in policy making is a relatively new task for governments. It is related to the crisis of representative institutions, the deficit in consensus of political parties and leaders, and the weakening of the state's ability to manage public affairs alone. All of these phenomena are correlated with the development of new forms of citizenship operating in the "politics of everyday life".

Involving citizens – as individuals and especially as organisations – in policy making is not an easy task for governments, whatever the dimension in which they operate. It constitutes an admission of the end of their monopoly in public affairs, something which is very hard to do. Moreover, it is a difficult, often very complex and sometimes exhausting endeavour. Finally, it involves a deep reform of public administrations' ways of thinking and behavioural patterns, organisational structures and operational approaches.

For all these reasons, the promotion of citizens' participation in public policies is often considered with suspicion and done unwillingly. This can take several forms, including the prevalence of a politically correct approach, without any firm belief. Another form is the involvement of citizens in the implementation phase, without an explicit mandate or institutional framework. An opposite, equally prevalent approach is the idea that citizens must be involved only in discussions, with no practical effects on reality.

In the light of this scenario, the issue of citizens' evaluation of public participation policies appears as a focal point. It faces the traditional reluctance of public institutions to evaluate their performance, especially with outside involvement, and is a litmus test of their true propensity to consider citizens as resources, and not as obstacles for governing.

This chapter, therefore, aims at presenting theoretical and empirical elements to better clarify the issue of the role of citizens in the evaluation of

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public participation policies, on the basis of their own condition and point of view.

The background to this paper is well represented by a statement by Aaron Wildavsky (Wildavsky, 1993, p. 277).

> "*The temptation of the analyst is to treat citizens as objects. By depriving people of autonomy in thought (their consciousness is false, their experience invalid) it is possible to deny them citizenship in action. The moral role of the analyst, therefore, demands that cogitation enhance the values of interaction and not become a substitute for it.*"

Wildavsky adds that policy studies have always neglected citizens' participation in public policy, and this field of studies must be enhanced, both on theoretical and empirical aspects (ibid, p. 252). This paper also aims to contribute to this end.

Some methodological remarks on the various facets of citizens' evaluation of public policies on civic participation will be the starting point both for the definition of a theoretical framework and for a review of current practice, drawn particularly from Italy. After which, a set of operational concepts on the evaluation process will be defined: what must be evaluated, with which criteria, who should evaluate and what are the tools of the evaluation.

A methodological puzzle

The issue of citizens' role in evaluation of government-citizen partnerships is not as easy and straightforward as it might seem at a first glance. A number of different factors tend to complicate the situation, but three of them are particularly significant.

The first factor is the **ambiguity of the concept and practice of evaluation**. It has indeed a double nature. On the one hand, it is a technology, *i.e.* a toolbox that scholars, practitioners and stakeholders can use to understand whether programmes and actions embodied in a policy have fulfilled their objectives and purposes. On the other hand, evaluation is itself a policy, *i.e.* a government activity that involves bodies, resources and rules that directly or indirectly influence the lives of citizens. In this case by verifying the success or otherwise of a policy and re-engineering it. From this point of view, citizens can be involved either as actors of a technical activity, or as stakeholders of a set of intentional government actions. As anyone can see, this is not exactly the same thing.

Another distinction which is related to, but not completely super imposable on, the previous one is: **the distinction between evaluation and assessment.** The first refers to "the structured process of establishing the

success or otherwise of an exercise against *pre-set criteria*" and the latter, "the relatively unstructured analysis of an exercise without pre-set effectiveness criteria, as occurs in the conduct of descriptive case studies" (see Frewer and Rowe, this volume). Though participatory approaches (see, for example, Rietbergen-Mc Cracken and Narayan, 1998, pp. 189-251) tend to challenge this distinction, it is in any case relevant for our discussion.

The third factor is more specific. It regards the **overlapping and multi-dimensional nature of evaluation**, when it is viewed from the citizens' perspective and when its object is citizens' participation in policy making. In this case, one can speak of evaluation in very different terms, such as:

- Participation of citizens in evaluation processes.
- Citizens' evaluation of participation processes.
- Citizens' evaluation of evaluation processes.

This is not a trivial distinction, but a serious, substantial problem. It involves very different facts, actions, and processes which happen in reality. It cannot therefore be solved by a superficial approach to the issue, but requires a clear methodological choice.

In seeking to solve this methodological puzzle, we will introduce both theoretical and empirical elements. In particular, we will try to define what participation is from the citizens' point of view; then we will review some concrete cases of successes and failures in citizens' participation; and finally we will try to set out some key factors regarding the evaluation of participation on the part of citizens.

A theoretical framework

Some theoretical statements are needed to establish a sound basis for dealing with the issue of citizens' evaluation of participation programmes. Five of which appear to be of the utmost importance: the phenomenon of "new citizenship", the role of citizens in public policies, their relations with governments, the question of their competence and their ability as analysts.

New citizenship

Our starting point must be the emergence, in the last 30 years and all over the world, of a new phenomenon, that can be defined as "new citizenship' or civic participation. The main features of this phenomenon, from our perspective, can be summarized as follows (*cf.* Moro 1998, 1999):

Alongside traditional forms of political participation (voting, membership in political parties), the phenomenon of civic participation has emerged. While the former is decreasing, the latter is increasing (independently of whether there is a correlation between the two processes).

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Civic participation can be defined in terms of the exercise of powers and responsibilities by citizens in democracy of everyday life, that is, in public policy making. Civic participation takes a number of different forms, such as voluntary associations, self-help groups, grassroots movements, advocacy organisations, community services, coalitions and networks, single-issue initiatives, second degree structures, etc. They are of different sizes, and operate at all levels, from local to global. They can be viewed as a unique phenomenon that can be defined as active citizenship.

Active citizenship operates in several policy arenas: environment, social exclusion, health, education, culture, safety, local development, international cooperation, consumer issues, and so on. As we will see, it covers all phases of the policy-making cycle: agenda-setting, planning, decision, implementation, evaluation. Its role can be defined in terms of protection of citizens' rights and caring for common goods. At least five powers of active citizenship can be identified:

- The power to produce information and interpretations of reality.
- The power to use symbols to change common awareness.
- The power to ensure the consistency of institutions' actions with their mission.
- The power to change material conditions.
- The power to promote partnerships.

Many results have been achieved thanks to active citizenship, mainly in terms of new laws; mobilization of human, technical and financial resources; changes in the behaviour of social and collective actors; modifications of mass culture and common sense; definition of new patterns of social organisation; changes in the paradigms of management of public or private services and public functions; modifications in political agendas, styles and languages; changes in the market rules.

Citizens in public policies

It is policy makers' conviction that citizens mainly participate in public policies as their targets, since they benefit from public activities in terms of resources, goods and services, as members of specific groups (for example poor, sick, elderly, unemployed, single working mothers, and so on). Under this perspective, citizens have by definition a passive role in public policies.

According to this view, the only case in which citizens can exercise a more active role is when they are affected by a decision of the public authorities. For example, they can be consulted on certain issues, or interviewed about their satisfaction, or even asked to support public programmes.

The underlying idea of this approach is that citizens only exist as objects of governments' decisions or activities.

On the contrary, just like all the other actors of policy making, citizens exist autonomously and are active in the realm of public policies despite the objectives and decisions of public authorities. As any other actor, they influence the development of public policies in all their stages: setting the agenda, planning, deciding, implementing, evaluating. As Meny and Thoenig observed, "Citizens do not behave passively, though at first sight they may appear so. The way they react makes them anything but inert targets" (Meny and Thoenig 1996, p. 123).

This point can be grasped better if public policies are considered less in terms of discussion and decision (as is usual, see for example Pierre, 1998) and more in terms of action. In other words, citizens are active not only if and when they take the floor to air their opinions or demands, but also, and above all, when they accept or refuse to do something, report problems, build solutions, monitor situations, manage horizontal communication, convince other stakeholders, mobilize resources, and so on. The phenomenon of civic activism which has spread worldwide over the last 30 years is essentially characterised by this practical attitude.

From the point of view of policy analysis, two different situations can be distinguished. In a recent paper (Moro, 2002a) I called them "governance" and "non governance-situations". In the first case, citizens' participation is included in government activity; in the second one, it is independent from any provision of, or agreement with, governments. This is the case, for example, when citizens create welfare services not provided by the state, or make autonomous agreements with other stakeholders (for example, with companies and trade unions on industrial pollution), or promote legal actions to protect rights and interests of individuals and communities against the state.

Citizens and governments

When citizens and governments interact and cooperate, we have governance-situations, in which:

- Public bodies recognize citizens' role, for example through formal or informal agreements before or during the implementation of a policy.
- Citizens actually take part in at least one phase of the policy-making cycle (agenda-setting, planning, decision, implementation, evaluation).
- Citizens play a role while being, at the same time, autonomous and acting in co-ordination with other actors.
- Such a role implies the exercise of powers and responsibilities.

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- Citizens' participation adds value to policy making (*i.e.* it allows the fulfilment of goals that otherwise could not be reached).

Since this cooperation is carried out in the realm of public policy we can identify, for each stage of policy making, the obstacles to be overcome, civic resources which could be spent, operational principles to be affirmed and practiced with respect to citizens' participation. The following table illustrates this approach.

These are the situations described in the *Citizens as Partners* handbook (OECD, 2001). It should be noted that this important document expresses the governmental point of view and approach to citizens' participation. In order to have a more complete picture of the situation and to learn from the differences in their points of view, this governmental perspective should be integrated with that of the citizens.

Table 6.1. **Citizens' roles, obstacles and governance principles at each stage of the policy-making cycle**

	Role of citizens	Obstacles	Governance principles
Agenda	• Identifying problems • Defining priorities	• Inaccessibility of decision-makers • Lack of attention to citizens' points of view	• Bilateral communication
Planning	• Identifying obstacles • Identifying solutions • Testing tools and components of policies	• Lack of recognition of citizens' competence	• Consultation with feedback
Decision	• Building consensus	• Obsolete criteria of representativeness • Fear of citizens	• Sharing • (not agreeing) decisions
Implementation	• Creating services, monitoring situations, mobilizing resources, collecting good practices	• Lack of coordination and/or competition between citizens and governments	• Partnership • (equality and full responsibility)
Evaluation	• Social auditing • Stakeholders cooperation	• Outcomes of citizens not taken into account as evaluation tools • Preconception that citizens are able only to give opinions, not information	• Common evaluation and re-engineering of policies

The question of citizens' competences

According to a long and well-established tradition, citizens do not have and cannot have any significant competence in addressing public problems or managing public affairs and therefore cannot have any role in policy making. A significant part of political philosophy and political science traditionally

agree with this statement. More precisely, this lack of ability of citizens concerns three different elements (*cf.* Dahl 1998):

- Moral competence (the knowledge of what is good and what is bad for the public interest).
- Virtue (the agency needed to pursue the common good).
- Technical competence (the know-how needed to make effective that virtue).

On the ground of this assumption of citizens' incompetence, various forms of Plato's "government of custodians" (or guards) – according to the definition of Robert Dahl – have been theorized.

But also within a democratic perspective, citizens' lack of competence plays an important role. The traditional vision of democracy that considers voting to be the highest expression of people's sovereignty rests on the assumption that common citizens do not have the time, knowledge and ability to overcome their self-interest in order to be really involved in the government of public affairs. What they can do is to choose, by voting, a few people with a sufficient amount of time, sufficient expertise and a reassuring detachment from self-interest who are therefore able to address public issues (Sartori 1994, p. 75).

This vision of citizens' incompetence is not restricted to the realms of philosophy or political science. It also affects policy analysis and public policy making. For example, among the basic assumptions of welfare systems and studies there is the idea that citizens are merely the targets of public policies, and are only able to express their needs and demands to institutions, so that they, in turn, can provide goods and services. The underlying paradigm is one of weakness, dependence and passiveness of citizens (*cf.* Zolo 1994).

But this vision of citizens' lack of knowledge and competence in public affairs no longer corresponds to the current context, one that has significantly changed over the last thirty years and requires a new approach on the part of the social and political sciences.

As we have seen, one of the powers of active citizens is to produce information on the context in which they live or are affected by. This entails a process of accumulation of knowledge and know-how related to public policies. Obviously, this competence does not cover the whole range of needed knowledge. But it entails the ability to collect and use information that comes from scientific research, technological know-how, and other sources. For example, the users of railway services do not know much about the technical components of safety tools and procedures of trains – for them, they are a black box. Nevertheless, users of train services:

- Have a high level of information on the effectiveness of the safety system's outputs for the train they are using.

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- Are able, if they act collectively, to use the advice of experts on the entire safety system, including the black box.

On the other hand, the task of protecting rights and caring for common goods is related to a moral competence, *i.e.* a perception of the general interest related to specific situations, and a commitment to the general interest as well.

Citizens as analysts

Another way to approach this issue is to use Aaron Wildavsky's characterisation of the citizen as analyst (Wildavsky 1993, pp. 252-279). When citizens' participation is intended not as a general, holistic (and therefore unworkable) approach, but as a policy-centred one, it is possible to satisfy the three basic conditions for citizens' participation: understanding what is at stake, distinguishing between big and small changes (thereby perceiving the utility of participation), and being continually involved, thus learning from experience. In public policies, citizens are indeed able to choose an issue, to collect and accumulate information and, acting together with other citizens, use it to influence their course. They can therefore, under Wildavsky's approach, be defined as analysts.

Civic analysis involves common, "specialized", and organized, citizens in different ways. It enables them to produce information, to use scientific and technical knowledge, and to evaluate public policies (Moro 1998, pp. 135-167). What is implied by the above statements is that citizens involved in a policy arena develop a form of knowledge that is irreducibly different from that held by public officials and other actors. It is a matter of concrete conditions and points of view. The way citizens affected by, or involved in, public policy problems experience reality has very particular features that must be borne in mind:

- They live in an environment which is affected by the problem and bears the brunt of its direct and indirect effects.
- They are involved in the whole problem and live with it continuously, concretely and directly.
- They have re-arranged their lives in relation to the problem.

These existential, or material factors constitute a specific anthropological condition of citizens involved in public policy problems. This condition is irreducibly different from those of public officials or other stakeholders, and determines the way they select and organize data from reality, as well as how they perceive and judge it.

As a concrete example, disabled people have a knowledge of the problem of architectural barriers that no government or analyst or scholar could

possibly have. They can identify the barriers existing in their city, can identify safe and unsafe paths, they know the impact – in terms of money, time, mobility, quality – of such barriers on their lives, they know how their family's life has had to adapt to barriers, they know precisely what professional or personal tasks are inaccessible for them due to the barriers. They can assess the outcome of public policies on this issue in all segments of their lives. If they self-organize and get together, they can also produce a general assessment, identify priorities, suggest new policies, lobby for public investments, cooperate in their implementation, and evaluate results and impacts.

It must be added that the well-known distinctions between "micro" and "macro", between "top down" and "bottom up", and between "from above" and "from below" can be of some utility, but cannot fully interpret the citizens' condition. Citizens involved in public problems are not only, not always and not necessarily, trapped in a micro-dimension, limited to a perspective "from below" and claiming a bottom up approach.

Citizens' evaluation in practice

This section will move from theoretical statements to a series of concrete cases. To do so it will use the typology set out above, which distinguishes three possible forms of citizen involvement: citizens' participation in evaluating public policy; citizens' evaluation of participation processes and, finally, citizens' evaluation of evaluation processes. While concrete cases are relatively scarce for each of these categories, it would be fair to say that there are more examples of the first two kinds than of the last one.

This section will focus on citizens' evaluation of participation processes. The examples are drawn from the *Archive of citizens' participation* managed by the Active Citizenship Foundation, a recently created institution in Italy. They refer mainly, but not exclusively, to the experience of Cittadinanzattiva (Active Citizenship), an Italian non-governmental organisation. They illustrate how the citizens' approach to participation in public policy making, and hence its evaluation, is distinct from – though not contrasting with – that of government.

Access to information

City of Rome call centre evaluation (2002). The City of Rome administration established a call centre which aims to answer all kinds of requests for information from the public regarding the entire range of City activities and services. Citizens' organisations, together with schools and other civil society organisations, were asked to monitor the start up of the call centre, both by collecting remarks and reports by citizens, and by making random calls to evaluate the ability of call centre operators to handle various issues. During

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the official inauguration of the City of Rome call centre, in the presence of the mayor, these citizens' organisations were asked to report on the results of their evaluation, with a particular focus on the critical remarks received and proposals for improving the service. In this case, only the citizens' organisations were in a position to provide the City of Rome with feedback and advice based on their firsthand knowledge of citizens' needs.

European Commission Easy Euro programme (1999-2001). In preparation for the introduction of the European single currency, several citizens' organisations from different countries were involved in a European Commission (EC) programme called "Easy Euro". The programme was aimed at facilitating access to the new currency for vulnerable groups (about 30% of the European population according to the EC) and preventing the risk of social exclusion. Focus groups of target people were organised in several European countries by citizens' organisations, to identify operational and cognitive problems and to adjust appropriate tools. The EC then entrusted citizens' organisations with creating networks of "proximity informers", that is people working closer to citizens (such as doctors, pharmacists, teachers, front line public services, etc.) who would be able to provide information and allay fears. A European roundtable, in which all the actors involved were represented, was active throughout the programme to co-ordinate the work, evaluate the situation and plan further developments. The roundtable also evaluated the effectiveness of the Easy Euro programme in terms of its ability to inform citizens and make them aware of the changes implied by the introduction of the single currency.

Consultation and public participation

Local health agencies' stakeholders conferences (since 1992). On the basis of a national law, either annually or bi-annually all of the approximately 300 Italian local health agencies must organise stakeholder conferences which are open to the public. They draw together managers, trade unions, professional organisations, citizens' and patients' organisations with the aim of exchanging views and information on the situation, critical issues and improvements needed. Each actor undertakes responsibilities and tasks, to be verified in the following stakeholder conference. Among the results of these conferences, it is worth noting that they have led to several local health agency managers being fired. Characteristics of these stakeholder conferences include: the sharing of responsibilities among the stakeholders, the practice of accountability, and the creation of an environment for constructive dialogue between stakeholders. In several cases, they have examined the local health agency's relationship with citizens in terms of information provided, management of complaints, and their involvement in planning and delivering services.

Civic audit of hospitals (since 2001). Thanks to an agreement between health authorities and Cittadinanzattiva's Tribunal for Patients' Rights, audits conducted by citizens are ongoing in about 25 local health agencies. The aim of the programme is to trigger a process of continuous quality improvement in health structures. Using a shared set of parameters, the civic audit seeks to review the local health agencies' ability to inform their users, collect and use their feedback and to involve citizens' organisations (*e.g.* advocacy, volunteers, chronically ill, consumers etc.) in decision-making. On average, 20 corrective actions have been promoted in each health agency as a consequence of the civic audit.

On evaluation

Thanks to this review of theoretical and empirical elements related to citizens' evaluation of participation in public policies, we can now try to suggest some conclusions related to the methodological puzzle raised at the beginning of this chapter. These conclusions are operational, in the sense that they aim to respond to policy makers' need for the citizens' point of view when evaluating public participation.

What is to be evaluated?

A first, only apparently obvious, question concerns what to evaluate. There is a tendency, both among policy makers and scholars, to reduce citizens' participation in policy making to discussion and deliberation (see for example Pierre, 1998). The underlying idea is that, while citizens only discuss, the public administration does the real job.

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, this is simply not true: citizens not only discuss, but act as well. This happens not only in the implementation phase, but also in the other phases: evaluation, for example, is often a matter of actions aimed at testing and verifying the implementation gaps for a given policy. If citizens want to participate in the evaluation of a home care service for the elderly, they must speak with target people, observe the effects of the service on the everyday life of a family, verify if the persons in charge of the service work well, etc.

From this point of view, it is very significant that the OECD handbook, *Citizens as Partners* (OECD, 2001) deals with the whole cycle of policy making.

Which criteria for evaluation?

In a very general manner, it can be said that what will be evaluated is the quality of the participation process, or, in other words, the results of the implementation of governance-situations in policy making.

More specifically, the following elements should be part of an evaluation.

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*1) A good participation process must **add value to policy making**, in terms of:*

- Effectiveness (better achievement of the goals and objectives).
- Efficiency (saving of time, money, social tensions, and so on).
- Impact (wider, deeper and more permanent effects on target situations and subjects).
- Pertinence (greater relevance to the issues dealt with by the policy).

For example, involving consumer, grassroots, neighbourhood and local development organisations in monitoring the prices of large consumption goods in a big city could add value if it:

- could lead to a lower level of inflation than if the public administration acted alone.
- were quicker or less expensive than if public officials acted alone.
- had a positive impact, for example in terms of establishing a permanent monitoring network of retailers' behaviour.
- could monitor all of the retailers and not only a sample of them, as the public administration would probably be able to do.

*2) A good participation process must **empower citizens***

Empowerment is, "the sense of efficacy that occurs when people realize they can solve the problems they face and have the right to contest unjust conditions" and "the process of gaining control over different forms of social power" (Rubin and Rubin, 1992, p. 62). Involving citizens in policy making must increase the awareness, the know-how and the operational ability of citizens as actors in public life.

Empowerment is a double-sided concept: it has a cognitive and an operational side. Both must be enhanced thanks to participation. For example, involving citizens in risk management – say, in civil defence programmes – can empower them if, thanks to their participation, they can know better the risks of their territory, distinguish between what is natural and unavoidable and what can be prevented or eliminated, cooperate in the definition of a civil defence plan including both preventive and emergency measures, learn what to do in order to minimise risks, organise themselves to cooperate in the implementation of the plan, each with specific roles, tasks and powers.

*3) Good participation must **improve social trust and social capital***

Trust can be defined in general terms as "a bet about the future contingent actions of others" (Sztompka, 1999, p. 25). It is actually the basis of social development, since it implies the existence within societies of

normative coherence, stability of social order, transparency of social organisation, familiarity of social environment, accountability of persons and institutions. When trust is lacking, its "functional substitutes" tend to prevail (Sztompka, pp. 161 ff.). These are providentialism, corruption, vigilantism, and externalisation of trust. Among the indicators of distrust there is also the withdrawal from participation in public life. In a similar manner, the concept of social capital emphasizes the strength of the norms that govern life in common, the existence of networks of civic associationism, the soundness of social ties that are the fabric of society (Putnam, 1993, pp. 191-218; *cf.* also Putnam, 2000; Skocpol and Fiorina, 1999).

Citizens' involvement in policy making must, therefore, contribute to enhancing social trust and social capital. This can happen, for example, when citizens' organisations are called upon to deal with the management of conflicts that arise in the neighbourhoods because of religious, ethnic, class, but also simply behavioural, differences. The same fact that conflicts between citizens are managed by other citizens with the support of public authorities enhances the credibility of institutions, strengthens social links, gives a practical meaning to interdependency, urges a *gestalt* switch in the people involved (from enemies to neighbours) – in a word, enhances trust, ties, reciprocity and common values.

4) Good participation must **involve a sufficient number of citizens**

No absolute criteria can be established in this case, for three main reasons:

- Quantity is relative to the situations, programmes and purposes of each policy. Involving 100 people can be a significant achievement in the case of a programme of home care for the elderly in a medium-sized town, but can be a really poor result in the case of a programme aimed at cleaning and caring for public parks in a city of 5 million inhabitants.
- Frequency and intensity of participation can vary a lot, so that a person that works one day a week in an advice bureau cannot be compared with a person that cooperates in the organisation of the annual fund raising party of a neighbourhood association.
- Forms and tools of citizens' participation are very different and not so easy to compare, such as in the case of, on the one hand, participation in walk-ins of traditional social movements and, on the other hand, post-modern e-volunteerism and civic engagement through the Internet.

We need, therefore, a flexible and articulated set of criteria, able to take into account these insurmountable differences, but, in the same time, able to assess the value of the number of people involved in policy making.

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5) Good participation must ***change the public administration's way of managing public affairs***

This does not necessarily imply the adoption of a new global pattern – for example the "Participatory State" (Peters, 2001, pp. 50-76), or the "Catalytic Government" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). It means, at the least, that public administrations overcome their self-referential syndrome as well as the illusion of self-reform. Good indicators of a public administration's change due to citizens' involvement in policy making are the eruption of conflicts between supporters of old and new visions, the emergence of new leaders, the strengthening of offices and departments in charge of relationships with citizens.

When, for example, parents of disabled children give their feedback on the quality of school services, the required changes not only affects the delivery of the service, but also its organisation, as well as the professional patterns of teachers and staff. If citizens' participation is taken seriously, these more general changes have to be carried out, or at least have to be tried. This very attempt to promote changes will have an impact on the public administration.

Who evaluates?

In the light of what we have said until now, both individuals and organisations must be involved in evaluation. Usually, the two points of view are consistent but they are not identical. The perspective of organisations is more stratified, taking into account past experiences which have been memorised, based on a competence due to the accumulation of knowledge and able to provide a wider, more structured and specialised, vision of reality. That of individuals is more immediate, more able to identify the impacts of policies on persons, the needs of small groups, the strength of individual variables, the hopes and fears for the present and the future.

The question of who evaluates encounters the problem of representativeness, both of individuals and organisations. Public administrations are seeking solutions to this real problem, but often go the wrong way. The worst way, in my opinion, is to expect that people who participate in evaluation be a perfect sample of the universe of the population. This leads to paradoxes.

In the case of individuals, the paradox is that people invited to participate in an evaluation would, strictly speaking, stand for the electoral body, the whole citizenry, due to the public interest nature of the problems each policy addresses. It is the case of Robert Dahl's "minipopulus" (Dahl, 1988), which alludes to a kind of "democracy of polls": instead of organizing elections calling the citizenry to vote, a perfect sample of people can be continuously polled with better results and lower costs (*cf.* Rodotà, 1997). But statistical representativeness can never replace political representativeness. Moreover, participation in public policies is

something completely different from participation in the political process, in the sense that there is no consistency or isomorphism between them. For whom and why I vote has a very limited impact on my attitudes, choices and actions when I have to face public problems in everyday life.

In the case of organistions, the paradox comes from the application to citizens' associations and movements of the same criteria of representativeness used for political parties and trade unions. They are mainly quantitative: how many members, how many votes, etc. The paradox is that this approach fails to capture the particular features of active citizenship organisations, which are the main reasons for which their involvement is useful. Citizens' organisations are important not (only) because of the number of their members, but because of their relevance and pertinence: ability to know problems, plan solutions, mobilise consensus and resources, and so on. Moreover, a quantitative criterion could marginalize the needs and rights of minorities, which are as important as the rights of majorities.

To avoid these paradoxes, people called upon to conduct evaluation should not be selected on the basis of their representativeness, but of their relevance and their pertinence in relation to the issue addressed.

In this operation, it should be borne in mind that the point of view of the community at large should also be asked for. For example, there is a tendency in European countries and at the EU level to consider that only chronically ill patients, and thus only patients' organisations, are able to evaluate health policies. But, given that health care is a matter of public interest, everyone is interested in it, even if they are not currently users of health services. On the organisations' side, advocacy, advice, self-help, voluntary, consumer organisations are all relevant and pertinent.

With which tools do we evaluate?

As we have seen in the previous review of cases, a variety of tools can be worthwhile for evaluation, intended both in its technical and political meanings. Stakeholder conferences, surveys, polls, monitoring and audit activities, collection and analysis of complaints, production of reports, checklists and questionnaires, focus groups, public hearings can all be used, according to the problems dealt with, the programmes carried out and the expected results.

They can be used either against pre-set criteria – such as in the case of the above mentioned "Civic Audit" projects – or without *a priori* criteria, as in the case of the stakeholder conferences. They can be used both as ongoing and *ex post* evaluation tools.

What seems to make most difference is whether governments believe that being evaluated (or assessed) by citizens is really important and useful. If

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governments take citizens' points of view seriously, the choice of evaluation tools is not so crucial; and at the same time, no tool can guarantee a real involvement of governments.

The risk, in other words, is the refusal of governments to dialogue and interact, or even their attempts to take shortcuts. Such is the case of market research on "customer" satisfaction with public services, often used and interpreted in the same way as elections, so that if the result is a degree of satisfaction higher than 50% of people polled, governments think that everything is going alright.

Conclusion

The best conclusion of this chapter is probably to reaffirm that citizen participation is not an ethical or political imperative, for either the public administration or for citizens. Rather, it is a matter of better policy making and of enriched political process.

Under our approach, citizens' participation is clearly an activity aimed at saving and not at wasting time, at solving conflicts and not at making trouble, at practicing rationality and not increasing chaos.

It can, for example, enable public administration to successfully manage conflicts with strong interest-holders putting citizens' points of view and claims for their rights first. It can ensure that the decisions taken by the public administration at the end of a well-managed consultation process, even though disagreed upon by some participants, are not challenged since they have been shared and therefore are fully legitimate. It can mobilise those resources – human, technical, financial, of time, of knowledge – that are often lacking in the realm of public policies. It can empower public management reformers, as they push for openness, accountability and priority to outcomes rather than to outputs.

These are the same reasons why, in the end, the development of the evaluation of citizens' participation is a noteworthy issue and an important task, both for governments and for citizens alike.

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Evaluating Public Participation in Policy Making

Citizens in all OECD countries are demanding greater transparency and accountability from their governments. New forms of public participation are emerging as citizens seek opportunities to actively participate in shaping the policies that affect their lives. In response, governments are exploring new ways to inform and include citizens and civil society organisations in policy making. Are these new forms of engagement effective? Do they support or undermine traditional mechanisms for public policy making within the framework of representative democracy?

Evaluating Public Participation in Policy Making looks at theory and practice, and draws heavily upon the insights and contributions of government experts, scholars and civil society practitioners from OECD countries. It builds upon the findings of a previous OECD report, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making* (2001), which highlighted the lack of systematic evaluation of government efforts to engage citizens and civil society in policy making.

This book is a first step towards closing the "evaluation gap". Rather than a technical manual for professional evaluators, it offers strategic guidance for policy makers and senior government officials responsible for commissioning and using evaluations of public engagement. It provides an indication of the key issues for consideration when evaluating information, consultation and public participation, and offers concrete examples drawn from current practice in 8 OECD countries: Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and the UK.

FURTHER READING

- *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making,* OECD 2001
- *Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making,* OECD 2001
- *Promise and Problems of e-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement,* OECD 2003

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