

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION

Evaluation involves performing an assessment of a public initiative in relation to a series of criteria and is intended to simulate, anticipate and measure the direct and indirect effects of public policies. It is also an issue that is attracting increasing levels of interest around the world, with the UN declaring 2015 the International Year of Evaluation.

A key component of democracy

Evaluation is a tool designed to facilitate and improve the decision-making process where policies are concerned. It is also a way of raising awareness among the people of what the public authorities are doing. This being the case, it is vital to restoring people's faith in political action.

The evaluation process will involve a number of players or stakeholders, including political decision-makers, bodies and agents responsible for implementing public policies, the beneficiaries of said policies and evaluators themselves.

Despite this, evaluation is relatively unrecognised and even underused in our country. Furthermore, confusion between the evaluation of public policies, on the one hand, and the monitoring, auditing and reform of the State, on the other, can lead to a certain reluctance among political leaders, services and agents.

The ESEC opinion and the corresponding report seek to explain this issue, review evaluation practices and outline proposals for promoting a culture of public policy evaluation in France.

The three stages for evaluation

Public policies should ideally be evaluated at the following three points:

- prior to a policy being implemented to initially assess its anticipated and potential effects. This is known as an *ex ante* evaluation;
- throughout the process or in the middle of the anticipated duration of the policy for the purposes of examining the course it is taking. These are known as mid-term and *in itinere* evaluations;
- at the end of a public initiative to assess its direct and indirect effects. This is known as an *ex post* evaluation;

THERE ARE three types of body that may perform the evaluation

- public bodies: ministries and inspection units, the Court of Accounts (*Cour des comptes*), the Policy Planning Commission (*France Stratégie*), the General Secretariat for the Modernisation of Public Action (SGMAP), etc.;
- constitutional chambers: Parliament, the ESEC;
- researchers and academics, private consultancy firms, etc.

This plurality allows for several complementary approaches to be adopted.

Furthermore, employee and employer representative bodies, just like the NGO sector, are

committed to evaluating public policies on a regular basis.

Evaluation is becoming increasingly common at regional level as a result of two factors, namely the regionalisation and contractualisation of public action, on the one hand, and obligations regarding the use of European funds, on the other.

There are five issues to be resolved

- the meaning to be attached to the evaluation;
- the frequency and timeliness with which it is performed;
- the relevance of its indicators;
- the objectivity and impartiality of the evaluation process;
- what its conclusions mean in terms of political decision-making.



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The ESEC would suggest three series of recommendations aimed at promoting a culture of public policy evaluation:

INCREASING THE CREDIBILITY AND LEGITIMACY OF EVALUATION VIA THREE CHANNELS

- Encouraging multiple perspectives and involving stakeholders (political decision-makers, beneficiaries, agents, etc.) in the various stages of the evaluation process.
- Capitalising upon past experiences: systematically monitoring the outcome of conclusions drawn from evaluations with a view to learning lessons from these.
- Publicising results: offering an enlightening summary of the results of the evaluation and structuring debate around these results. The media, and those performing a public service role in particular, could play a key role in this.

IMPROVING EVALUATION PRACTICES IN SIX WAYS

- Coordinating the political agenda and evaluation time: legally providing for the time and the human and financial resources required to perform an evaluation of a given policy and making its renewal dependent upon its evaluation.
- Reinforcing the objective nature of the evaluation and guaranteeing impartiality on the part of the evaluator.
- Using and facilitating access to information: establishing the means devoted to acquiring or producing information adapted to each policy covered by the evaluation, as well as the terms governing its availability to evaluators.
- Increasing training: improving the collective ability to perform evaluations, notably by creating or increasing the number of public policy evaluation modules available on higher education courses, at *grandes écoles*, etc.
- Coordinating public policy evaluation: organising an informal annual meeting between institutional evaluators for the purposes of discussing on-going efforts, evaluation needs for the coming year and the intentions of the respective parties, for example.
- Promoting good evaluation practices: creating a "resources space" listing evaluations performed at both national and regional levels and recording good practices and progress made in the field.

REINFORCING THE ESEC'S CONTRIBUTION IN THIS FIELD WITH THE EMPHASIS ON ITS SPECIFIC NATURE AND FAVOURING THREE PATHWAYS IN PARTICULAR

- Improving the evaluation aspect of what the ESEC does and listing all work of this nature on the outcome assessment of each respective term.
- Bringing new energy to the ESEC's cooperation with other evaluation bodies via the following means:
 - involving it in the outlining of evaluation criteria for a particular public policy;
 - participating in steering, monitoring, etc. committees set up by other bodies responsible for evaluating public policies, as the Directorate-General for the Overseas Territories, for example, has already proposed;
 - joining forces with Parliament, *France Stratégie* and the SGMAP to structure the debate around the results of evaluations in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders (political decision-makers, beneficiaries, agents, etc.);
 - establishing a dialogue with the Court of Accounts (*Cour des comptes*) based on the complementary approaches adopted by the two organisations.
- Reinforcing cooperation with Regional Economic, Social and Environmental Councils (CESERs) and organising an annual meeting aimed at producing an inventory of, discussing and coordinating evaluation efforts on the part of these bodies.