

## Evaluation in Europe: An Overview

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### The Landscape of European Evaluation

The umbrella organization of evaluation in Europe is the [European Evaluation Society](#) (EES). Founded in 1994 in Hague (Netherlands), the EES elects presidents for two-year mandates and provides a central secretariat for two to three years in different locations. The EES welcomes all individuals interested in evaluation, professionally or academically. Members of the EES receive a Newsletter,<sup>2</sup> a one year subscription to *Evaluation: the International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, and reductions on EES conference fees and other activities.

The web site of the EES provides a good overview about the evaluation community including lists of European and international evaluation associations and networks, evaluation journals, events, and other online resources. Currently, the EES provides links to 13 national or multinational European organizations as well as 5 regional networks within the United Kingdom (see Figure 1). A Portuguese evaluation society will be established (News from the Community,

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<sup>1</sup> This is a first draft of an illustration of evaluation in Europe. The author anticipates receiving feedback from those evaluators who are experts on issues of European evaluation. Please send any comments, recommendations, feedback, and additional information to the state of art in Europe or individual European countries to: [daniela.schroeter@wmich.edu](mailto:daniela.schroeter@wmich.edu). I appreciate your feedback and will gladly revise this paper accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> At this point in time there are three newsletters available online at <http://www.european-evaluation.org/news/newsletters.html>. All of these newsletters are specifically addressing conference related issues in preparation for the biennial events.

2004) and listserv discussions of the German Evaluation Association ([DeGEval](#)) indicate that an Austrian Evaluation Society has been formed.



[European Evaluation Society](#), [Danish Evaluation Society](#), [Finnish Evaluation Society](#), [French Evaluation Society](#), [German Evaluation Society](#), [International Program Evaluation Network](#), [Irish Evaluation Network](#), [Italian Evaluation Association](#), [Polish Evaluation Society](#), [Spanish Public Policy Evaluation Society](#), [Swedish Evaluation Society](#), [Swiss Evaluation Society](#), [UK Evaluation Society](#) (the following are regional UK networks: [Cymru Evaluation Network](#), [Scottish Evaluation Network](#), [London Evaluation Network](#), [Midlands Evaluation Network](#), [North West Evaluation Network](#)), [Walloon Evaluation Society](#)

Figure 1. *National and Multinational Evaluation Societies in Europe*

Evaluation in Europe appears to be highly influenced by the political environment. One of the most constraining elements to effective communication across the European evaluation community is the diversity of language. In addition, Elliot

Stern (2004, p. 9-10) referred attendees at the 5<sup>th</sup> conference of the European Evaluation Society 2003, to four contextual dimensions that challenge and shape evaluation in contemporary Europe specifically in public policy and civil society. These are (1) national specificity or convergence (identity), (2) cultural diversity and its limit (solidarity), (3) decentralization or supranational solutions (legitimacy), and (4) the strong state with the weak means (complexity). The task of the EES is to help minimize and overcome any barriers the European evaluation community faces.

The EES holds conferences biennially. From September 30 to October 2, 2004, the sixth conference took place in Berlin, Germany with the title *Governance, Democracy and Evaluation*. There were about 423 evaluators (as indicated on listserv discussions of the German Evaluation Society); 334 of these stem from 36 countries and 5 organizations and presented on issues related to *Governance, Democracy and Evaluation* (see [List of Presenters](#)). More specifically the [call for papers](#) welcomed contributions related to program complexity, accountability, standards and guidelines, policy implementation, knowledge management, and education in evaluation that address needs of national and international level governments. The [program](#) of the conference reflects these issues, and the proceedings may shed light on the specifics.

## **The Development of Evaluation in Europe**

Leeuw (2004) asked if European evaluation is still an “infant industry” and illuminates the European type of “evaluation industry”. His book chapter will serve as the foundation for the following sections. Rist, Furubo, and Sandahl’s (2002)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The author did not have the study at hand and utilized Leeuw (2004) summary and comments of that study only.

assessed countries worldwide on eight dimensions to determine levels of development in evaluation. The dimensions included:

- Evaluation activity
- Supply of evaluators
- Training capacity
- National discourse
- Organized evaluation meetings
- Evaluation infra-structure within the public sector
- Evaluation infra-structure within parliament
- Evaluations carried out by Supreme Audit Offices (see Leeuw 2004, 63).

While not all European countries were assessed within this study results indicated most intense evaluation efforts in North and West European countries. However, data was either insufficient or indicated only moderate training capacity for evaluators in Europe, which as Leeuw argues is plausible in view of the fact that evaluation has not been established well at the university level in form of evaluation studies. On the other hand, national discourse and organized meetings were available and as indicated by other contributions in this issue of *JMDE* not only stimulate debate and discussions, but also provide platforms for trainings. Additionally, Rist et al. found that evaluation in the public sector was more widely available than evaluation within parliament. Last but not least, evaluations carried out by Supreme Audit Offices were most developed in Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Historically, Sweden, Germany, and the United Kingdom are considered first and second wave evaluation countries where evaluation developed in the 70s and 80s. Since then, many other European countries have been established as frontrunners in evaluation, especially the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, Finland), other West European countries (Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) as well as South European countries (France, Spain, and Italy), and the numbers are growing.

### **The European Evaluation Market**

Based on a study conducted in 1999, Leeuw describes the European evaluation market as a growing market. While the response rate in the study was rather limited, findings indicated that the evaluation market was growing faster on the European and national levels than in regions. Most evaluations conducted were related to policy and respondents indicated that methods utilized usually derived from the evaluators' specific subject areas. Moreover, the regional evaluation market was perceived as rather fragmented and it was thought that international competition on the European evaluation market would be constrained due to cultural factors. For instance, Leeuw pointed out that one respondent said that it was even hard to hire a British evaluator for an Irish setting. This is due to language constraints and an understanding of the different organizational cultures. On the European level, this leads to evaluations which are conducted by teams of evaluators from multiple nations. Leeuw refers to such arrangements as “(quasi)professions” (p.68). Moreover, Leeuw argues that top-down processes thwart good evaluation practice. While evaluation in North America is outcome and impact oriented, European evaluation focuses on resources and administrative processes. Leeuw points out that there may be a slight drift into auditing, focusing on form rather than substance.

## **Evaluation on the European Union Level<sup>4</sup>**

On the European level, initial forms of program evaluations began in the 80s, were focused on research and technology development programs, and were based on practices prevalent in first wave evaluations. A shift occurred in 1995, when a new evaluation scheme was introduced that demanded evaluation of research and framework programs in form of annual monitoring and five-year periodic assessments. Leeuw states:

The assessments can be understood as a combination of an ex post evaluation of the previous program, an intermediate evaluation of the current program and an ex ante appraisal of future activities (2004, 69).

However, while evaluation on the Union level always focused on regulatory policy, formal evaluation systems or databases for the Directorates General are insufficient and “the Council and Parliament pass[ed] a small number of ‘sunset’ regulations which include a formal evaluation clause given a deadline (especially in the field of Competition Policy)” (Leeuw, 2004, 69). The results of reporting, however, are neither called nor could be classified as evaluation. Other foci, especially cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit evaluations were yielded by management reforms in the 90’s and are “supervised by the Directorate General for Budgets and Financial Control” (Leeuw, 2004, 71).

In 1996, steps for more systematic evaluations of policies were undertaken and a “decentralized model in which the operational Directorates General are responsible

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<sup>4</sup> Based on Leeuw (2004).

for establishing systematic evaluation procedures for the programs they are executing” was developed to improve evaluation practice (Leeuw, 2004, 71). As a result, each Directorate had to designate one evaluation official who is responsible for establishing an annual evaluation plan and for determining program to be evaluated. The Directorates’ evaluation plans are assembled into the “Commission’s Annual Evaluation Program”. The [Directorate General for Budget](#) “coordinates evaluation activities and maintains an overview of the evaluation findings across the Commission services. It also provides [methodological guidance](#) and support, helps with [procurement of evaluation expertise](#) and maintains [evaluation networks](#) within and outside the Commission (see [website](#)). Unique features of the Evaluation Commission include a broad definition of the concept of evaluation and its direct link to budget:

Not only does it [evaluation] encompass ex post and midterm evaluation, but it also cover ex ante exercises... evaluation projects are to be framed so that they correspond to identifiable entities in the Community budget and to be timed so that results are available when they are relevant for budgetary decisions (Leeuw, 2004, 72).

### **Current Issues in European Evaluation<sup>5</sup>**

Leeuw refers to different elements of current developments in Europe, including an increasing importance of civil societies, strengthened public management, and “polity”. The most interesting aspect here is polity, especially because distinct political traditions in European nations need to be considered. Moreover, Leeuw refers to the valuing component of evaluation, which is especially inherent in political processes in which decisions are being made, values are chosen, and

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<sup>5</sup> Based on Leeuw (2004)

priorities set. However, the traditional practice of social research is challenged in their value-free doctrine.

Most central topics for evaluation within Europe as stated by Leeuw are:

- The increasing importance of evaluation for civil society
- Evaluation for Parliaments (Do parliament decisions have effects?)
- Evaluation for public policy partnerships
- Decentralization of evaluation
- Potentials for evaluation of social programs from a non-managerial standpoint
- Evaluation of information and communication technology products, processes, and outcomes (web-based communication, training, the internet as knowledgebase)
- Auditing versus evaluation
- Evidenced-based evaluation
- Learning from evaluation
- Effective implementation and utilization of performance management systems in public management.

Overall, evaluation appears to be a vast growing market in Europe. However, as a discipline evaluation is still an “infant,” not only on the European level but internationally.

## **References**

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