Evaluation in Spain:

Concepts, Contexts, and Networks

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Evaluation as a discipline has just started to take hold in Spain, especially since the nineties. More and more research centres, independent consultants, professionals and scholars are devoted to these tasks. However, we lack a unified body of knowledge, there is no shared vision of what evaluation is, nor is there a professional profile recognized by society or even by ourselves. Entry of unqualified persons in the profession is a tangible reality, with many supposed evaluators whose training is limited, in the best of cases, to a specific course, or certain personal experience as participants (not technicians) in some evaluation process, generally in an accreditation system.

The practice of evaluation is spread around a multitude of fields of independent professional and academic activities. Recent evaluation networks allow us to see

the appearance of a network extending throughout the territory. However, many of us do not know each other nor have we heard about the work of the others. Many others are carrying out evaluation activities in their particular profession (psychology, medicine, education, agriculture, management, etc.), without knowing or taking an interest in the field of knowledge we call Program Evaluation. We lack systematic studies describing the varied and little known Spanish reality. So the impressions and news that we offer here are backed more by our experience as scholars, researchers and members of the Spanish Society of Evaluation. We must therefore apologise if we have overlooked many colleagues, for the simple reason that our formal networks are imperfect or very recent. The research institutions and teams mentioned here must be considered examples, and not as a complete panoramic overview of evaluation in Spain.

Concepts and Models

We understand *program evaluation* to be a valid generic label covering many activities and fields of application. We understand *program* as any structured set of actions that puts into play a system of social resources to meet certain goals or render a service. Any rational action fits under this definition and is subject to being evaluated following the general models basically taken from evaluation of social and educational programs. We also understand *evaluate* as judging the merit or worth of something, using the formula that has come to be known as evaluation logic (Scriven, 1994). We accept that evaluation is an integral process present in all phases of the program (following Stufflebeam's CIPP Model), using a variety of research methods to determine the value of actions, with the triple goal of improving programs, increasing knowledge about them and demonstrating their proper performance to interested groups (Chelimsky, 1997). Finally, we give

capital importance to the ideas of stakeholder negotiation, scientific perspective and orientation toward improved social conditions (Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, & Cantón, 2003).

The theory and practice of evaluation in our country owes much to U.S. models, although with different paradigmatic and applied adscriptions. Specialists in education frequently cite the work of Stake (respondent, qualitative, case-study evaluation) and Stufflebeam (the CIPP Model). Psychometricians and methodologists cite the classical works of Campbell and Stanley, Cook and Reichardt, and Shadish. Those who have a qualitative orientation are familiar with the texts by Guba and Lincoln and the recent work of Schwandt. Specialists in social and public institution programs mention Wholey's evaluability, books by Chelimsky and the classic handbook by C. H. Weiss.

Above all others, Rossi and Freeman's handbook (with its distant predecessor by K. Lewin) and the many writings of M. Scriven, are points of agreement on the idea that Spanish evaluators have shaped of evaluation. This does not mean that there is a common viewpoint, even on basic concepts like evaluation or utilization. For example, many would like to differentiate between evaluation and assessment, and many others erroneously use indicators and other descriptive variables to arrive at conclusions on the value of programmes, without giving due attention to the problem of value criteria (Scriven, 1994). Others reduce evaluation to an analysis of the dimensions or values that structure the view of the users or customers of some service, although this is a problem that is not limited to our country (e.g., Craik & Feimer, 1987).

Evaluation Contexts

We only mention some of the contexts in which evaluation has extended in Spain. The selection depends more on our knowledge and communication networks than an exhaustive analysis of the country's reality. Evaluation is a promising field of work opening up in new spaces beyond those mentioned here and we have no doubt that it will continue do so in the near future.

<u>Public policy evaluation</u>. Rational evaluation of results, changing the management model (from control to efficient use of public spending), and the enormous administrative decentralization of Spanish government to the Autonomous Regions have fostered the surge of evaluation since the nineties (Vélez, 2003a). The directives of the European Union have been the basic motor. The EU has been contributing very large sums of money for development in Spain and the more disadvantaged European regions through the so-called Structural Funds. Ex-ante evaluation (to assure program evaluability) and intermediate evaluations (to identify the activities and measures that should be strengthened) are priorities. The MEANS Program, designed by the General Directorate for Regional Policy, has promoted the creation of a common framework for the evaluation of actions financed by the Structural Funds. The Spanish reality, however, is deficient. Evaluation is not present in many projects, and plans for action do not have monitoring and evaluation systems from the beginning. Vélez (2003a) suggests that evaluation is weighted as an administrative and financial control, more than as a tool at the service of the managers and responsible politicians.

<u>Quality management and accreditation systems</u>. These subjects have their own universe, discourse and sales. They are a big business as consulting services and

have extended enormously in very diverse institutional fields. Management by goals, quality management (EFQM, 2003) and service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) are the key processes in which evaluation activities are integrated (Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, & Cantón, 2003; Ruíz-López, 2004). In all cases it is assumed that evaluation forms part of general institutional action and is done periodically in the public sector, hospitals, judicial systems and business. Although quality management has a different history from evaluation (emerging from the organizational sciences), and its concepts, applications and subject matter are different, it has given a fundamental boost to the introduction of evaluation through accreditation systems. In this case, we understand accreditation as an evaluation activity, because it deals with judging or determining the presence of certain desirable practices that together make up value criteria (Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, & Cantón, 2005; Stufflebeam, 2000).

Environmental Management. Environmental management is another growing field (Pol, 2002; Pol & Moreno, 2000). The problems of environmental change, the political concept of sustainability and their connection to international declarations, have promoted the appearance of environmental management tools that include key evaluation activities. Life-cycle analysis, environmental auditing and the evaluation of environmental impact are the preferred instruments for accreditation. These activities have recognized legal frameworks, and use the ISO 14000 and 14001 series more and more often, as well as concepts and tools for territorial planning and management (Valera, Iñiguez, Pol, & Llueca, 1996). Evaluation of environmental design has recently attracted interest in academic contexts (Fernández-Ramírez & Rebolloso, 2002; Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, &

Cantón, 2002), following social intervention design proposals (Preiser & Vischer, 2005; Zube, 1992).

Universities. The university system is an interesting field for testing institutional evaluation. Many technical units are working at each Spanish university, coordinated with regional and national agencies for periodic evaluation of university degrees, services, programs and departments, using the Four Stage Model of van Vught and Westerheijden (2004), based on the work on educational system accreditation by Kells (1983). The agencies prepare guides for evaluation of each university unit or service and the in-house technical unit is responsible for coordinating self-evaluation, external evaluation and negotiation of improvement plans. The political support of leaders is very strong, and each university is committed to undertaking a certain number of evaluations annually. The corresponding regional agency retains part of the overall university budget until it receives the reports on the demonstrated results of the work done. The purposes of evaluation are responsibility and improvement (Haugh & Tauch, 2001), although the goals of legitimacy (the autonomy of the university is legitimated in exchange for performing and reporting on its improvement efforts) and strategy (the unit evaluated uses the evaluation to define strategies and negotiate their needs with academic and political authorities) must not be forgotten.

Networks and People

The *Sociedad Española de Evaluación* (SEE, Spanish Evaluation Society[1]) was founded in July 2001. Among other purposes, it is intended to promote research, analysis and exchange of experience in evaluation and development of the culture

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[1] http://www.sociedadevaluacion.org/

of evaluation to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and usefulness of government intervention (Vélez, 2003b). Although its promoters work in the field of public policy, the SEE gathers scholars and professionals with a multitude of interests, reflecting the extent of evaluative practices in Spain. It organized the 5th Biennial Conference of the European Evaluation Society in Seville in 2002 and participated in the inaugural assembly of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) (Russon & Love, 2003). In spite of its short life, it has been recognized as a valid representative by ministerial institutions and advised on the creation of the also recent State Agency for Evaluation of Public Policy and Service Quality under the Ministry of Public Administration. National evaluator meetings, publication of a journal, and participation in training programs are its priority activities at the present time.

Means of diffusion are very scarce, although necessary to create a professional network, to share ideas and interests and to know who is working on it. The SEE now has a few: The biennial conferences, the new Public Policy Evaluation journal and the website. Reports on evaluation appear in journals and books on social intervention, regional development or employment policies, but they have a specialized minority audience and do not identify themselves as program evaluation, which is understood rather as a methodological tool without its own substantive weight. There are a few Spanish handbooks, including the pioneering texts by Alvira (1991), Fernández-Ballesteros (1995) and Rebolloso (1998), and the recent Osuna, Márquez, Cirera and Vélez (2000), Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, and Cantón (2003) and Pozo, Alonso, and Hernández (2004). Although the most recent European and American literature is well known, at least in academic circles, there is a noticeable absence of translations, those preferred

being the handbooks of Rossi and Freeman (1989), Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (1987) and Weiss (1990). Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, and Cantón (in press) complete this sample with a generic social program and public policy evaluation handbook.

A number of research teams perform evaluations as their main activity. We mention only a sample of many. The team directed by Prof. Enrique Rebolloso at the University of Almería has specialized since 1994 in institutional evaluation, environmental evaluation, total quality evaluation and teacher evaluation (Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, Cantón, & Pozo, 2002). At the present time they are carrying out a metaevaluation project on evaluations performed in the university context following the patterns set by the metaevaluation project at Western Michigan University (Rebolloso, Fernández-Ramírez, & Cantón, 2006).

In Seville, the IDR (Institute for Regional Development) research team has also been working since 1994 on evaluation of public policy. They have published a good number of research reports, many of them the results of projects linked to European Union Structural Funds (such as those related to the EQUAL Initiative) and other work on policies in such sectors as employment (Román & Bueno, 2004, Osuna & Vélez, 2004a, 2004b), R&D (Osuna, Grávalos, & Palacios 2003), housing, fishing and trade. At the present time they are updating and revising the evaluation methodology for Spanish cooperation and writing procedures and protocols for monitoring and evaluation of cooperation policy instruments (for the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

At the University of La Laguna, Prof. Bernardo Hernández has been working since 1990 on social and labour insertion programmes for ex-offenders (Martín &

Hernández, 1995; Martín, Hernández, & Hernández-Fernaud, 2004) and at the Complutense University of Madrid, María Bustelo is evaluating public policy on gender equality (Bustelo, 2003).

Evaluation is especially well developed in academic political science circles (Ballart & Ramió, 2000). A good example is the researchers at the Carlos III University "Fermín Caballero" Institute of Policy and Management in Madrid. Specifically, they have been doing evaluations for local and regional governments and international organizations, covering a wide range of subjects and sector policies: evaluation of public service quality, evaluation of European programs, social programs and policies, rural cooperation and development programs, safety policy and, in recent years, preferentially, especially the evaluation of crisis management plans and programs. Their preferred lines of research concern evaluation system design applicable to public management, evaluation methodology, metaevaluation and the institutionalization of evaluation in Spain (García-Sánchez, 2005; Ruiz-López, 2004; Vanaclocha, García-Sánchez, & Viñas, 2004; Viñas, 2005).

Program evaluation is a booming professional activity. Although there are few specialized consultants, it is part of the services provided by a good number of management consulting or project advisory services. DARA[2], an independent NGO in Madrid committed to improving the quality of development aid and humanitarian action through evaluation, is an example of the first. It provides technical assistance and advisory services to various organizations and makes studies for agencies, foundation and organizations that work in the fields of cooperation for development and humanitarian aid. Also just as an illustration of

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[2] http://www.daraint.org/

the second case, IKEI Research & Consultancy[3], a corporation created by Basque banks and other entities, specializes in consulting on project planning and management, and evaluates employment policy; Arenal Grupo Consultor[4] works in the field of evaluation of economic, territorial and urban development, and local promotion and development programs, many of them connected to the Andalusian Regional Government.

Educational programmes. Evaluation is unusual in higher education, for example, in the Psychology Degree at the University of Almería since 1993, or in Ph.D. programmes on psychological evaluation and research methods coordinated by María Teresa Anguera at the University of Barcelona since 1987. From 1998 to 2005, the University of Almería offered a Ph.D. in Evaluation (*Theory and methodology in program evaluation: the psychosocial perspective*) directed by Enrique Rebolloso.

At the present time we have two higher degrees at Spanish universities: the *Master's Degree in Program Evaluation and Public Policy* directed by María Bustelo and Juan Andrés Ligero at the Complutense University in Madrid[5], and the *Master's Degree in Evaluation. Public Policy and Social Program Planning, Intervention and Evaluation* at the University of Almería, directed by Baltasar Fernández-Ramírez[6], which follows the directives of the European Higher Education Area. Both are trying to form strategic alliances with other Spanish and European Universities as partners offering joint degrees.

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[3] http://www.ikei.es/
[4] http://www.arenalgc.es/
[5] http://www.ucm.es/info/csegae/informacion/pdf/evaluacion.pdf
[6] http://www.ual.es/personal/bfernan/MasterdeEvaluacion.htm

Conclusion

We stress that this paper is only the barest outline of the present situation of evaluation in Spain. It is a growing field in the process of becoming consolidated and formalized, with a multitude of interested professionals and scholars, but lacking in identity and with limited networking. The effort of a few to reconcile evaluation added to political support contrasts with the lack of definition and agreement on what evaluation means, what the technical competencies are, or the goals and procedures. New educational programs and independent consultants are combined with supposed professionals lacking specialized knowledge. We hope that the contrasts in this optimistic panorama will disappear with time, giving way to a well established discipline with less confusing boundaries and an adequate social and professional identity.

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