Ex-Ante Evaluators: Super Heroes or Ordinary Mortals?
I’m standing in for Alberto Martini

(That’s Cecelia)
(She shows up again later . . .)
(Why are they pointing?)
My background

• Economist with background both in urban and regional policy and social policy
• Consultant on evaluation to various agencies
• Contributed to the recently-released DG-EMPLOY *Design and Commissioning of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations*
• Have come to many presidency events

Public management is “my thing”
A Martian Studies Cohesion Policy

That was my original title for this talk.

Martians are interested because the planet has a large number of quasi-independent states. Since the end of what they term the “Big Troubles” they have been united in a single, highly decentralized confederation.
The Phobos Contract

Mars is governed from Phobos

- Phobos operates a program of grants-in-aid intended to promote confederation political objectives, including economic development, national integration, and improvements in government capacity.
- The Martians seek information from elsewhere in the galaxy about operating such programs. Alberto and I won the contract, narrowly beating ESTEP
- We decided to come here first.
- You do not know about the Martians because of a CIA conspiracy. Also, Martians live underground.

The Big Question: Where do we start?
The GUIDANCE!

The Programming Period 2014-2020

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY

European Regional Development Fund

European Social Fund

Cohesion Fund

Guidance document on ex-ante evaluation
The Phobos Management Problem

• How do you evaluate the programmes?
• The EU strategy is to insist on an inspector, an “ex ante evaluator” (EAE)
• The managing authorities get to choose; the inspection report comes in to Phobos with the programme plan
• Interesting dual role: EAEs are consultants, too
The EAE Guidance sequence is sensible and impressive. Ask:

• What do you intend?
• Is it what in confederation want?
• Does it make sense
  – Mechanically?
  – In context?
• How will we know it’s happening?
• Can it be managed?
But it’s easy to pile on instructions

EAE’s should (inter [much] alia):
appraise ‘the consistency of the selected thematic objectives, the priorities and corresponding objectives of the programmes with the Common Strategic Framework, the Partnership Contract and the country-specific recommendations under Article 121(2) of the Treaty and the Council recommendations adopted under Article 148(4) of the Treaty’ as required in Article 48(3)(d) CPR”
(a side note to puzzled Martians on vocabulary)

**CPR** is NOT “cardio pulmonary resuscitation” for those challenged by such instructions. It refers to the Common Provisions Regulation. Back to the *Guidance* (we found 27 instructions of this sort) . . .
And EAEs should also . .

“verify that complementarities and potential synergies are identified,” and

“explore if external factors that could influence the intended results were identified (e.g. national policy, economic trend, change in regional competitiveness, etc.)” and

“appraise that these challenges and needs [as in the National Reform Programme and elsewhere] are given an appropriate weight in the investment priorities,” and

Et cetera . . .

No more guidance, PLEASE
All this posed problems for our clients . . .

• This is clearly a two-sided effort—
• Not only must the ex-ante evaluators be able to do such things, but so too must personnel in the (future!) Managing Authorities
• Where can such talent be found?
• (Recall Martian experience of human competency is largely based on observations in Washington. This leads to scepticism)
Thus the EAEs must be . . .

(Note compliance with Article 7 of the Common Provisions Regulation)
Thoughts (ex-post, apparently)

• If not “super,” you are impressive
• Alberto and I have concerns
  – About management
  – About the ex-ante counterfactual
  – About evaluation and the evidence base
What are the counterfactuals?

• Programmes change the environment of the individual “units” that are policy targets
• There is a “logic model” for management, too.
• There are two counterfactuals for process
  – What is intended
  – What is current experience
• The *Guidance* properly emphasizes finding measures of what is achieved, but measurement of change is essential to understanding impact
The big problem: WHAT evidence?

“The Commission recommends that the ex ante evaluators examine whether the policy assumptions underpinning the programme logic are backed up by evidence (from previous experiences, evaluations or studies). . . If this is not the case, the evaluators should assess if other possible outputs would be more conducive to results or if other actions could more effectively lead to these outputs. If they find so, they should propose other actions to be supported, based on evidence. “
My colleague’s reaction:

The Guidance: The EAE should “examine whether the policy assumptions underpinning the programme logic are backed up by evidence”

The Reaction: “WHAT f__king evidence, Sir? You collected useless numbers for two decades, and now you are invoking evidence!”

What’s YOUR reaction?
The evidence cabinet is near-empty

The standards:

• Well-defined interventions
• Credible counterfactuals
• External validity
• Decision relevant
• Portable
• Communicable

Cecilia, seeking evidence . .
This is the big challenge for 2020

• Like the logic of ex ante evaluation, commitment to evidence must begin from the ground—agencies with a culture of improvement that see evaluation as essential to that effort

• BUT there is a “collective good” problem: The benefits of good evaluation are general, but the costs are born by the implementing agency.

• And evaluation must be planned *ex-ante*.

Ex ant, on ground
AND it is a management problem

• That’s what my Warsaw remarks addressed
• Important to see the (future!) Managing Authorities as participating in a sort of “club”
• The Evidence Club dues are good evaluations, not necessarily of programmes as a whole; more often of the building blocks
• The return to Evidence Club membership is gained from exchange of results and good dinners
• Call yourselves “Base-Builders,” the technique the “Open method of evidence base-building”
Make no mistake . . .

• Systematic evidence base-building is a BIG JOB
  • No confederation has accomplished it, not on Earth (certainly not the US) OR Mars
  • But a goal for 2020 should be something real in the evidence cabinet
  • When better to get going than at a conference entitled “Toward evidence-based programming and evaluation”?

However
You may agree with the Martians