

How to Make Impact Evaluation Feasible and Cheap

*What's New and What Works in the EU Cohesion Policy
2007-2013: Discoveries and Lessons for 2014-2020*

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Outline

- Why so few impact evaluations
 - Impact evaluation in the US and in the Structural Funds
 - How to make impact evaluation feasible and cheap in Italy
 - Conclusions
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Why so few impact evaluations

Three easy answers

- **A very difficult task** (identification and measurement problems; impact evaluation requires a very detailed, complete and accurate dataset)
 - **Bureaucracy kills evaluation in the cradle** (greater attention to inputs and to the formal respect of rules and laws on the 'correct' use of funds)
 - **Policy-makers could fear the findings of impact evaluation** (impact could be zero or negative)
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A fourth answer: ownership

- **In some cases most of the demand for evaluation comes from exogenous pressures** stemming from the European Commission rather than from endogenous initiatives
 - In these cases the evaluation is seen as an obligation and a formal exercise
 - **Impact evaluation, even if conducted by the Managing Authorities, is not owned by them**
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A fifth answer: time for results

- ❑ Data collection requires a lot of time
 - ❑ Impact estimates are sensitive to length (light impact in the short term, stronger in the long term). Years have to elapse after the end of interventions before outcomes and impacts can be correctly measured
 - ❑ Information on interventions and beneficiaries has to be collected from the beginning to have any value
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A sixth answer: costs

- Impact evaluation requires an adequate budget
 - Data collection is the major cost
 - Dissemination of the main findings should be considered an important item
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Consequences: not all Managing Authorities are interested in impact evaluation

The case of ESF in Sweden (cf. Brulin, G. – Jansson, S [2010]).

- In Sweden data and researchers are available for impact evaluations, but ESF policy-makers are not interested in them
 - Sweden policy-makers prefer other kinds of evaluation offering quicker and more immediately exploitable responses
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Summing up. What are the major challenges in making impact evaluations interesting for Managing Authorities?

- Ownership
 - To what extent these evaluations meet stakeholders' demands
 - Time needed to achieve results
 - Costs
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Impact Evaluation in the US and in the Structural Funds

Impact evaluation in the US

- ❑ Long tradition in this research field
- ❑ The importance of impact evaluation is a shared value and not only among experts in the field
- ❑ Substantial budget for impact evaluation
- ❑ Abundance of impact evaluators

Two important fields of application:

- ❑ Single donor projects/programmes
 - ❑ Public policies
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US: Single donor projects/programmes

There is no problem with respect to:

- Evaluation ownership
- Data acquirement/releasing

The 'only' problem is how to choose the right person(s) to carry out the impact evaluation

US: Public Policies

- ❑ Strong cooperation among policy-makers and evaluators
 - ❑ Impact evaluation is designed in tandem with programmes
 - ❑ Examples:
 1. WIA (Heinrich [2010])
 2. Education (Agodini [2009])
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Evaluation in the Structural Funds

- ❑ Policies have a complex governance
- ❑ Multiple sources of funding (EU, Member State, Regions, Private Subjects, ...)
- ❑ Different stakeholders have different interests in (impact) evaluation

IT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY CLEAR WHO OWNS THE EVALUATION, WHO IS ENTITLED TO DATA COLLECTION/ RELEASING AND FINALLY HOW TO SHARE COSTS

Establishing a link between monitoring and evaluation is necessary in the ESF

1. Managing Authorities are entitled to ask implementers for micro-data
 2. Building a monitoring infrastructure could be the first step towards defining evaluation demand and design
 3. Without monitoring there is a risk of attributing the evaluation with inappropriate tasks
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How to make impact evaluation feasible and cheap in Italy

Preamble

At national level

- ❑ There is a **strong interest in impact evaluation**
 - ❑ Impact evaluations are conducted inside and outside the Structural Funds
 - ❑ **The Italian Constitution gives the Regions exclusive responsibility for some important policies** (labour market, training, ...)
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2007-2013 ESF Governance

- Italy has **21 ESF Regional Managing Authorities** (19 Regions and 2 Autonomous Provinces)
 - **5 of them belong to the Convergence Objective** (Basilicata, phasing out)
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The current situation at regional level

- ❑ Italian Regions do not have much experience in (impact) evaluation outside the Structural Funds (ESF)
 - ❑ Not all regional experiences are satisfactory. Local monitoring systems are very heterogeneous and the evaluation culture is not evenly developed
 - ❑ There are too many fragmented initiatives
 - ❑ There is no coordination among regional offices
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Hard times (at regional and national level)

- ❑ Budget cuts or budget reallocations
- ❑ Spoils system
- ❑ Fixed-term contracts

Less resources are being devoted to monitoring, surveying and evaluation. Trained personnel or expert managers are not being maintained in the regional structures. **Cumulative learning is vanishing.**

Principal aims at national level

- Regional Authorities should be encouraged to promote monitoring, surveying and impact evaluations outside the Structural Funds

 - Policies that are not co-financed should receive the same attention as co-financed policies
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Making impact evaluation feasible

- The high costs of the impact evaluation are related to data collection
 - The lack of affordable and accessible micro-data sets is one of the main reasons for the scarcity of impact evaluations in Italy
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To simplify data collection

- ❑ Managing Authorities are asked for too much information
 - ❑ Information is not always affordable and precise
 - ❑ Information is not utilised (at regional as well as national level)
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Reducing statistical harassment of Managing Authorities and implementers

Data: few, fast and furious!

Essential information on projects,
beneficiaries, and implementers
then

**Beneficiary survey(s) and/or
administrative data** for outcome
measurement

Cooperation between national and regional levels

PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- a) Impact evaluation could be an **excessive burden** for some regions
- b) Impact evaluation could be considered as a **public good**, enabling regions to learn from each other

SOLUTIONS

1. **To share the costs** of impact evaluation
 2. To enhance regional structures and experiences **to build a national evaluation infrastructure, usable at regional level**
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The building blocks of the national evaluation infrastructure: National Information System on interventions and beneficiaries

ISFOL and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies are creating a National Information System on Training accessible by regional authorities and containing information on policies, whether co-financed or not (**SISTAF**). The system can provide a data-base for outcome measurement.

The building blocks of the national evaluation infrastructure: outcome measurement

National survey, significant at regional level

Outcome measurement should be done by independent agencies at regional or, preferably, national level

Use of administrative data from PES (external control groups)

The building blocks of the national evaluation infrastructure: impact evaluation

National initiatives will accompany regional ones

Dissemination of results of impact evaluation to foster mutual learning

Advantages at regional level

- ❑ **Managing Authorities can concentrate their efforts on monitoring and on the demand for evaluation.** More resources for evaluation are available at regional level if outcome measurement is conducted at national level
 - ❑ **Programme Evaluators can benefit from better, affordable data.** At the same time the Programme Evaluators can focus on their specific job (i.e. evaluation, not survey)
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Places and spaces for cooperation and learning: the National Placement Working Group

- This is a **technical working group led by ISFOL** and consisting of representatives of all the MAs in the Italian Regions, from both Convergence and Competitiveness Objectives
 - The main task of the Group consists of **building up common instruments and exchanging methods** and approaches to impact evaluation
 - Participants ask questions about technical problems related to beneficiary surveys and impact evaluation
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Places and spaces for cooperation and learning:
Moodle, a Virtual National Placement Group on the web

To foster continuous cooperation among and with policy-makers ISFOL has created a space on Moodle, a free and open source e-learning software platform (<http://moodle.isfol.it>)

Members of the National Placement Group can:

- ❑ participate in forums
 - ❑ access archives (documents, articles, PPT presentations)
 - ❑ upload data in safe and secure conditions according to stringent Italian privacy norms
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Conclusions

Conclusions

- ❑ **Impact evaluation should not be the only way of conducting the evaluation**
 - ❑ **Impact evaluation is expensive and poses many coordination and funding problems in the Structural Funds.** Adequate budgets and cooperation among European, national and regional levels are required
 - ❑ **Impact evaluation findings should be widely disseminated** to help policy-makers
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A modest proposal for making data collection easier and quicker

Engaging implementers (training agencies) **in data collection** for monitoring, surveying and impact evaluation

HOW?

- 1. BY MAKING DATA COLLECTION COSTS ADMISSIBLE**
 - 2. BY MAKING MANAGING AUTHORITIES' PAYMENTS TO IMPLEMENTERS SUBJECT TO DATA COLLECTION**
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Thank you for your attention

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