

Some Perspectives on the Evolution of Evaluation Cultures in the European Commission

Let's start at the beginning: 1980s - mid 1990s. No formal requirements for evaluation mandated. Some evaluation but unsystematic. But as expenditure on programmes increased, notably Structural Funds, concern to ensure sound management of public funds. The Means Evaluation guide developed from mid 90s to end of the decade and was very influential. SEM 2000 of late 90s mandates evaluation of spending programmes across the Commission

Key principles were cost effectiveness and evaluation of achievement of objectives. Era now of New Public Management. Overarching responsibility for Evaluation - DG Budget. But structure mediated by individual agency. At structural level - fiscal accountability but at agency level huge influence of key Commission enthusiasts concerned to capacity build in the interests of learning as well as accountability.

First Commission Guide to Evaluation of Spending Activities led by H. Summa, revised 2004. But as yet no policy evaluation.

Better Regulation from 2002. Emphasis on simplification and evidence based policy. Ex ante impact Assessment. Locus of initiative shifts to Secretariat General - different culture, different agenda. Now focus on policy. All major new policies require IA (e.g Roaming Regulation). IA Board established.

Tensions between DG Budget and SG. Former focuses on rigour, quality and use - evaluation Standards and Com 'Reinforcing the Use of Evaluation (2007). Also ex ante evaluation guide for policy.

Power of SG and push on IA all pervasive.
Responsibility for Evaluation taken over by SG IN
2009. Increasing focus on demonstrating
transparency, evidence base, rationalizing or
reducing regulatory burden, accountability to
relevant publics and consultation.

Under Juncker Commission, Better Regulation reinforced. Establishment of Regulatory Scrutiny Board. Evaluation integral part of the policy cycle. Now REFIT Programme, Fitness Checks and 'Evaluate First' principle.

But has it strengthened Evaluation - or just institutionnalised it?

- Trend to reduce stand alone Evaluation Units and locate evaluation in sectors dealing with Better Regulation, economic analysis and units dealing with policy cycle and evidence.

- Often difficult to get timing of evaluation to fit policy formulation.

- Lots of evidence but is it applied to hierarchical learning and informing the public?