EVALUATION NETWORKS AND GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN EVALUATION NETWORK

BY PABLO RODRÍGUEZ-BILELLA[66]

INTRODUCTION

Although evaluation is being integrated more and more into the design and analysis of public policies, there are key differences among countries in the use and dissemination of evaluations. Many factors affect the development, integration and use of evaluation in each country, so it is possible to find almost as many styles of and approaches to evaluation as there are countries. In some regions, like the European Union, these differences seem to be less problematic because they have a clear, common framework that has helped to build a common evaluation culture.[67] However, this is not the case, for instance, in Latin America, which lacks a common framework and where national and regional evaluation associations have differing roles.

This paper explores this issue, paying attention to the role of evaluation networks in supporting governance in the region. It discusses the notion of governance and evaluation culture, in order to provide the conceptual grounds for the introduction of evaluation networks at global and regional levels and then discusses the Latin American Evaluation Network, ReLAC, assessing its relevance as a tool for regional governance.

THE GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE AND THE CULTURE OF EVALUATION

The concept of governance has gained great popularity across most of the social sciences during the past decade, although it has been used differently in different contexts. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some shared characteristics that provide the basis of the governance perspectives (Rhodes 1996:660; Shaffer 2001:18; Bonfiglioli 2003:18-20). These are a strong interest in self-organizing; inter-organizational networks; shifting boundaries

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66. Member, Executive Committee, Latin American Network of Evaluation.
67. Although there is some discussion about the existence of a 'European' evaluation tradition, due to the presence of different evaluation traditions from various countries, arising from the way evaluation was introduced in successive waves in different contexts (Stame 2006).

between public, private and voluntary organizations; and indirect and imperfect 'steering' by the state.

For Jessop (1995:310-311) the concept of governance signals a shift to "a broad concern with a wide range of governance mechanisms with no presumption that these are anchored primarily in the sovereign state". The concept of governance is broader than government (which is concerned with the formal institutions and structures of the state). It pays attention to the multiple ways in which governmental and non-governmental organizations interact and to how political power and authority are distributed, both internally and externally, in the state (Goodwin 2003:2).

The literature on governance has shown how top-down and centralized approaches to policy and interventions opened the way for policy to be 'infiltrated' by two related concepts: local context and participation (Ray 2003:2). Development thinking has been strongly influenced by the demand to adopt a people-centred approach (Cleary 2003). This implies that development is no longer seen as uni-dimensional, in which progress is measured primarily in terms of economic growth and accumulation of wealth. There is growing consensus that development is about enhancing individual freedoms, expanding human capabilities, widening choices and assuring citizens of their basic human rights. To go beyond an 'audit culture' (Roberts 2001) and to search for in-depth knowledge of the processes involved in development projects, this paper discusses the establishment and development of ReLAC as a starting point for analysing participation and associated work in the evaluation of development interventions.

Evaluation culture can be defined in the simplest terms as how evaluation is considered by key stakeholders in a particular context. It is also a process of 'reality construction' that allows these stakeholders to see and understand particular events, actions, objects or situations linked with evaluation in distinct ways. Paying attention to issues of culture helps to avoid viewing it as a mechanical or engineered structure but rather as a product of the social interaction of several key actors.

In the field of sustainable evaluation, many evaluations that attempted to uncover the human causes of environmental degradation failed in simplistic and deterministic analysis. They gave insufficient attention to the way in which people act as conscious agents to intervene in the world around them (Jones 1999). To overcome these shortcomings, different people-centred approaches emerged (Cleary 2003).

Several factors influence the development of an evaluation culture (Levine 1981; Toulemonde 2000; Haarich 2005): the political consensus about the objectives of the government, the concentration of services and the public and scientific life of major cities; the level of decentralization or federalism; the legal requirements of performing evaluations; the role of different government offices more or less interested in the development of evaluations; the existence of internationally funded projects (by the World Bank, for instance) that require the integration of evaluation in different policies; civil society; mass media; and the role of international professional networks.

Toulemonde (2000) finds that in the late 1970s evaluation culture spread within policy networks that were open to international trends, especially those of research and

development aid. But this broad diffusion of evaluation on a European scale has not been a strong driving force in the development of evaluation practice beyond the circle of the policies concerned. For Boyle, Lemaire and Rist (1999:3) a friendly or favourable environment for development of evaluation has six dimensions: (1) The development and institutionalization of the social sciences; (2) the existence and maintenance of a trustworthy statistical apparatus; (3) the capacity to staff a national evaluation system; (4) the constitutional relationship between the executive and the legislative branches of the government; (5) the population and geographic size; and (6) the administrative distance from the centre to the periphery of the governmental system.

The different existence of these factors in dissimilar national contexts makes it difficult to find a pure 'culture of evaluation'. This means that the diversity of culture in regions and countries is a permanent source of enrichment and social innovation and that evaluation practice, while getting mature, may escape from uniformity.

What are the problems in the absence of an evaluation culture? (1) Institutional and political constraints are more difficult to overcome; (2) the struggle for adequate budgets demands extra energy; (3) the evaluator is closer to the image of a detective or a spy than a critical friend; and (4) it is more difficult for the evaluation to reflect local and regional priorities.

In the case of Latin America, one common element is the growing demand for evaluation of public policies. Managers and policymakers are using evaluation as a way of making public expenditure more efficient and of fulfilling requirements of accountability. At the same time, there are problems with the design and implementation of evaluations and with the limited use of their results. Evaluations are often used more for financial and administrative control than as a tool of planning and managing. In many cases, evaluation has more to do with generating descriptions and less with the evaluation of these activities and improving planning and decision making.

EVALUATION NETWORKS AND GOVERNANCE

The main purpose of many evaluation networks and organizations is to contribute to the development of a culture that situates evaluation as a key tool to improve the efficacy and efficiency of the design and implementation of social interventions. The term 'network' has become a hallmark of the development industry. Networks have the potential to provide a more flexible and non-hierarchical means of exchange and interaction that is also more innovative, responsive and dynamic, while overcoming spatial separation and providing economies of scale. It is clear that the label 'networks' currently pervades discourses about the relationships between organizations in development, although there has been little research or theorization of such networks (Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos 2004).

Some authors regard networks as a counter-hegemonic force. Most important is to consider them not as static entities but as an ongoing and emergent process. Networks offer a variety of synergistic advantages, such as the option to work together, availability of resources, access to information, opportunities to share experiences, generation of new policy interventions and development of a collective vision. Networks are flexible, which favours the building of consensus. More than anything, networks hope to have an impact

on the real world—to change reality. However, networks may also have disadvantages. If they are closed, they can inhibit the introduction of new ideas, becoming static structures. In addition, external influences can divert networks from their original purpose.

Evaluation associations and networks at local, national and international levels provide opportunities for evaluators to meet regularly. Members include interested individuals, evaluation practitioners, managers, consultants, teachers, students and officials from all levels of government, educational institutions, research agencies, civil society organizations and businesses. While there were only 3 national and regional evaluation societies in the 1980s, by the late 1990s there were 9, and by the beginning of the 21st century the number had grown to 50 (Segone and Ocampo 2006). Today, according to the records of the International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE)[68] there are 87 evaluation groups and networks worldwide.

In general, these organizations aspire to improve methods and practice, enhance the standards and quality of evaluation work, develop skills, promote ethical behaviour and standards, strengthen professional independence and provide a forum for exchange, debate and learning. Most of these associations understand evaluation as a profession and practice that can contribute to improve societal, policy and institutional problem-solving and development.

Recognition of the potential benefits of evaluation has also led to efforts to establish international organizations of evaluators. At the global level there are two associations: IOCE and the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS). IOCE is committed to building a worldwide evaluation community by becoming a platform for cooperation and partnership, fostering cross-fertilization of ideas, high professional standards and an open and global perspective among evaluators. Its mission (as stated in its constitution) is to help legitimize evaluation and support evaluation societies, associations and networks to help them contribute to good governance, effective decision-making and a stronger role for civil society. As an international organization, IOCE is committed to cultural diversity, inclusiveness and bringing together different evaluation traditions in ways that respect this diversity.

IDEAS is a voluntary association of professional evaluators, development institutions and civil society organizations committed to promoting the theory, methods and practice of development evaluation globally. Its mission is to improve and extend the practice of development evaluation by refining methods, strengthening capacity and expanding ownership, particularly in developing and transitional countries (Gariba, 2006). IDEAS' strategy is to serve as a catalyst for enabling and convening a global development evaluation constituency, while observing the principle of subsidiarity, especially with respect to the emerging community of evaluation practice among country evaluation associations. IDEAS' activities are designed to expand both the supply of and demand for evaluation.

THE LATIN AMERICAN EVALUATION NETWORK

Internationally, evaluation is at the heart of modern developments in governance and democracy. This has to do with the demands of continuous improvement in administrative

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68. <http://ioce.net/members/national_organizations.shtml>

performance, greater accountability and transparency (in the interests of citizens as well as policymakers) and effective delivery of results in the public and private sectors and civil society. Evaluation can address these demands by providing feedback on what has worked, deepening the understanding of the processes of policy implementation, designing knowledge systems that allow institutions and systems to learn, and developing capacities to manage effectively and to innovate.

ReLAC is a network of networks designed to help strengthen capacity in monitoring and evaluation and professionalize the evaluation function in Latin America. It seeks to strengthen the culture and practice of monitoring, evaluation and systematization as a social and political process essential for improvement of policies, programmes and projects, aiming for greater transparency and citizen participation.

ReLAC originated in the inaugural assembly of IOCE, in Lima in March 2003, where the networks of Brazil, Colombia and Peru agreed to promote its formation. In October 2004, ReLAC was launched in Peru, where it had its first conference: 'Evaluation, Democracy and Governance: Challenges for Latin America'. The issues addressed included democratic evaluation, methodologies for evaluating human rights programmes, capacity building in evaluation of social initiatives and monitoring and evaluation as a political and social process to strengthen democracy. The discussions reflected the intense focus on promoting a social agenda for the region, with evaluation as a key tool. The objectives of ReLAC are:

- Generate and support opportunities for exchange and reflection among professionals and entities involved in monitoring, evaluation and systematization;

- Promote the development of capabilities in monitoring, evaluation and systematization;

- Develop general principles, procedures, ethical standards and conduct for the good practice of monitoring, evaluation and systematization;

- Promote the development and dissemination of concepts, methodologies and tools for monitoring, evaluation and systematization adapted to the cultural diversity of the region;

- Encourage national and international agencies to practise and use transparent, participatory and equitable systems of monitoring, evaluation and systematization;

- Contribute to development of the international community of monitoring, evaluation and systematization, from the specific cultural and local experience of the region;

- Support the development of organizations and national and sub-regional networks of monitoring, evaluation and systematization.

ReLAC's second conference was held in July 2007 in Bogotá, with the theme of 'Contributions of Monitoring and Evaluation to Governance and Democracy'. It was attended by 170 delegates from 22 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and North America plus Spain. Speakers lectured about the strategic role of evaluation in development; evaluation as a political process; professionalization of evaluation; evaluation of humanitarian aid; and evaluation, accountability and learning.

ReLAC has elaborated a master's (diploma) programme in evaluation, which had its pilot test in January 2008 in Santiago de Chile, offered by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences. The programme was taught again in January and November 2009.[69] It is oriented to evaluators who want to update and deepen their knowledge with a broad perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean. It recognizes the need for professional evaluators in the region, given that development programmes and projects implemented over the past decades in the region have not produced the expected results. Hence, both academic training centres and evaluators themselves need to upgrade methodologies, exchange experiences and establish parameters and standards of evaluation to account for the new challenges. Among the key skills required for evaluators to respond to the reality of Latin America, the programme has identified these:

- Knowledge of the reality and socio-economic, cultural and political contexts of the region;

- Ability to understand and address cultural and social diversity;

- Capacity for an approach to social change in the context of exclusion, strong asymmetries of power and the dominance of a legalistic and economic approach to evaluation;

- Ability to exercise professional autonomy in institutional settings characterized by little or no transparency;

- Consideration of the approach of rights in the design, implementation and evaluation of development projects;

- Knowledge of the strategic role of monitoring and evaluation for the achievement of development goals.

The master's programme is organized in four thematic modules (table 1).

ReLAC's discussion lists have advertised an increasing number of job postings, primarily from government agencies and non-profit organizations (NGOs, foundations and institutes). The positions offered cover a broad range of areas, including education, environment, child labour, agriculture and socio-economic development (Chianca 2005).

During its brief existence, ReLAC has recorded some important achievements, including greater awareness of the relevance of evaluation, dissemination of current trends and the creation of a community of evaluators who engage in more networking. ReLAC has also fostered the creation of new national networks and has developed a website to link evaluation networks. Its electronic discussion list allows interaction and collaboration among network members. Some of ReLAC's challenges are achieving a sustainable membership, finding ways to avoid overburdening its voluntary leadership and maintaining its current level of activities.

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69. The Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences is an academic international organization created in 1957 by the goverments of Latin America and the Caribbean. Its mission is to promote teaching, research and scientific cooperation in the social sciences.

TABLE 1. THEMATIC MODULES OF EVALUATION MASTER'S PROGRAMME

MODULE I: INPUTS AND CONTEXTS	MODULE II: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS
• Evaluation and development in Latin America and the Caribbean • Evaluation and public policy • Ethical dilemmas in evaluation	• Evaluation theory • Evaluation thinking • Evaluation typology • Results-based management and logical models • Rights-based models and evaluation • Principles, rules and standards of evaluation
MODULE III: METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS	MODULE IV: SYNTHESIS AND APPLICATION
• Introduction to evaluation methods • Quantitative methods • Qualitative methods • Indicators construction • Socio-economic, financial and technological components • Institutional and political components • Process and result evaluation • Impact evaluation	• Evaluation design • Evaluation management • Evaluation project

Some of the lessons learned in the context of a national network could be easily applied for ReLAC. Writing about the Brazilian network evaluation, Silva et al. (2006:69) stated that:

...democratic contexts create a favourable environment for the development of evaluation networks; given their support for the independence and autonomy of their members, networks are a better strategy for organizing evaluators than establishing a full organization with a hierarchal structure; and a major component of a successful network is people with fresh ideas who are motivated to work. Money is important, but not as important as the people.

CONCLUSIONS

RELAC has been playing an important role in the establishment of national evaluation associations in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as evaluation capacity building. Capacity building can be delivered in many ways, formally and informally, through university or training institution programmes or other means (Bamberger 2006). Following Quesnel (2006:28), the experience of the evaluation community in general shows that the success or failure of evaluation capacity development depends greatly on three conditions:

● Awareness and appreciation at governmental decision-making levels of the importance and necessity of evaluation—in other words, demand for evaluation;

- Institutionalization and meaningful integration of the various evaluation functions in government machinery at national, sectoral, programme/project and sub-state levels;

- Development of human and financial resources to support a professional, dedicated and effective cadre of evaluators and evaluation managers.

Monitoring and evaluation capacity is increasingly acknowledged as a key to improving public sector management. It is possible to identify several trends in governance benefiting from the contributions of evaluation (Russon and de Silva, 2001), including democratization, by promoting citizen participation in government through inclusion, dialogue and deliberation; and 'de-bureaucratization', by promoting public accountability, responsiveness, transparency and efficiency.

A deeply rooted culture of democratic evaluation at all administrative levels can help evaluation practice to fully produce its benefits. This would imply that public managers are prepared to accept and publish reports that contain negative or disturbing conclusions (Toulemonde 2000). This requires the media and politicians to use evaluations without distorting their conclusions. Another factor that could contribute to achieving this goal is the creation and consolidation of national evaluation societies or associations, which help to ensure recognition of evaluation as an integral part of democratic functioning. As Toulemonde (2000) expressed it:

> Another form of maturity is probably at play. In the public sector this involves the progressive shift from evaluation as a constraint to a managerial use of the exercise— something which has largely been achieved—and then to a democratic evaluation culture. The latter stage is still very far from being attained in Europe. My view is that all countries in the European Union are in the process of reaching relative maturity in their evaluation culture. It seems that in the short term some universal lessons are going to be learnt and that specific national characteristics will consequently disappear.

Networks of evaluators also can aid the professionalization of evaluation by generating spaces for discussion and exchange of concepts, approaches and methods. They could have a key role in generating and disseminating knowledge and in putting the professionalization of evaluation on the public agenda. In developing countries, networks could help to deepen the strategic role of evaluation in the development framework. Mature networks could also make evaluation more professional by stating norms, behaviour and ethics codes. And last, but not least, evaluation networks are a means to ensure the independence and authority of evaluators.

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