

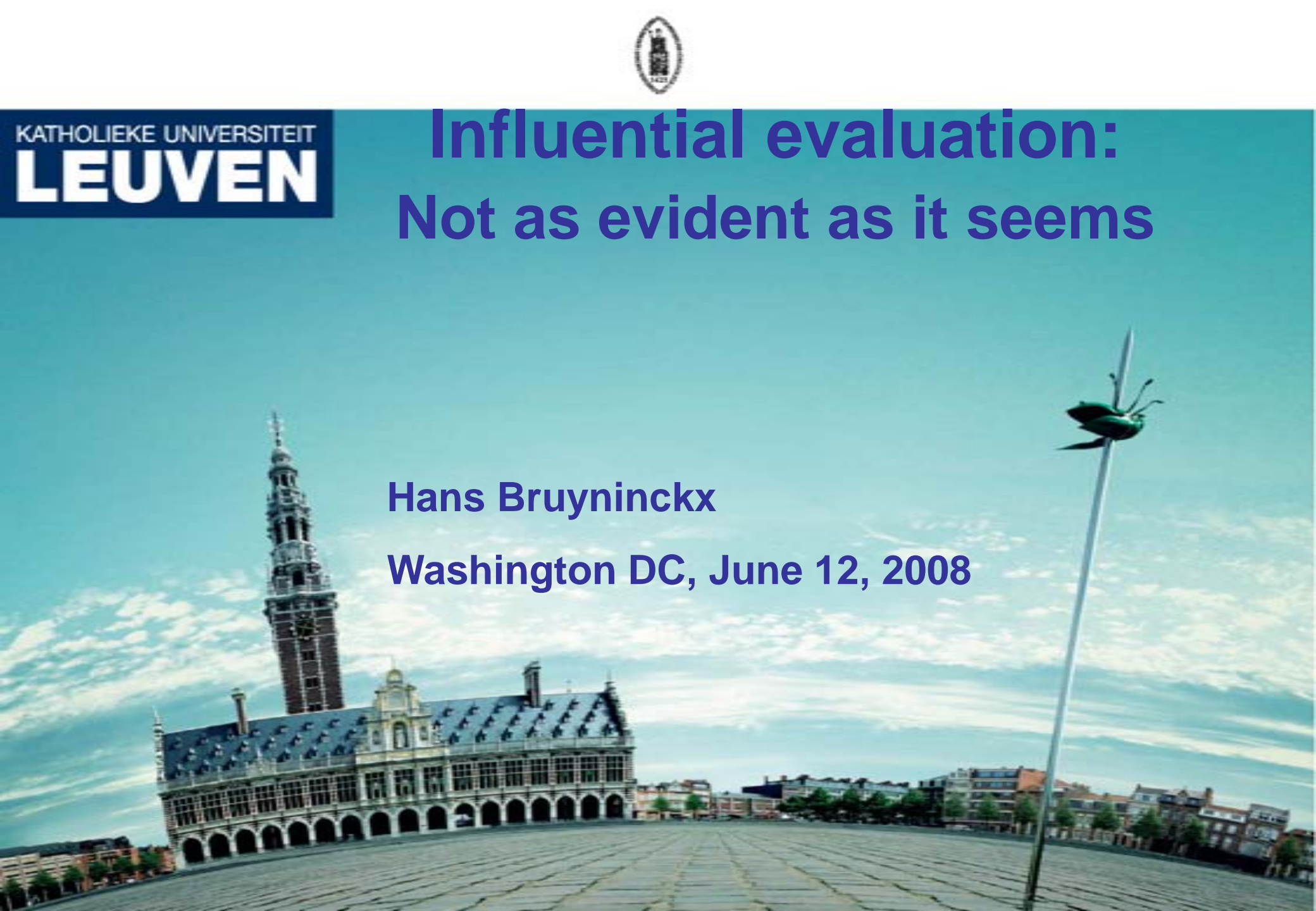


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Influential evaluation: Not as evident as it seems

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Introduction

« Of course we want more influential evaluations! »

- Evaluators:

- Recognition
- Impact

- Policy makers:

- Better policy results
- Responsive policies
- Cost/benefit

- Public:

- Objective policy making
- Good use of public funds



Critical questions

- What is an influential evaluation?
- Who really wants this?
- Under what conditions are evaluations influential?
- Does this change what we do as evaluators?



Influence

- “The modification of one or more actors’ behavior, beliefs or preferences by purposeful acts of another actor”.
(Schunz, 2008)
- Elements:
 - Influence wielder: is this the evaluator or is the evaluator just providing the knowledge: evaluator as ‘agent of change’ or as neutral professional
 - Acts that exert influence: persuasion, argumentation based on knowledge
 - What is the focus: change in behavior, beliefs, preferences?
 - What is the time frame?



What sort of influence?

	Intentionality	Object	Time horizon
Influence attempts	Intentional or unintentional	Actors or institutional/structural level targeted	Short-term or long-term aims
Influence effects	Intended or unintended	Actors or institutions/structures affected	Short-term or long-term effects



Conditions for more influential evaluation



Political importance

- How important is ‘more influential evaluation’ for policy makers?
 - Policy tradition
 - Personal position: ideology, relationship with agencies, other influences
 - The results of evaluations!
- How important are environmental arguments when ‘things really matter’?
 - Economic competitiveness
 - Large infrastructure projects
 - Energy security
 - Short term (political) gains



Institutionalizing evaluation

- Primordial condition!
- Evaluation becomes an integral part, norm and standard of (environmental) policy interventions.
- Consequences:
 - It is not something additional or optional
 - It should be better integrated in policy processes
 - Evaluation planning: when, what sort of data necessary, who, statute of evaluation and evaluator



Standardizing evaluation

- Needed to be more influential?
- Good examples:
 - Belgium: bi-annual 'Environmental Policy Evaluation Report'
 - EEA: methodological work to improve and standardize evaluations
- Is there a need 'generally accepted standards' for the profession?
 - E.g. financial evaluation by accountants



Yet, role of creativity

- Much methodological work is still needed
- New challenges: issues of scale, time and institutional design, new problems, ...
- So, standardisation could stand in the way of innovation and creativity
- Influence can also be exerted through innovative methodologies, new conceptual approaches, taking ‘the road less traveled’.



Participation

- By whom?
 - « Stakeholders », but who is that anyway?
 - ‘the public’ (EU EIA directive)
 - representative interest groups or civil society actors (urban settings)
 - institutionalized advisory boards (Bel)
 - Experts (Neth)
- How?
 - During the evaluation: instrumental, legitimizing
 - During the planning? participatory policy making
 - Making use of the results: knowledge for ‘agency’



Does this change what we do as
evaluators?



Position of the evaluator

- Given the potential impact, the position of the evaluator becomes more tricky.
- Evaluator as an activist? With her own agenda?
- Evaluator as the provider of expert knowledge?
- Evaluator as part part of ‘standard operating procedures’?
- What if the news is bad?



Professionalism

- Are evaluators ready?
- With increased influence, the need for professionalism also increases:
 - Sound methodologies
 - Training
 - Specialization?
 - Certification?



Professionalism (2)

- More attention for policy evaluation:
 - processes
 - instruments
- Beter integration of ecological and policy evaluations
- Accountability of the evaluator



Conclusions

- Striving for more influential evaluation sounds more evident than it is.
- It has an impact on what evaluators do and what sort of actors they are.
- Is dependent of the context in which the evaluation takes place.
- Institutionalization is central condition.