

# Exceptionalism in Environmental Evaluation: Are We Really That Different?

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# The short answer

# No!

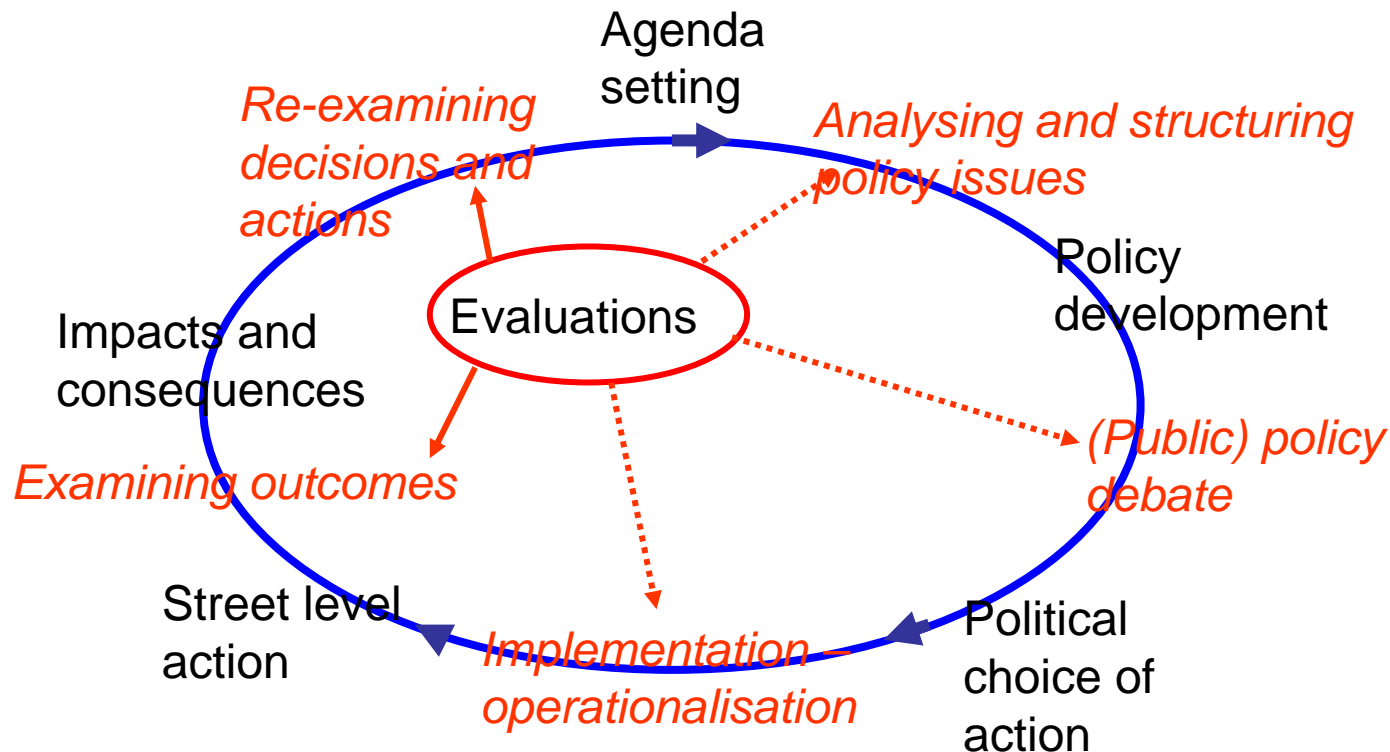
## Some features of environmental problems that have been identified as special

- **Complexity** – specified as problems through research
- Long time frames and geographically remote areas – huge **uncertainties**
- Consequences and causes unequally distributed – stakeholders with **different belief systems and conflicting goals**

Mickwitz 2006

# What makes environmental evaluations not so special?

- Environmental evaluations are part of policy cycles



➔ General studies of policies and policy implementation have much to offer

# The environment is not what it used to be

- Environmental issues are increasingly dealt with outside the environmental "core"
  - **Climate** is about economy, technology and innovation
  - **Biodiversity** is about land use, ecosystem services and resource management
  - **Chemicals** are about trade, risks in general, industry and innovation
- ➡ New actors, new agenda mixtures that cannot be meaningfully evaluated from a "pure" environmental view.

# The times they are a-changin – and so are regulatory regimes

- A regulatory regime is an institutional structure and assignment of responsibilities for carrying out regulatory actions:
  - A general move from prescriptive regimes towards market based and “voluntary” public-private or fully private regimes
- ➡ New actors, new structures and institutions that cannot be meaningfully evaluated from a “pure” environmental view.

# The strange case of climate evaluations

**Or why is it so d... difficult to assess and evaluate climate and energy policies?**

# Strategic "onions"

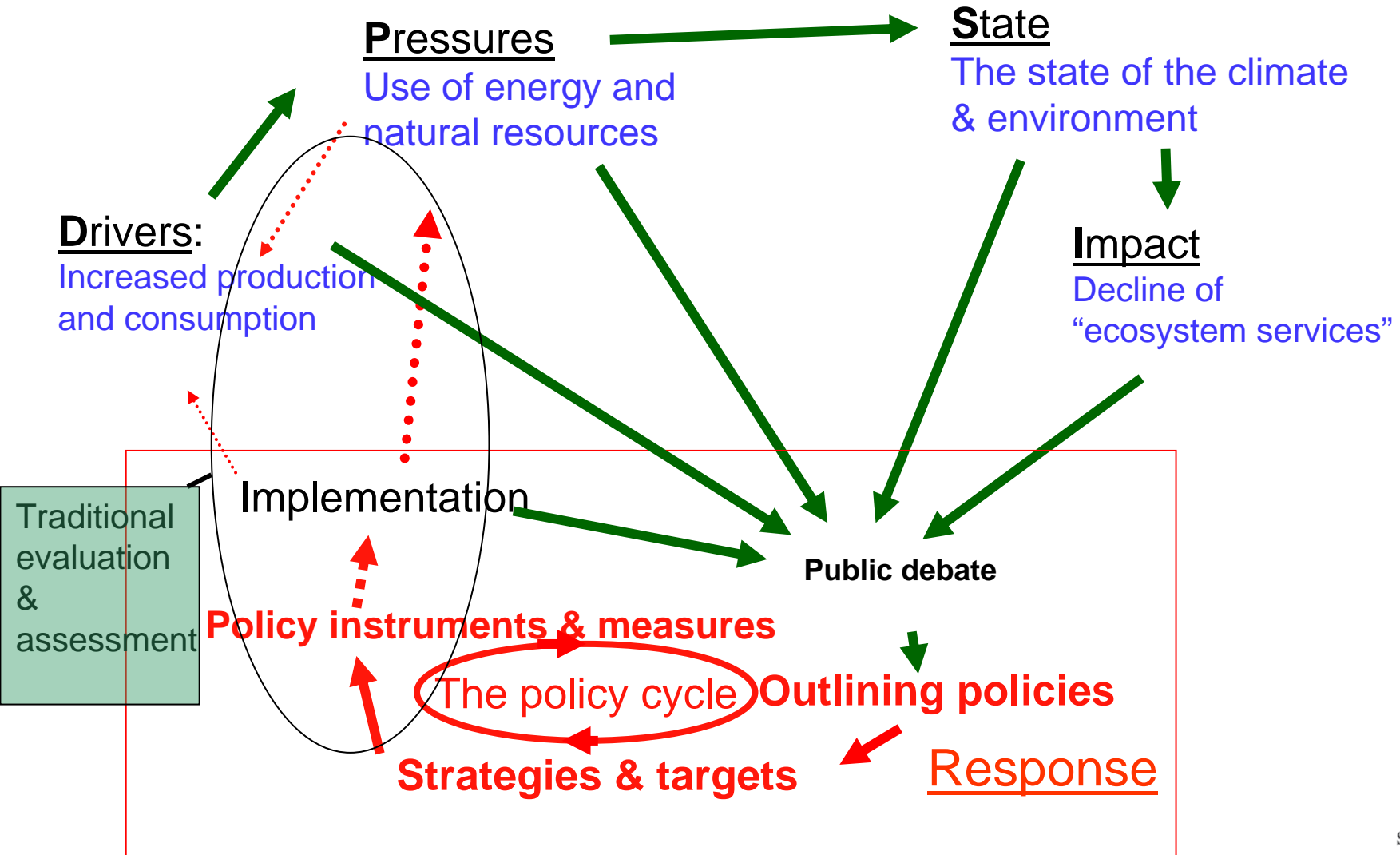
- A "measure" in a strategy is frequently a promise of a more detailed plan or programme;
- With the exception of the emissions trade targets are set at an administrative level – the aim is an outcome, not a result → significant delays.
- The "intervention theory" (programme theory) outside the emissions trade is left vague.
- The measures have cumulative effects that extend beyond the borders of any one country.
- Non-linear and discontinuous changes are likely at the level of implementation.



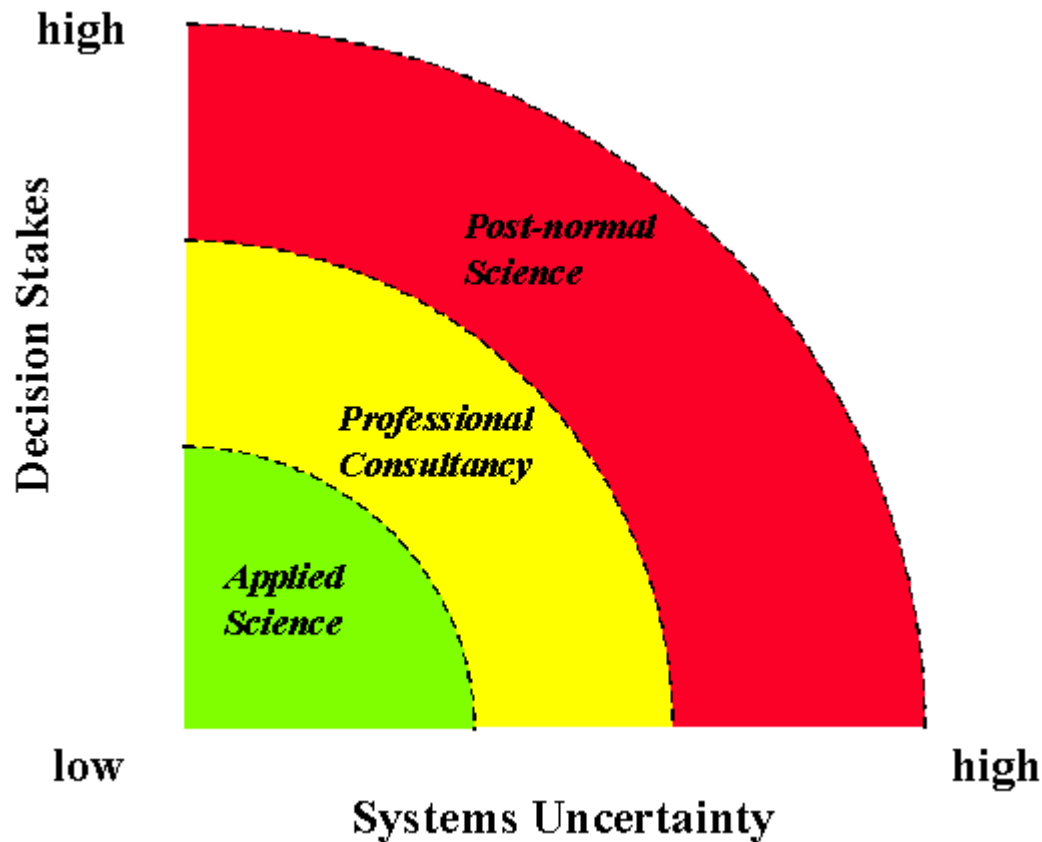
# The political nature of climate change strategies

- The preparation of the strategy and its outcome can potentially affect all societal actors.
- The preparation is carried out in a complex network, that also uses public debate as a way of increasing its own role.
- An evaluation can disturb and confuse the game.

# The demand for exact science and the curse of uncertainty



This is fundamentally what evaluation is in a post-normal policy environment



*S. Funtowicz & J. Ravetz; NUSAP.net*

## How to live with it?

→ Evaluations of policy integration and policy coherence become key tasks

- **The devil is in the details:** policies for subsidies and taxation can affect the outcomes significantly: forestry taxation, taxation-reduction for travel to work...
- If a coherent policy is able to generate a **systematic incremental change** radical positive change will develop over time, and the possibility of a system shift increases.
- There is a need to formulate coherent climate **and other environmental criteria** for a broad range of measures and policy areas.

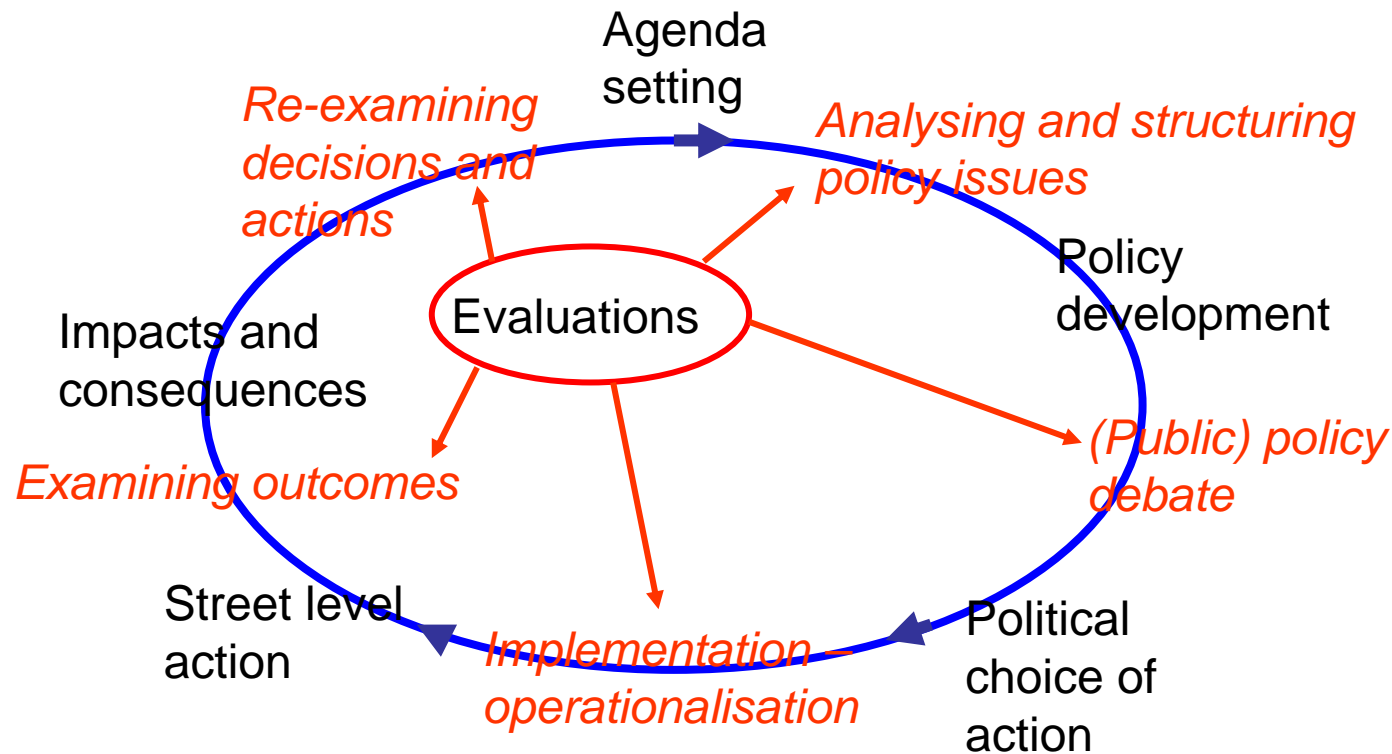
# Some solutions

- A life cycle approach to deal with cumulative effects – including those outside national borders.
- The assumed cause effect chains need to be explored, for example with the help of a DPSIR framework, emissions – health effects – economic effects.
- A more transparent and open preparation of strategies – environmental policies are fundamentally about generating innovations and innovations will occur only in response to information on a need for them.
- Adaptive evaluations and exploration of the quality of evidence for complex and contested policy decisions. (The evidence that is embodied in scientific policy advice requires quality assessment, Slujs et al 2008).

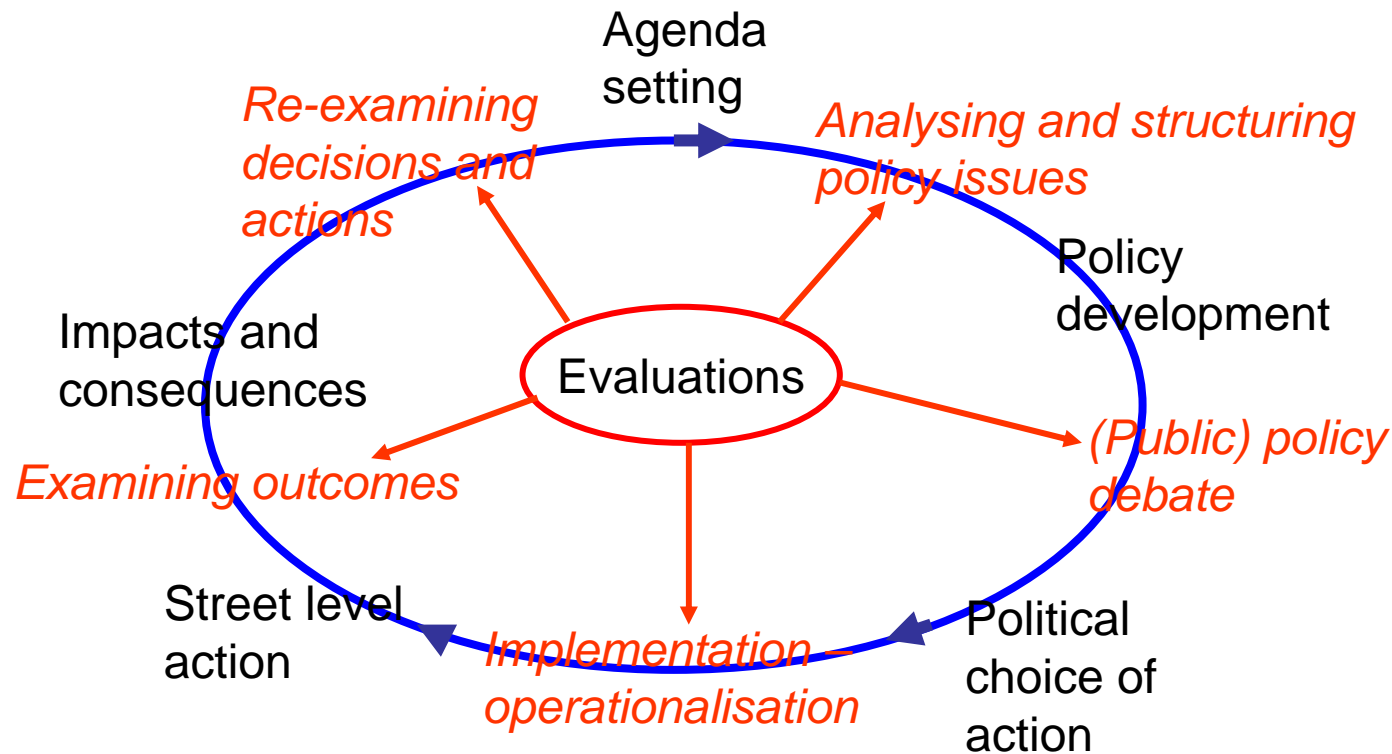
# Adaptive evaluation – some key characteristics

- **Widening the time horizon:**— ex-post evaluation & ex-ante assessment are joined – ex nunc (Crabbé and Leroy).
- **Recognising points of discontinuity:** Potential self-organisation of societal systems.
- **Recursive evaluation:** all policies are repetitive: for example Finland has prepared three strategies for climate change with 8 years.

# Moving evaluations to the centre



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To conclude: we are different, but not unique

Will realizing this make evaluations and assessments of environmental policies easier?

- No, but hopefully interesting also in the future!