Some comments on “Four Waves of Evaluation“ by Evert Vedung

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2nd European Environmental Evaluators Network Forum, 9.4.2013
Structure of my comments

- The nature of the four waves
- Missing waves?
- Waves in environmental evaluation

Based on:

&
The nature of the waves: two options

“The whole situation can be likened to ocean waves that roar in and subside, roar in and subside.” (Vedung 2010, 265)

- Forces (or waves) that have made evaluation important (gigatrend)

  “these waves has formed part of a larger wave that also contains broad governance doctrines to which the evaluation forms have been coupled” (Vedung 2010, 265)

- Waves of certain types of evaluation
The nature of the waves: background

Evert Vedung (1997) defines evaluation as:

"careful retrospective assessment of the merit, worth and value of administration, output and outcome of government interventions, which is intended to play a role in future, practical action situations."
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- The scientific wave
- The dialogue-oriented wave
- The neo-liberal wave
- The evidence-based wave
The nature of the waves

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The scientific wave

- Careful assessment = scientific
- Nature of government = Rationalism
- For science to play a role it has to “know its place”
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• The dialogue-oriented wave
  ➢ Careful assessment ~ the nature of knowledge (constructivist)
  ➢ Nature of government = Negotiated
  ➢ Stakeholder centered use
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- The neo-liberal wave
  - Nature of government = NPM
  - Indirect & market based control
  - Results based follow-up
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- The evidence-based wave
  - Careful assessment = Experimentation & meta analysis + a “hierarchy of knowledge”
  - “What Works” – rhetoric(?)
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• No wave related to criteria?
  1. **Effectiveness** evaluation – I think it should be called a wave
  2. Multi-criteria – No it has not become a wave
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- **Program theory** based evaluation (probably more in the US)
- **Triangulation based** – unfortunately not
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• Is participation based evaluation completely covered by the dialogue-oriented wave?
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• Unfortunately side-effects evaluation (Vedung 1997) has not become a wave (yet).
Waves in environmental evaluation

Not but

Since

“Evaluation has come relatively late to the environmental arena.”
(Birnbaum & Mickwitz 2009)
Waves in environmental evaluation

- Some results from a meta-analysis of climate policy evaluations by Huitema et al. (2011)

"The overwhelming majority of the evaluations in the database do not meet the basic criterion of a participatory analysis (up to 95.8 per cent, depending on method of measurement)."
Waves in environmental evaluation - a personal assessment

Vedung’s 4 waves
- The scientific wave
- The dialogue-oriented wave
- The neo-liberal wave
- The evidence-based wave

My 2 additional waves
- The effectiveness wave
- The program theory wave

- Strong, especially role of government and knowledge
- Some, especial local evaluations, little at EU level
- Strong, national & EU level
- Partly, especially in conservation (Andrew Pullin)

- Very strong
- Quite weak
Thank you