Rethinking evaluation – how to encourage the use and effectiveness of evaluation in the governmental policy-making

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National Audit Office of Finland

- **Supreme Audit Institution of Finland**
  - Constitutional, independent oversight and evaluation authority
  - Financial, compliance, performance and fiscal policy audit
    - policy evaluation and meta-evaluation and the assurance of the quality of the informational bases of governmental policy making core topics and tasks of performance audit and fiscal policy auditing
    - quality of law drafting and legislation a permanent audit theme

- **Independent Fiscal Institution of Finland**
  - Monitoring and evaluation of the Government’s fiscal policy
  - Quality assurance of economic forecasting, setting and effectiveness of fiscal policy rules, reliability of information bases and effectiveness of fiscal policy

- **Oversight of political party financing and election campaign financing**
Approach, data and method

- Use of evaluation based knowledge in governmental policy-making
  - macro-level policies and regulatory impact assessments
  - micro-level decision-making with environmental impact assessments is in some sense different issue

- Review of literature and analyses of legal structures of evaluation and information policy related to data and use of evaluation
  - Tuomas Pöysti’s scientific article on the information policy related to new economic governance rules in the European Union (Tuomas Pöysti 2014)

- Document analyses and review
  - primary source documents selected in performance and fiscal policy audits
  - the analyses used in this presentation reviews performance and fiscal policy audit reports

- Structured thematic interviews of permanent secretaries and other government officials

- Qualitative empiric analyses
Megatrends in society affecting evaluation and the use of evaluation in governmental policy making

- Evaluations are performed and are used in a context and in discourses. Evaluators need to be discourse and context sensitive.

- Infotainment and mediatisation of policy,
  - signalling more important than the content

- Mathematisation of knowledge

- Open society, knowledge and data

- Dominance of wicked problems in policy-making => need for multi-disciplinary evaluation

- Complexity and decision-making in uncertainty
Demand of evaluation knowledge

- **Internal factors**
- Professionalisation of politics: Number of ministers and role of political advisers
- Countries with coalition governments: role of the Coalition agreements, coalition building before elections
- Evidence adverse ideological environments
- Mixture of value rationality and purpose rationality may diminish confidence on the objectivity of evaluation
Demand of evaluation based knowledge

- **Cognitive features**
- Social representations: psychological and social beliefs, beliefs and conceptions shared in certain groups of people
  - => faith-based policies

- Cognitive features of human beings
  - cognitive science and research tradition following Kahnemann & Tversky):
  - fear for uncertainty, risk assessment, situationality of all knowledge, dual cognitive process with system 1 and system 2
  - information overflow and the role of professions as epistemic communities
  - => naïve belief in knowledge based policy making based on too optimistic conception on the capacity to use data and evaluation if only advised to do so
Demand of evaluation based knowledge

- **External factors**
  - Long path from evaluation knowledge to governmental action (climate change and climate policy is a good example)
  - Incentives for policy-makers and civil servants
    - => role of the Parliament and of the Supreme Audit Institutions
  - Role of the media => data on the effectiveness of Independent Fiscal Institutions and effectiveness of anti-corruption measures
    - => media reporting with concurrent action by independent institutions with high reputation leads to effective action
  - Demand by citizens:
    - open society as the possibility
Tools and processes of policy evaluation

- Regulatory impact assessment procedures do help
- [http://lainvalmistelu.finlex.fi](http://lainvalmistelu.finlex.fi)
- Impact assessment data bases and decision-support software
- Regulatory Impact Assessment Review Panels: experience from UK and European Commission
- Information policy: creates foundations and conditions to the access to data and use of data
Supply of policy evaluation

- Incentives for the academic community to participate in policy discourses
  - evaluation are shall not only be for lobbyists and consultants
  - access to data
- Differences of angle and time-perspective in research vs. policy-making
- How to provide research based / evidence based policy advice in the times and conditions of uncertainty
- Fragmentation and mathematisation of knowledge => who transforms research based evaluation to general purpose evaluation knowledge and how this is done
- Metadata concerning evaluation
- Knowledge intermediaries between policy-analyses and policy-making and research and evaluation community
- purchaser / ordering knowledge in the policy analyses work
7. Conclusion

- Assuring effective use of evaluations requires overcoming of several obstacles => even good evaluations do not sell themselves

- Policy-making has a certain tendency for being faith-based rather than knowledge-based

- Smart steering and governance systems help to overcome it

- Attention shall be paid to supply and demand factors and social presentations

- Context-sensitivity and discourse awareness of evaluators is needed

- Wicked problems in evidence adverse environments call upon multi-disciplinary approach and good communication policy