



## EVALUATION STUDIES IN POLAND IN THE YEARS 2007-2013 AND THEIR CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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### Summary

The paper addresses the issues of evaluation surveys conducted in Poland in the years 2007-2013. The objective of the paper is to provide an insight into the significance and utility of the evaluation surveys carried out in Poland. The paper is structured into two sections. The first section presents the definition, criteria, features and types of the surveys. The second one, on the other hand, outlines the course of the evaluation process in Poland from 2007 to 2013 and offers its critical assessment.

**Keywords:** evaluation surveys, evaluation, critical assessment of evaluation surveys

### Introduction

The necessity to conduct evaluation studies is prompted by the introduction of evaluation laws. The fundamental EU-level document in the years 2007-2013 was Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006. Accordingly, based on that regulation, all EU states were obliged to carry out evaluation of the financial aid received. The first Polish legislation that expanded on the issue of evaluation was the Act on the principles of development policy of 6 December 2006. Another significant document was Guidelines No. 6 for evaluation of operational programmes for 2007-2013. This latest document was the most specific and included the scope of competence conferred to entities involved in the execution of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs), scope of evaluation for 2007-2013 as well as description of principles, requirements and forms used to accomplish the evaluation process. The evaluation system applicable in Poland from 2007 to 2013 was established based on the EU documents and requirements. Therefore, it is necessary to agree with K. Olejniczak who argues that evaluation has become one of the formal requirements in implementing the cohesion policy. In effect, we have had to deal with it since Poland's accession to the EU.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> K. Olejniczak, *Teoria i praktyka ewaluacji w świetle doświadczeń europejskich*, Studia Regionalne i Lokalne, UW, Warszawa 2005, nr 4, pp. 35-37.

Projects performed with the use of EU funds enjoy wide interest among various groups of beneficiaries, e.g. enterprises, higher education institutions, local governments and ministries. Basically, this is the key reason behind the increasing interest in the evaluation topics which proves to be a tool leveraged to verify specific assumptions. The evaluation process may refer to evaluation at the level of European institutions (principally, the European Commission) as well as evaluation of European programmes at the national level.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider whether evaluation studies up to date have fulfilled their function. To what extent can they help to effect changes to the applicable programming documents? Thus, the objective of this paper is to demonstrate the significance and utility of evaluations conducted in Poland. The paper comprises two parts. The first features the definition, criteria, attributes and types of these studies. The other section, on the other hand, details the progress of the evaluation process in Poland from 2007 to 2013 and provides its critical assessment.

## 1. Evaluation - definitions, criteria and attributes

The 1930s in the USA are considered as the beginnings of evaluation development, though at that time they principally referred to the area of education<sup>2</sup>. For other domains concerned with the issues of regional development, infrastructure, human resources or health care, the 1950s and 1960s saw a major breakthrough, which resulted from the extended scope of public interventions, and thus the need for their monitoring. The term evaluation (*Pl. ewaluacja*, *Fr. évaluation*) is defined as "value estimate" according to the dictionary (Oxford University Press 2002). In Poland, this term was mistranslated as "ocena" (assessment) in disregard of the fact that evaluation is a process comprising assessment as one of its elements<sup>3</sup>.

The most extended definition of evaluation is offered by the OECD – "Evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Evaluation should provide information which is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy or program. An assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of a planned, on-going, or completed development intervention. Evaluation in some instances involves the definition of appropriate standards, the examination of performance against those standards, an assessment of actual and expected results and the identification of relevant lessons"<sup>4</sup>. An abbreviated definition is included in the Communication from the Commission "evaluation involves a judgement of interventions according to their results, impacts and the needs they aim to satisfy"<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, the definitions proposed by K. Olejniczak and others argue that evaluation is "systematic

<sup>2</sup> E.G. Guba, Y.S. Lincoln, *Fourth generation evaluation*, Newbury Park, Sage 1989, B.R. Worthen, *Program evaluation*, w: H.J. Walberg, G.D. Haertel (eds.), *The International encyclopedia of educational evaluation*, Oxford, England, Pergamon Press, New York 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Since mid-1990s an error has been reproduced and regularly transferred to the official and legal language. "Ocena" instead of the term "ewaluacja" (evaluation) appears in tenders organised by diverse ministries, the act on National Development Plan 2004-2006 and translations of EU regulations concerned with structural funds in the pre-accession period as well as in successive programming periods 2004-2006, 2007-2013, 2014-2020. In practice, the term "ewaluacja" (evaluation) is exploited by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development or the Ministry of Regional Development, e.g. for evaluation conferences or evaluation plans.

<sup>4</sup> *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*, DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation, OECD 2002, s. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Communication to the Commission from Mrs. Schreyer in agreement with Mr. Kinnock and the President, SEC (2000)1051 – 26/07/2000, s. 2.

examination carried out using diverse methods, encompassing data collection, analysis, assessment and information about the results. Its objective is to estimate (with regard to clearly formulated criteria) the quality and value of the process and the effects of its implementation of public interventions”<sup>6</sup>.

When assessing the above definitions, the first one is the most extensive and contains references to five fundamental evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). The second approach gives priority to the verification of achievements in respect of objectives planned and the future exploitation of this information and experiences. The third definition, proposed by K. Olejniczak, in my view, best reflects the definition of evaluation, due to the fact that it combines the two previous ones and includes almost all elements of a properly accomplished evaluation study. In my opinion, it is necessary to complement the definition by adding the statement that these methods should focus on critical reflection on both processes and their effects.

Due to the topic of this paper, the understanding of evaluation should be based on the EU documents. The understanding of evaluation, as defined in the EU documents, has transformed over the successive periods of budgetary programming. Over the pre-accession period, evaluation largely embraced support in planning and presentation of the impact of programmes<sup>7</sup>. From 2000 to 2006 it centred on the ongoing supervision and effectiveness<sup>8</sup>. Last not least, over the programming period of 2007-2013 it was defined as an examination aimed to “improve the quality, effectiveness and consistency of the assistance from the funds and the strategy and implementation of operational programmes with respect to the specific structural problems affecting the member state and regions concerned”<sup>9</sup> (Council Regulation (EC) of 2006 Art. 47.1). Additionally, the need to separate the strategic studies from the operational ones has been recognised. The changes which occurred with respect to the very definition of the concept of evaluation should be viewed in a positive light. However, irrespective of the programming period, they stand out by their propensity to vagueness. This result is attributable to a number of states, and thus regions covered by the European Union and their diversity as regards, among others, their level of economic growth as well as political and cultural situation. Hence, the term “evaluation” is broadly accepted with respect to activities co-financed by EU funds because this assistance is provided as part of public intervention, thereby combining applied sciences with the practice of public policies, as noted by E. Stern<sup>10</sup>. A properly completed evaluation brings together numerous elements, and the primary attributes of this study should be as follows:

- analytical and systemised nature – which in practice suggests the selection of adequate study methods, accomplishment of the analysis based on data, scientific approach and critical reflection on the findings obtained<sup>11</sup> ;

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<sup>6</sup> K. Olejniczak, M. Kozak, B. Lendzion (red), *Teoria i praktyka ewaluacji interwencji publicznych*, Wyd. Akademickie i profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, s. 22

<sup>7</sup> Council of The European Economic Community, Council Regulation (EEC) No 2082/93 of 20 July 1993 amending Regulation (EEC) No. 4253/88 laying down provisions for implementing Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 as regards coordination of the activities of the different Structural Funds between themselves and with the operations of the European Investment Bank and the other existing financial instruments, 2082/1993, OJ L 193, 31/07/1993 - Art 26.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *MEANS collection: evaluating socio-economic programmes*. DG Regio, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 1999 - Art 40–44

<sup>9</sup> COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, 1083/2006, OJ L210,31.7.2006 Article 47.

<sup>10</sup> Stern E., *Evaluation research methods*, Sage, London 2005 pp.23.

<sup>11</sup> cf.: L. Langbein, C.L. Felbinger, *Public Program Evaluation. A statistical guide*, London, New York, M.E.Shape 2006, pp.33; M.Q.Patton, *Evaluation Research*, w: M.S.Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, T.F. Liao (red) *The Sage encyclopedia of social science research methods*, pp. 337–340, Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage 2004 pp. 337-340; P.H. Rossi, M.W. Lipsey, H.E. Freeman, *Evaluation: a systematic approach*, Thousand Oaks, Calif, Sage, London

- combining diverse tools and sources – which in practice suggests the application of various complementary sources and methods governed by the type and subject of the examination and cannot be determined *a priori*<sup>12</sup>;
- system-based evaluation reflection – which implies a comprehensive approach, bearing in mind diverse perspectives as well as its cyclical and systematic character, because it makes conducting a study possible at every stage of the intervention (e.g. prior to the launch of the programme, in order to verify the idea itself, during its functioning in order to assess procedures and activities, and following its completion in order to estimate the actual effects). This is thus the empirical cause-and-effect verification between activities and their outcomes<sup>13</sup>;
- assessment of quality and intervention value – which suggests the necessity to refer to specific standards and criteria<sup>14</sup>.

Projects co-financed by the EU funds tend to adopt certain standards established on the basis of five evaluation criteria, i.e.: (1) Relevance – raising questions about the adequacy of objectives planned and the methods used to implement intervention with respect to social and economic problems and challenges to be addressed by the specific intervention. It is conducted prior to its launch and at the initial implementation phases of the intervention. (2) Effectiveness – these are questions about the degree to which the targets set have been attained, the effectiveness of methods used or the impact of external forces on final effects. (3) Efficiency – concerns the analysis based on relationships between expenditures, costs, resources (financial, human, administrative) and the effects produced by the intervention. (4) Utility – raises questions about the actual effects attained and their adequacy with respect to social and economic situation and the challenges targeted by the specific intervention. As opposed to the criterion of relevance, the analysis of utility is conducted once the intervention is closed or at its final implementation phase. (5) Sustainability – these are questions about continuity of effects (essentially positive effects) produced by the specific intervention in the mid- and long-term<sup>15</sup>. Each criterion listed may be assigned with evaluation questions, and those detailed above do not exhaust the list, they merely indicate their direction. The set of questions presented is stereotyped, and it is cut off from the thematic specificity of definite evaluations and timeline. It fails to include cause-and-effect questions. Nevertheless, it provides the basis for formulating the specific evaluation questions.

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2004; M. Scriven, *Evaluation thesaurus*, Newbury Park, Sage, London 1991; E. Stern, *Evaluation research methods*, Sage, London 2005, pp.22.

<sup>12</sup> cf.: J.C. Greene, V.J. Caracelli, W.F. Graham, Toward a Conceptual Framework for Mixed-Method Evaluation Designs, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 11(3) 1989, pp. 255-274; Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, *The Magenta Book Guidance Notes for Policy Evaluation and Analysis*, Government Chief Social Researcher's Office, UK Prime Minister's Cabinet Office 2003, pp.3-4.

<sup>13</sup> cf.: R.D. Bingham, C.L. Felbinger, *Evaluation in practice: a methodological approach*, Seven Bridges Press, New York, London, 2002; D.L. Stufflebeam, A.J. Shinkfield, *Evaluation theory, models, and applications*, Calif, San Francisco 2007; C.H. Weiss, *Evaluation: methods for studying programs and policies*, Upper Saddle River, N.J. Prentice Hall 1998; J. Górniak, K. Keler, *Rola systemów wskaźników w ewaluacji*, [w:] K. Olejniczak, M. Kozak, B. Lenzion (red), *Teoria i praktyka ewaluacji interwencji publicznych*, Wyd. Akademickie i profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, pp. 109-129; J. Górniak, *Ewaluacja w cyklu polityk publicznych*, w: Mazur S. (red.), *Ewaluacja funduszy strukturalnych – perspektywa regionalna*, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie, Kraków 2007.

<sup>14</sup> cf.: E.J. Davidson, *Evaluation methodology basics: the nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*, Thousand Oaks, Calif, Sage Publications 2005; S.C. Paddock, *Evaluation*, w: J.M. Shafritz (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration*, Boulder Colo, Westview Press 1998, pp.818-823.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission, *MEANS collection: evaluating socio-economic programmes*. DG-Regio, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 1999; European Commission, *Working Document no. 2 – Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators*, DG-REGIO, The New Programming Period 2007–2013 Working Documents, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 2006.

## 2. Evaluation types

Each evaluation is diversified because of the different criteria adopted. The literature provides numerous evaluation typologies<sup>16</sup>. This paper draws upon four dimensions of evaluation mostly utilised in practice:<sup>17</sup>

1. Subject of evaluation: (i) Evaluation of the project – focused on analysis of a single, small intervention (typically in the field of innovation or human resources); (ii) Evaluation of the programme (the most common type) – both a single programme from the public sector as well as the whole package of interventions (e.g. activity, priority) may be studied; (iii) Evaluation of policies – typically termed as policy analysis – consists of a wide range of studies and analyses (generally over many years); (iv) Thematic/horizontal evaluation – a specific aspect of management or programme (e.g. application of partnership principle) is examined; such studies are conducted across the board – for a few or several interventions. (v) Meta-evaluation – studies examining other evaluations previously performed. These include comparative analyses summing up observations, conclusions and recommendations for several studies, and thus assessing the techniques exploited or the correctness of the methodology.
2. Objective of evaluation: (i) Formative evaluation (operational) – assessing the form, plan and process of the specific intervention prior to its launch or during its functioning. It places the emphasis on advising those in charge of the programme as to what objectives to set or how to enhance the smooth implementation of interventions and boost its ultimate quality; (ii) Summative evaluation (strategic) – summarizes an on-going or soon-to-be-completed intervention, its actual effects and the scale of changes effected by the intervention. It is performed after the completion or at the final phase of intervention. It is descriptive and explanatory in its character and it is intended for a wide public.
3. Timing of the study: (i) Initial evaluation (*ex ante*) – performed prior to implementation of the intervention. Its aim is to verify its structure and logic as well as justify the activities planned; (ii) On-going evaluation performed during the intervention studied; it may be a spot examination (ongoing evaluation) or it may comprise a number of studies conducted one after another by a team of evaluators (continual evaluation). It may relate to both processes as well as effects (if the programme is advanced). (iii) Final evaluation (*ex post*) – carried out once the intervention is completed (mostly 2 years after completion of all activities). It brings focus to the assessment of results and the long-term effects (impact) produced by the programme, including the sustainability of positive changes effected and identification of possible side effects.
4. Organisation of the study: (i) External evaluation – examination commissioned outside the institution performing a specific intervention and carried out by teams of independent experts selected competitively; (ii) Internal evaluation – conducted by an independent evaluation unit, based within the structures of the public institution that implements specific public interventions. (iii) Self-evaluation – carried out by individuals from the specific institution entrusted with the delivery of the intervention analysed.

Each categorisation is significant, though I believe that from the perspective of rational use of EU funds, one of the key categories is the time at which the study is launched, defined as the life-cycle of the public intervention in the EU documents through specifying *ex-ante* evaluation, *on-going* evaluation and *ex-post* evaluation<sup>18</sup>. The first one makes it possible to verify and make

<sup>16</sup> J.C. Greene, *Understanding Social Programs through Evaluation*, [w:] N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, Thousand Oaks, Calif, Sage London, 2003; J.M. Owen, P.J. Rogers, *Program evaluation: forms and approaches*, Sage, London, 1999; Tavistock Institute, GHK, IRS *The Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development. The Evalsed Guide (1st edition)*, 2003; K. Olejniczak, *Mechanizmy wykorzystania ewaluacji. Studium ewaluacji średniookresowych INTERREG III*, Scholar, Warszawa 2008.

<sup>17</sup> K. Olejniczak, *Mechanizmy wykorzystania ewaluacji. Studium ewaluacji średniookresowych INTERREG III*, Scholar, Warszawa 2008, pp. 25-380

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, *MEANS collection: evaluating socio-economic programmes*. DG-Regio, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 1999; European Commission, *Project Cycle Man-*

key corrections to particular elements of the programme such as: logic behind the intervention conducted, indicators, verification of financial resources or specification of time needed for its execution. Moreover, it helps to assess whether it will actually be able to deliver specific hard and soft results and be useful, as well as having a beneficial impact on tackling the problem identified. Whilst *on-going* evaluation is performed during the project and revolves around the analysis of the effectiveness of the programme, understanding of processes occurred and, above all, planning corrective actions while putting emphasis on the identification of barriers against its accomplishment. Its primary outcome is to design a list of recommendations so as to avoid repeating any mistakes identified at the phase analysed. Whereas the last one – *ex-post* – is limited to evaluating projects actually completed, thereby summarising and appraising the specific programme based on overall evidence and effects in terms of the utility of the specific public intervention. Principally, the latter type proves to be the best in theory, because it assesses the completed programme, indicates causal relationships and determines beneficial changes brought about by the accomplished programme. In practice, however, the final assessment process is deferred in time due to the principle  $n+2$ , whereby projects performed in the years 2004-2006 may be subject to overall assessment in 2008, whereas those from the programming period 2007-2013 may be assessed in 2015 and even in 2016 or 2018 (following the publication of all studies conducted) for certain types of projects, such as collaboration between scientists and business or R&D, where it may even take a few years to show the effects.. After all, at best, the outcomes brought by the completed programme may be recognised in the middle of the next programming period or even later. Therefore, its utility tends to be limited and has little bearing on the planning of another (forthcoming) financial perspective. Furthermore, future programmes fail to have a direct impact on the completed ones. Therefore, in my view, *on-going* evaluation appears to be the most appropriate due to the fact that it may have the greatest influence on the programme and the ability to make necessary changes.

### 3. Critical assessment of evaluation studies conducted in Poland

Every evaluation is different and, thus, it is necessary to show a tailored approach to them. The efficiency of an evaluation should be measured by its utility, practicality or accuracy. This seemingly banal conclusion is not altogether obvious. Unfortunately, as practice has shown, evaluations conducted in Poland tend to be of low quality. I personally carried out 23 analyses of evaluations concerned with the business enterprise sector and performed within the Regional Operational Programmes<sup>19</sup>. The reason for the low quality is the fact that the individuals tasked with evaluations usually lack adequate relevant knowledge or capability to perform them in an appropriate manner. Such problems arise at the very beginning – at the phase when the ordering institution describes the subject matter of the contract in detail. The authority to commission evaluations is conferred to evaluation entities. They operate within institutions that manage, implement or act as intermediaries in particular operational programmes, also at the regional level. Basically, these institutions should be most interested in conclusions or recommendations produced by evaluations. The description of the subject matter of the contract consists of initial

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*agement guidelines*, vol. 1, EUROPE AID, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 2004.

<sup>19</sup>The results from the evaluations focused on the development of enterprises were presented in the publication: M. Hryniewicka, *Wpływ funduszy unijnych na rozwój sektora MSP w Polsce w latach 2007-2013* [The impact of the EU funds on the development of SME sector in Poland in the years 2007-2013], Difin, Warszawa 2015. To select expert opinions, all 234 expert opinions were analysed so as to choose those focused on the development of enterprises. This provides key conclusions and findings from research conducted. However, research conducted was not assessed in the light of comparison of its methodological assumptions with recommendations. Such information has been displayed in this paper.

questions and research methods that arise as the result of the needs of diverse units. Their criteria are frequently couched in very general terms. Such requests for proposals are responded to by individuals, groups of individuals or research institutions interested in performing the evaluation. They propose their offers containing more detailed information about the options to carry out evaluation studies. At this point it should be highlighted that the time limit for preparing an offer is from 2 to 4 weeks, which for the evaluation study is insufficient and may cause further problems. The research conspectus itself comprises: expert opinion, scope of evaluation, research questions, research methods adopted, effects in the form of the final report and its cost estimate, which ultimately translates into several or a few dozen pages. Hence, the preparation of such a prospectus requires work to be performed by many persons and their final proposals are brought together and combined as a whole. However, due to limited time available to individuals involved in the preparation of the prospectus itself, it is impossible to verify all of the numerous ideas. This is also compounded by submitting overly complex proposals on the assumption that the plan will end in success notwithstanding the circumstances. However, such individuals are, in many cases, forced to act in this way because the greatest number of conceived questions or research areas may lead to winning the contest and the award of the contract to conduct the studies. At the next phase, as part of the contest, a single team is selected to carry out an evaluation, typically within a few months of signing the contract. However, practice shows that the most serious problems are faced while conducting empirical studies. This is despite the fact that some expert opinions include the description of so-called critical points to be addressed by researchers when performing the order. Nevertheless, as shown in studies completed and my own experience, many potential situations, which may significantly affect the final conclusions, are not predicted.. The most pressing problems are as follows:

- complicated organisational structure, as a result of which the population under analysis may be represented by different institutions, thereby impeding the contact,
- limited knowledge among those surveyed, resulting from a narrow specialisation among employees,
- unavailability of the person in charge of the project, e.g. sick leave, maternity leave,
- low or non-existent motivation to take part in the survey,
- scant feedback from surveys and refusal to give an interview,
- deficiencies in databases<sup>20</sup>,
- excessively high number of evaluation questions supplemented by auxiliary questions concerned with the formulation of the problem in the cross-section of the region and district,
- underestimation of research costs.

The list of problems presented is not exhaustive. Some problems lie with the customer, and some with the contractor. The table illustrates the number of studies conducted over the programming period 2007-2013.

**Table 1.** Number of evaluations performed according to their completion time in specific operational programmes in Poland over 2007-2013 (as of 31.12.2013)

Type of operational programme/ name of evaluation	ex-ante	on-going	ex-post	in total
Horizontal (refers to more than one operational programme)	3	28		31
EC Initiative INTERREG III		1		1

<sup>20</sup>In the case of contest there is information that contractors will have access to a database needed to carry out at least some analyses. However, in practice, such a database is made available to the contractor only after the conclusion of the contract and in many cases appears as incomplete (missing phone numbers, email addresses errors, blank records, etc.).

OP Infrastructure and Environment	3	54		57
OP Innovative Economy	1	34		35
OP Human Capital	7	207	2	216
OP Technical Assistance	3	13		16
PO Development of Eastern Poland	1	11		12
PO Sustainable Development of Fisheries Sector and Coastal Fishing Areas	1			1
Rural Development Programme	2			2
European Territorial Cooperation Programmes	7	2		9
Regional Operational Programmes	26	205	3	234
other	15	3		18
<b>In total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>632</b>

Notice: OP – Operational Programme

Source: Own study based on KSI SIMIK 07-13.

In Poland, 632 evaluations in total were carried out in the financial perspective 2007-2013, where 88% concerned *on-going* evaluations. The vast majority, i.e. 412 out of 558 covered the analyses of two programmes, i.e. Operational Programme Human Capital and Regional Operational Programmes. When looking at their impressive number, it is also worthwhile assessing their quality. A significant number of evaluation studies performed and their broad extent result in low quality. The fact that the same studies are replicated in different provinces testified to the serial production of evaluation reports. The customer facilitates its task by reproducing information such as: research scope, aim or questions or a portion of questions. Meanwhile, a contractor enters diverse contest across Poland with slightly modified offers, thereby reproducing the same information<sup>21</sup>. These conclusions are supported by the data published in one of the papers. The paper reveals the findings from analyses of evaluation reports. The analysis included 71 evaluations carried out over 2007-2013 within the Regional Operational Programmes, which accounted for 30% of all evaluations accomplished<sup>22</sup>.

Bearing in mind the quality criterion of evaluations performed in Poland, it is worthwhile exposing the low quality of recommendations formulated by contractors, which corroborates my review of evaluation studies. Each evaluation only makes any sense when it concludes with adequate recommendations. However, in practice, they are often overly unspecific, unintelligible or merely unlikely to be implemented in specific cases. The instances of such recommendations may include<sup>23</sup>:

- design of verification procedure – recommendation formulated in response to a problem “Lack of a procedure intended to verify complementarily in practice” – no details included,
- search for adequate channels for communication with beneficiaries RPO WO 2007-2013 – recommendation formulated in response to a problem which is insufficient informing of beneficiaries about trainings. Lack of detailed information referring to possible communication channels,

<sup>21</sup> B. Ledzion, *Zarządzanie kontraktem ewaluacyjnym – perspektywa wykonawcy*, [w:] K. Olejniczak, M. Kozak, B. Ledzion (red.), *Teoria i praktyka ewaluacji interwencji publicznych.*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, pp. 231-248.

<sup>22</sup> T. Kupiec, *Użyteczność ewaluacji jako narzędzia zarządzania regionalnymi programami operacyjnymi*, *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, UW, Warszawa, 2/2014, pp.52.

<sup>23</sup> T. Kupiec, *Użyteczność ewaluacji jako narzędzia zarządzania regionalnymi programami operacyjnymi*, *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, UW, Warszawa, 2/2014, pp.58.



- change in indicator unit – recommendation concerned with a mandatory indicator included in the National IT System (NITS) unlikely to be divided.

Such recommendations are not in short supply. On the whole, this is reinforced by the phenomenon occurring in Poland, which is the establishment of companies that specialise in conducting evaluation studies. Due to the fact that this is their key source of income, they participate in numerous contests (purporting to be experts in everything) and prepare abundant contest documents. This is also the case for the public administration where units responsible for useless studies were set up, even though their scope was significantly narrower than that of enterprises specialising in this respect, their quality was equally questionable<sup>24</sup>. Recommendations should be tailored to the specific problem analysed and refer to, among others: enhancement of implementation processes as well strategic changes in support trends, though, as practice shows, they fall short of the ideal<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, it may be concluded that an appropriate recommendation should be clear, viable and connected with the studies (its aims, conclusions and methods).

## Conclusions

Every evaluation is different. This cannot be a routine process arising from long-standing education or practice. As a result, evaluation should be viewed as both a complex and conscious consultative process.

The evaluations conducted in Poland in the programming period 2007-2013 contained numerous errors in the form of ill-formulated questions, an excessively high number of questions, erroneous conclusions and unrealistic or downright unviable recommendations. The reasons for that should be sought on both sides – those ordering and those performing such studies. On the side of the party commissioning the studies, the key problem lies in the offer itself which cumulates a wide range of problems to be solved with the use of a single evaluation, which proves to be unlikely in practice. It would be advisable to address one or two problems and analyse them thoroughly. Hence, at the core, there is the issue of a well-considered strategy, including the selection of adequate methodology with a direct impact on the use of the research findings. Whereas on the side of contractors, the problems include: the excessive number of contests they take part in, the unrealistic nature of assumptions adopted, paucity of well-established knowledge or experience, which has an effect on the quality of final results and recommendations formulated. It may be stated that in the years 2007-2015 we dealt in many cases with a

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<sup>24</sup> cf.: F.L. Leeuw, J.E. Furubo. *Evaluation Systems What Are They and Why Study Them?*, Evaluation, nr 14(2) 2008, pp.157-169.

<sup>25</sup> „...An average share of such significant recommendations is 37%, where the majority (30%) include operational recommendations seeking to streamline the implementation process, solve ongoing problems concerned with disbursement of funds. Merely 7% include significant recommendations related to strategic changes – support trends, scope of activities and priorities, supported types of projects and financial allocations earmarked to them. Having considered the distinction among evaluation subject matters (into those concerned with process of implementing RPO, RPO effects and processes and effects linking the research) it appears that significant implementation recommendations account for the half of recommendations for evaluations of processes (and 19% in evaluations of processes and effects), whereas significant strategic recommendations account on average for 17% in examinations of effects (and 5% in evaluations of processes and effects). For evaluations investigating processes or effects, as many as 62% represent those where less than half of recommendations may be recognized as significant for implementing purposes, and in 20% of studies there is no one single such recommendation. Among evaluation of effects and processes, as many as 89% contain less than half of strategically significant recommendations, and 59% of evaluations lack a single one such recommendation...” T. Kupiec, *Użyteczność ewaluacji jako narzędzia zarządzania regionalnymi programami operacyjnymi* [Utility of evaluations as a tool for managing regional operational programmes], Studia Regionalne i Lokalne, UW, Warszawa, 2/2014, pp.58-59.

learning process. Contractors identified problems, indicated their sources and made attempts to formulate corrective actions which failed in many cases.

Evaluation results need to go to decision-makers such as directors or marshals, which would definitely increase the probability that they will be put into practice. However, these need to be presented in a concise manner due to the multiple duties such persons are burdened with. Typically, a standard evaluation report contains from several dozen up to several hundred pages. Accordingly, it is vital to communicate a massive amount of information and narrow it down to a few pages in the form of concise, specific and essential conclusions. Only then are they likely to be implemented. Despite the fact that the requirements for specific evaluations obliged the contractor to deliver not only a report on the studies conducted but also a report (in an abridged version or in the form of key conclusions) on the studies completed, they were not sufficiently concise or clear-cut to be feasible. Importantly, they should reach the decision-makers in a timely manner. They cannot appear too early, or they will be buried under other important information, but they cannot be delivered too late when key decisions have already been taken.

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## **BADANIA EWALUACYJNE W POLSCE W LATACH 2007-2013 I ICH KRYTYCZNA OCENA**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę przeprowadzanych w Polsce w latach 2007-2013 badań ewaluacyjnych. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zaprezentowanie znaczenia i użyteczności przeprowadzanych w Polsce badań ewaluacyjnych. Artykuł składa się z dwóch części. W pierwszej przedstawiono definicję, kryteria, cechy i typy tych badań. Natomiast w drugiej zaprezentowano przebieg procesu badań ewaluacyjnych w Polsce w latach 2007-2013 oraz dokonano ich krytycznej oceny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** badania ewaluacyjne, ewaluacja, krytyczna ocena badań ewaluacyjnych

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