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EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION STRUCTURAL FUNDS' SUPPORT IN POLAND: SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

Poland has made significant efforts in the development of the evaluation function as a tool for better decision-making and good governance. Starting from the pre-accession program PHARE as legal obligation, current evaluation is not only used as a tool for accountability and knowledge production but evaluation results are used in the national decision making on. Poland has also made significant attempts to implement a European Union Cohesion policy, the outcome of which should be to decentralize the evaluation function too. However, the system is not working properly yet, due to different obstacles such as lack of human resources, quality of evaluation studies and relevant monitoring data. Poland is moving to the most advanced stage in terms of evaluation content, quality between European Union member states and maybe good example for the present and future members how to make evaluation really work for decision making and absorption of structural funds.

KEYWORDS

Evaluation culture, evaluation capacity, utilization of evaluation, monitoring, Poland, European Union, Structural Funds

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of public policy recently introduced in Poland and some broader effects of the tool seen in the management of EU Structural and Cohesion Funds. However, information on evaluation is not perfect yet. The evaluation has been institutionalized in the Poland political and administrative system already. The evaluator is a new social role. As we know from anthropology and sociology, the role sets up specific rights, duties, expectations and etc. In addition, the evaluator's role has relations with other roles - policy makers, administrators, citizens. For each algorithm for a given pair of relations there are certain rules of behavior and configuration of power, thus requiring time to include an evaluation in the agenda.

In the case of European Structural funds interventions, state mechanisms are used together with the new 'partnership' forms of public and private sector, market mechanisms and the 'commercialised' public policy. With the help of evaluation, the EU member states, European Commission get information what is effective in the society, why it is effective or not. Actually, evaluation helps to make evidence-based decisions and also, by using specific evaluation methodological approaches, contributes to the reinforcement of democracy, which encourages the involvement of stakeholders, empowerment of citizens, ensures transparency and supports the welfare of the society.¹

Purpose of the paper. The aim of the paper is to investigate the scope and significance of the evaluation during the administration of the European Structural Funds in Poland.

Design/methodology. The objectives of the research were achieved by using the following methodology. Two variables were identified: the coordination of the evaluation process and the evaluation scope & significance. The indicators for the first variable are the evaluation capacity and institutional structure of evaluation. The indicators for the second variable are the utilization of evaluation results and market. The on-site visit was organized in Poland². The semi-structured qualitative interviews were organized with officials, academics and evaluators. The interview with official from European Commission was organized by telephone. In total 12 persons were interviewed. By using SWOT analysis the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Poland evaluation system were identified and mapped. Secondary data was collected from the papers published by local scientists, official documents available at the government ministries and agencies web sites, other

¹ Jaroslav Dvorak, "Designing the Public Policy Evaluation Market in the Central and Eastern Europe," *Bridges* Supplementary Issue: Scientific Volume 39 (2009): 190.

² The on-site visit was financed by the grant from *Švietimo mainų paramos fondas* contract No. AM-PL-2008-LT-0151.

printed materials, e-mails to some experts from international organizations, who were not available during the on-site visit.

1. THE RISE OF EVALUATION AND ITS SCOPE IN POLAND

At the beginning of 1990, the first signs of the evaluation demand appeared after starting to provide external financial support programmes. Even though the beginning of evaluation is described as *donor-oriented*³ evaluation, it is possible to distinguish two approaches, the final effect of which was different for the development of evaluation. First, the evaluation of the World Bank USAID programmes was oriented towards the meeting of the needs for internal information of these institutions and accounting for the results of these programmes. Second, the support according to the PHARE programme started in 1998 with the aim to support economical and political changes in Poland and other Middle and East European countries. In 1990-2003, the PHARE programme budget for Poland was 3.9 billion Euros.⁴ Poland was the biggest receiver of the support from the PHARE programme among Central and Eastern European countries.

In order to ensure the accountability function, ex-post evaluations were carried out at the European Union level. In addition, the people from the Polish academic community were chosen to learn evaluation from the EU experts.⁵ It can be called a certain signal for the beginning of evaluation in Poland. The national Parliament had neither the will nor a noticeable impact on the evaluation in Poland and even today most probably does not understand what evaluation is. Therefore, the EU impact is the most obvious in Poland, while gradually developing evaluation abilities, standards, culture and methodological access to public administration practice, which have already shown effectiveness in the old EU member states.

There is no agreement between scholars, evaluators and administrators whether Poland has policy evaluation. According to Olejniczak,⁶ "Poland does not have evaluation of policy as such because evaluation is focused on the programmes of EU structural funds." On the contrary, as the administrative side maintains,⁷ "In

³ Jacques Toulemonde and Thomas Bjornkilde, "Building Evaluation Capacity: Experience and Lessons in Member States and Acceding Countries," paper presented at the *Fifth European Conference Evaluation of the Structural Funds*, Budapest (June 2003) // http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docconf/budapeval/work/toulemonde.doc (accessed February 15, 2010): 6

⁴ Office of the Committee for European Integration, "Pre-Accession Funds Polish Experience": 4 // [http://www.cde.ukie.gov.pl/HLP/files.nsf/0/8A25581477E1ED88C1256FE10047F1A9/\\$file/Pre-accession_funds_Polish_experiences-publikacja.pdf](http://www.cde.ukie.gov.pl/HLP/files.nsf/0/8A25581477E1ED88C1256FE10047F1A9/$file/Pre-accession_funds_Polish_experiences-publikacja.pdf) (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁵ Respondent EW02, personal interview (March 15, 2009).

⁶ Karol Olejniczak and Marek Kozak, joint interview (March 09, 2009).

⁷ Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *et al.* "Evaluation in Poland: Brief overview of evaluation process of EU Cohesion Policy Funds": 143; in: Stanislaw Bienias and Iwona Lewandowska, eds., *Evaluation Systems in the Visegrad Member States* (Warsaw: Ministry of Regional Development, Department of Structural Policy Coordination, National Evaluation Unit, 2009).

Poland, the establishment of evaluation system of the EU Cohesion policy started in 2004.” However, earlier Olejniczak⁸, analyzing the development of evaluation culture in Poland, explored its development (see Table 1) in the framework of regional policy, which did not become similar to the contemporary regional policy immediately.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATION CULTURE IN POLAND

Table 1

Period	Name	Description
1989-1992	“Zero experience”	No evaluation initiatives were undertaken in that period. There were not materials to evaluate: no policy, no objectives, no data, no actors.
1993-1997	“Understanding the regional policy”	Some crucial elements for evaluation were put. Planning of the annual programs for regional development started. No one raised the discussion on developing the system of indicators.
1998-2001	“ The creation of the system”	The evaluation finally appeared on the agenda both in the relation to state intervention in the field of regional development as well as specifically EU aid programs. The first PHARE program evaluations were conducted. The evaluation market was created. Poland evaluation firms have a chance to train by preparing evaluation studies. There is no information about are evaluation reports were utilized.
2001-2004	“Toward EU membership”	The intensive work on monitoring and evaluation system started. It lead the lack of adequate experiences in administration, absence of clear rules for monitoring, incompatible implementation of the EU projects by the certain actors, lack of continuity in the statistics, lack of regional dimension of monitoring and evaluation – definition of competencies at the regional level.
2005-2009	“Evaluation diffusion”	The decentralization of EU Structural and Cohesion funds evaluation begun. There is national evaluation unit which is responsible for the coordination of evaluation. There is national professional body and it has own standards. There are many market participants.

⁸ Karol Olejniczak, “Towards the Evaluation culture in Poland – experience and prospects,” paper presented at the *Annual Conference of the Regional Studies Association Evaluation and EU Regional Policy*, Aix-en-Provence (May, 2002).

Olejniczak analyzed the development of evaluation culture in Poland from 1989 to 2004 and subdivided it into four periods. The first period (1989-1992) is described as 'zero experience'; during this period evaluation did not exist because there was nothing to evaluate. During the second period (1993-1997), the understanding of regional politics began, annual programme planning began and the elements necessary for evaluation appeared. The third period (1998-2001) is called 'the creation of the system;' here evaluation was included into the agenda related to state intervention and the EU support programmes in the area of regional development. During this period, the first evaluations of the PHARE programme were carried out. The evaluation was initiated by the Polish Regional Development Agency.⁹ The agency was responsible for the implementation of region-oriented projects of the PHARE programme. After the end of the programmes PHARE STRUDER and PHARE RAPID, their evaluation was carried out. In total, four evaluations were ordered and carried out, which were partly financed by the European Commission¹⁰. The fourth period (2001-2004) is related to moving "toward EU membership". During this period, the observation and evaluation system was created; however, public servants lacked experience and continuity of statistics; the system of indicators was initiated. The present research distinguishes a fifth period (2005-2009) of evaluation culture, which called "evaluation diffusion".

Despite the preparatory work forming evaluation capacity and preparing the methodological background, all evaluations that were planned for the programme period 2004-2006 were included in "Evaluation Plan of the National Development Plan for 2004-2006", the aim of which was to ensure effective management of the evaluation process in Poland.¹¹ It is important to note the lack of coordination and *chaos* at the beginning of the evaluation process. According to respondent EW01, who previously worked in public administration, the director simply came to her one day and said, "You have to carry out the evaluation because we need an ex-ante evaluation."¹² This shows that the evaluation was not planned, the employees were not prepared for this task, and that their activities needed an immediate justification. However, not only competence to carry out the evaluation was lacking. Programme planning skills were also poorly developed, and the administrators who prepared the programmes did not define the problems and the targets. Maybe, as it was in the first case, the public servants did not know that their programmes would be evaluated or maybe this was done consciously.

⁹ Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *et al.*, *supra* note 7: 140; Karol Olejniczak, *supra* note 8: 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *supra* note 7, p.143.

¹² Respondent EW01, personal interview (March 12, 2009).

2. EVALUATION: THE STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The main actor in the evaluation system is the National evaluation unit. It was established in the Regional Development Ministry Structural Policy Coordination Department and performs the function of evaluation coordination. This body is responsible for the implementation of the evaluation process at level of the National Development Plan (henceforth, NDP) and the National Strategic Reference Framework (henceforth, NSRF). In addition, a management committee was established in order to coordinate the process of evaluation. This unit functions at the level of the Managing authority (henceforth, MA) directors. The role of the management committee is to guarantee the cohesion of NDP and NSRF evaluation process and to define the main strategic goals.

After the beginning of the decentralization of cohesion policy implementation, the decentralization of the evaluation process appeared as well. Twenty-four units emerged in the institutional evaluation structure, in the MA. New bodies became responsible for the implementation of evaluation in each EU Structural funds and regional operational programme (henceforth, OP). In order to increase the independence and objectivity of the evaluation process, MA delegated the evaluation competences for the lower implementation level. 29 evaluation units were established in Intermediate bodies (henceforth, IB). Management groups were established in many action programmes, the main task of which is to help the evaluation bodies to implement evaluation process at the corresponding implementation level.

From the perspective of an evaluation system, while implementing evaluation decentralization, the chosen organizational structure was oriented towards the product, the regions. Each evaluation body has an appointed head, who is directly responsible for a certain department and a corresponding action programme or a region. However, from the point of view of Ministry of the Regional Development, a division structure emerged in its constitution. In principle, instead of decentralization, the national evaluation unit manages the EU Structural fund evaluation system in a centralized way. This creates premises to deliver the achievements of their activities to the highest political and administrative bodies. In addition, this has a big influence on the allocation of resources. On the other hand, such structure becomes dependent on communication and cooperation procedures.

While decentralizing the process, central administration seeks to maintain the responsibility for the evaluation of programmes; however, in many cases it is subdivided among the national and regional administrations. The increasing role of

regional authorities while planning and managing the programmes leads to the development of evaluation skills at the regional level in some cases.

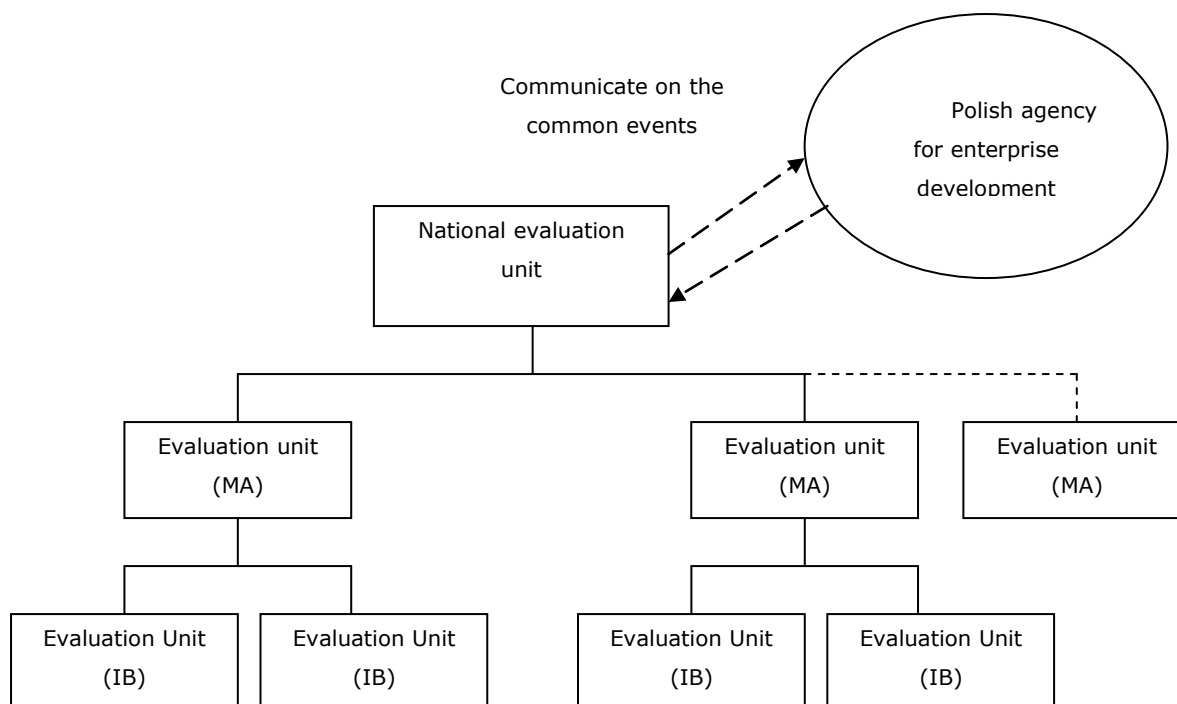


Fig. 1. Institutional structure of evaluation in Poland¹³

The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (*Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości*) is not usually mentioned as an official part of the EU evaluation system. This agency is an implementing body, it has an evaluation unit, performs internally and orders evaluations from subcontractors. The distinguishing feature of this agency is that evaluation here began to be used beyond merely as an obligatory requirement, contrary to at the Ministry of Regional Development. As the agency has analytical arguments, it makes an influence on the formation of public policy¹⁴ because the Ministry of Economics can use its services, identifying the problems and forming agendas. The agency closely cooperates with the Poland evaluation society, it contributed to the preparation of the evaluation standards of the association and its staff are the members of the association board.

3. EVALUATION CAPACITY

Despite the common opinion that the Polish evaluation system is decentralized, quite a high degree of centralization prevails in the system.

¹³ Adopted and modified from: Ministry of Regional Development, Department of Structural and Policy Coordination, "Report from the evaluation process of the cohesion policy in Poland," conference material of *Sixth European Conference Evaluation of Cohesion Policy*, Warsaw (November, 2009): 7.

¹⁴ Maciej Szalaj, personal interview (March 11, 2009).

Decentralization failures happen because of different transaction costs.¹⁵ The most distinguished are information and coordination costs. Information costs appear when a local government seeks to get information about the local preferences and what they have to do when they have such information. Coordination costs appear because of the spillover effect or because companies and households that are beyond the limits of local officials jurisdiction consume these services and do not pay for them.

Preparatory work for evaluation system decentralization has been done. Evaluation plans are started, which is an important element in the system. Such plans are of strategic character, because there is a common evaluation plan for 2007-2013, which comprises the entire programme period and defines the main evaluation areas. In addition, periodical evaluation plans are prepared, which define the specific planned evaluation activities for the coming year. However, let us come back to the arguments about high centralization level. First, this is related to the public servants', who are responsible for the evaluation process, skills. The respondents noted in one accord that there is a big difference between the central and the regional level. Apparently, in such conditions, regional officers will be dependent on the pieces of advice from the central level officers while preparing technical specifications for the ordering of evaluation, preparing methodology and questions for the coordination of the observation system and organization of public buying. In this case, the central evaluation level will have big transaction expenses because of the coordination of all evaluation system.

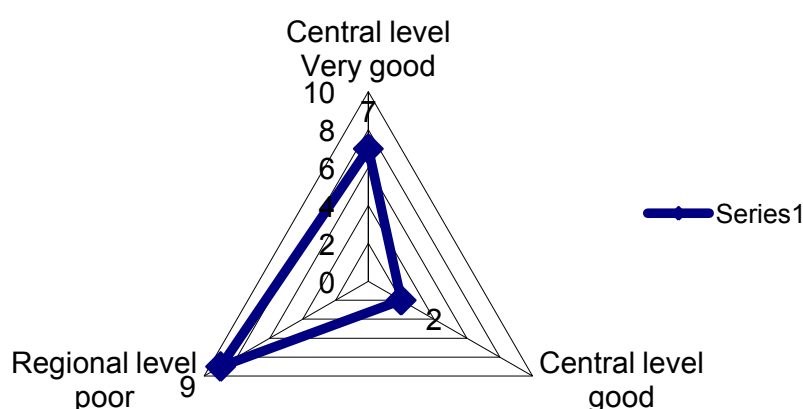


Fig. 2. Comparing of the evaluation capacity at central and regional level (n=10)

¹⁵ Ehtisham Ahmad and Vito Tanzi, *Managing Fiscal Decentralization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

Bienias¹⁶ provides the argument that “administrative skills of evaluation exist in Poland, as there are bodies established in the programming period of 2004-2006. In 2007, after the decentralization of the evaluation system, new bodies appeared at the regional level, which in principle have one-or-two-year experience.” Being anxious about the quality of evaluation process, Bienias pointed out that “the evaluations that were made during earlier years were prepared by the most experienced employees of the departments”. In 2009, Poland did not approve the standard of evaluation report quality. Apparently the non-existence of the standard may partly impair the decentralization of evaluation system. The appearance of such standard would be especially useful for the employees of evaluation bodies with little experience.

In order to analyse the effectiveness of the evaluation system, SWOT analysis was carried out. For the analysis, the goals defined in the evaluation system documents¹⁷ for the period of 2007-2013 were used, which provided the possibility to foresee critical aspects of evaluation system. They are analysed in this part of the paper and will help to formulate the recommendations for improvement.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE POLAND EVALUATION SYSTEM

Table 2

Aims	Strengths/Weaknesses	Opportunities/Threats	Recommendations
<i>Setting up structures and the coordination of evaluation activities of NDP and NSRF</i>	<p>S/W: Strong evaluation capacity at central level; weak at regional</p> <p>S/W: Increasing financing for evaluation projects; Evaluation is not use in many institutions</p> <p>S/W: Evaluation plan prepared; Result-oriented public management is not broadly adapted in Poland public administration</p> <p>S/W: There is recommendation data base, and monitoring of their implementation; Lack of monitoring data;</p> <p>W: Evaluation still mix with other control practise</p>	<p>O/T: Develop of the monitoring system; Monitoring system will not be improved during further 3 years</p> <p>O/T: Young and ambitious public servants at the Ministry of Regional Development and Poland Agency of Enterprise Development; The civil servants at the regional level are not able to develop the same capacities as central</p> <p>O: The utilization of evaluation results in the decision making/ in preparation and</p>	<p>To provide financing and human resources for developing performance measurement system and to integrate it into a management system</p>

¹⁶ Stanislaw Bienias, personal interview (March 10, 2009).

¹⁷ National Evaluation Unit, Department of Structural Policy Coordination, *Evaluation System Documents* (Warsaw: Ministry of Regional Development, 2008), p. 15.

	(audit, monitoring) or employee evaluation	implementation of national budget	
<i>Dissemination of knowledge and information of evaluation</i>	S: Increasing interest of public administration and civil society organizations in the evaluation results S/W: There are postgraduate evaluation studies; Postgraduate evaluation studies are taking part in the capital of the country S/W: National annual evaluation conference/ There is the lack of training of civil servants in the regions	O/T: Investments in human resources; There will be no postgraduate studies/ courses at the regional level O/T: To increase the involvement of stakeholders and citizens in evaluation; The involvement of stakeholders will be formal matter	To start campaign on introduction of evaluation to public and recognizing mistakes for further learning
<i>Cooperation with external entities</i>	S/W: Officials are taking part in the European Commission evaluation networks and share best practise; Foreign evaluation companies are less involved in providing evaluation services W: Universities are less involved in providing evaluation expertise	O/T: The quality of evaluation reports will increase; The quality of evaluation reports in the region decrease O/T: The best EU practice will be transferred and used; The use of best practice will be limited	To build local evaluation network by using assistance of Polish evaluation society To present best practice in Poland to other EU member states (Bulgaria, Romania)
<i>Development of evaluation methodology</i>	S/W: Long and rich tradition of social science research; There is no evaluation quality standards	O/T: Broader involvement of researcher and new evaluation methods development	To develop evaluation methods together with research institutions by using partnership agreement. To start work on the development of the methods for evaluation of innovations

Evaluation initiatives started to penetrate into the process of national budget formation. In order to avoid doubling with the Ministry of Regional Development, this initiative was called a performance audit in the Ministry of Finance. According to the respondents, the goals of the Ministry of Finance do not differ from the Ministry of Regional Development; in principle they work similarly to their colleagues, using the experience from the Cohesion policy evaluation. In order to encourage the performance audit application, in 2009 a legal requirement was set

that it is necessary to carry out evaluation in advance before presenting the programmes to the prime minister. The evaluation initiative is introduced in a complex way. There is an attempt to introduce a result-oriented mechanism for budget making alongside. Therefore, it is believed that evaluation will become an important part of this process.

Quality of the monitoring data. All the respondents admit that the monitoring system has still remained the weakest part of the EU Structural funds evaluation system. It is claimed that during the period of 2004-2006 "the monitoring of financial expenses was working the most effectively" (the direct report to the Prime Minister, who fails to spent money within 20 days in the end of each month¹⁸), while "the observation of effects, results and products was poorly developed." The monitoring system existed in the shape of Word and Excel files. Comparing Poland with other EU countries, it is argued that "the situation in Poland is similar <...> where the data are late in some other areas as well".¹⁹

Lack of documents necessary for evaluation had an influence on the management of evaluation process and, possibly, on the appliance of recommendations. First, the reports were late because of lacking information accessed from the administrators' monitoring system, thus it was necessary to collect it. Second, even though the information about the same object was gotten from different institutions, the data were hardly comparable. The main reason for these drawbacks is that in Poland, public administration is not oriented towards the results and tasks management.²⁰ However, the system is being improved and it is learning from experience, thus an information system was created for the period of 2007-2013, which has a certain number of the main indicators that are aggregated from the product level to the National Common Strategy. In addition, as the results of the research show, the ministry employees cooperate with the Central Statistical Office of Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*), looking for help about new data retrieval while changing the standard measure of enquiry groups

Training. According to the respondents, the supply of training evaluation in Poland is adequate and even overfull. The training can be grouped into the specialized training to the officials, evaluators and mixed (oriented towards officials and evaluators). During the research, three post-graduate evaluation programmes were working in Warsaw. The main difference between the programmes is their disciplinary dependence, even though their teaching basis is similar. University of

¹⁸ Stanisław Bienias, "Application of economic modeling results in the process of Cohesion Policy Evaluation": 125; in: Agnieszka Haber and Maciej Szalaj, eds., *Evaluation in the Making Contexts and Methods* (Ministry of Regional Development, PARP, 2009).

¹⁹ Karol Olejniczak and Marek Kozak, joint interview (March 09, 2009).

²⁰ Karol Olejniczak and Marek Kozak, joint interview (March 09, 2009); Stanisław Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, et al., *supra* note 7, p. 141.

Warsaw is the leader in this area, as it has two post-graduate programmes. The representatives of the academic community of this university either have established their evaluation companies or work as freelance evaluators. One study programme is oriented towards public administration and the EU Structural funds administration, another one is oriented towards sociology and methodological aspects of evaluation, statistical analysis, application of qualitative and quantitative methods. Warsaw Economics School has a programme in economics. The attention is focused on economical analysis, econometrical modeling, application of expenses-benefit method in evaluation. In principle, such disciplinary variation reflects the dominant tendencies and the orientation of evaluation towards interdisciplinarity. However, respondent EW03²¹ distinguished the main limitation of these programmes, i.e. "orientation towards theory" as "the graduates lack practical knowledge how to prepare evaluations."

In decentralizing the evaluation system, the need for public officers and evaluators grows in the regions. Trying to solve this question and seeking for dissemination of evaluation and benefit, the representatives of Polish evaluators association started the negotiation with regional universities that the first postgraduate evaluation studies would be opened in Olsztyn, Poznan and Lublin universities. Obviously, after opening the programmes in the regions, competition would start; however, for at least several years they would be dependent on the specialists working in Warsaw because evaluation scope in regions is still moderate.

Because evaluation demand is constantly increasing, the demand for various courses is also increasing. Consultancy companies have become the main suppliers in this niche. They organize a lot of courses related to the evaluation practice. In addition to the discussed postgraduate programmes, the courses of the highest quality are organized for the public servants at University of Warsaw. The courses are organized according to the project, which is financed by the European Commission. The best evaluation experts from the USA, Great Britain and Poland are invited to work with the public servants.

The knowledge about evaluation is disseminated not only by organizing training. Since 2005, the National Evaluation Unit and Polish Agency for Enterprise Development has organized an annual evaluation conference. In 2009 they organized a conference, during which the fair of evaluators' companies took place and their representatives could communicate with the clients from the public sector institutions. Thus, it can be maintained that the dissemination of evaluation knowledge spreads in different directions. It is important that not only public sector

²¹ Respondent EW03, personal interview (March 24, 2009).

institutions take part in this process, but also universities and private companies with the Evaluators Society.

4. TOWARDS UTILIZATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS

It is possible to analyze the usage of evaluation recommendations in decision-making using the analytical model by Ferry and Olejniczak (2008). Its essence is that the use of recommendations depends on five main factors related to the creation of evaluation knowledge and stages of use²²:

1. *Characteristics of the learner/recipient*. This factor comprises the quality of public administration human resources and the dominant tradition of public administration. It seems likely that the personnel that has evaluation knowledge, skills and experience understand evaluation advantages better and know how to use them in their work. The stability of institution, position in the political system and the experience in planning and implementing interventions can become an effective stimulus in the use of evaluation results because knowledge is needed in order to solve new complicated situations. In my opinion, this category should consist of not only the employees of public administration institutions, citizens or their groups. The informativeness of the media about evaluation and their participation in the evaluation process can be an effective support using the recommendations in decision making.

In 2004-2008, the number of officials working in the evaluation administration area increased from 7 to 153. The main factor that influenced the growing tendency was the objective to decentralize the evaluation system. Similarly to other countries that newly entered the EU, Poland lacks personnel that have skills in evaluation. Because of the increasing employees' number, the losses were inevitable, as competent employees chose career in the European Commission, other ministries or private consultancy companies.

Improving the evaluation management process, a recommendations implementation system was created. Every year more and more evaluations are carried out and this is about 10-20 thousand pages of information. Apparently, nobody can allot so much time to read that much information. Bienias²³ notes that "in order to absorb the information effectively, it is necessary to have synthesized conclusions and recommendations." In addition, the observation process of the recommendation implementation was started in the Ministry of Regional

²² Martin Ferry and Karol Olejniczak, *The Use of Evaluation in the Management of EU Programmes in Poland*, Warsaw (2008) // [http://webapp01.ey.com.pl/EYP/WEB/eycom_download.nsf/resources/Evaluation_EU_Funds_Poland.pdf/\\$FILE/Evaluation_EU_Funds_Poland.pdf](http://webapp01.ey.com.pl/EYP/WEB/eycom_download.nsf/resources/Evaluation_EU_Funds_Poland.pdf/$FILE/Evaluation_EU_Funds_Poland.pdf) (accessed December 18, 2009).

²³ Stanislaw Bienias, personal interview (March 10, 2009).

Development. According to Bienias and Hofman,²⁴ the ministry appoints the institution or the interested side to implement a certain recommendation. At the same time, consultations about the implementation of consultations take place, the terms are foreseen. The information about the completed activities is given to the observation committee and it is observed further how the recommendation is implemented. Finally, the information about the implemented and unimplemented things is provided for the observation committee.

The research aimed at determining whether the evaluations are used in public discussions. The respondents claim that conferences are organized, in which the representatives of media and interested groups participate, and here the evaluation results are presented. Evaluation reports are printed and may be accessed publicly on the internet, therefore anyone willing can read them. Of course, the reports are usually in Polish, which may become an obstacle in using the evaluation, taking into consideration the multinationalism of the EU.

2. *Characteristics of the evaluated policy.* The scope of public intervention and its importance on the political process may be the critical factor in using the evaluation results. The evaluation comprising policies will possibly get more attention from the politicians, administrators and the society. It is also similar with the programmes that receive much investment because their results are important for the society, therefore, it is probable that the evaluation results will be used as well.

According to the data of 2008, (see the Table 3), the most evaluations (27%) were carried out in the good governance area, a bit less (25%) in the regional and territorial development area and 16% of the evaluations were carried out on the human resources development. Another direction of evaluations was oriented towards innovative economy and these evaluations comprised 11% of all evaluations. The evaluations concerning the modernization and development of infrastructure, NDP and NSGD effect, environment protection fluctuated from 6% to 8% of all evaluations.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE IMPLEMENTED EVALUATIONS
ACCORDING POLICY AREAS AT THE END OF 2008²⁵

Table 3

Evaluation reports according the policy areas	%, Percents
Environment	6 %
Good governance	27 %

²⁴ Stanislaw Bienias, personal interview (March 10, 2009); Hofman Joanna, personal interview (March 26, 2009).

²⁵ Prepared according to: Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *et al.*, *supra* note 7: 171.

Innovation of economy	11 %
Human resources development	16 %
Modernization and development of infrastructure	8 %
Regional and territorial development	25 %.
National Strategic Plan and National Strategic Reference Framework	7 %
<i>In total:</i>	<i>100 %</i>

According to Kozak and Olejniczak, the use of evaluation results depends on the evaluation area²⁶. They maintain that when the evaluation is oriented towards the process, the evaluator is a “good boy” because he/she helps the public servants in their activities. The evaluation is used immediately because the reasons are identified and the solutions for the process organization disturbances are provided. Such evaluations do not have a tangible impact on politics because it is important for the civil servants to get information about how one or another process of their disposition functions.

As concerns the impact on policies, the national evaluation unit initiated a discussion about the evaluation results and the use of recommendations at the national level. Such actions create the demand of bureaucrats to use the evaluation results because they hope to involve different units responsible for certain political areas to follow the recommendations of different evaluation reports and other analyses. As Bienias notes, his unit prepares reports from the evaluation results of cohesion policy in a certain political area²⁷. In order to fulfill this purpose, a special recommendation database was created, which was recommended by experts.²⁸ The recommendations stored in the database are grouped according to different areas. It is probable that such an initiative will help to make decisions based on the proof not only on the level of the EU structural funds but also on national policies. The most successful in using the evaluation results is the evaluation unit responsible for the programme of human resources actions.

The political decision to reconstruct the EU Cohesion policy in 2007-2013 did not create premises that the performed ex-ante evaluation would have a noticeable impact in forming the national strategy if structural and cohesion funds for 2007-2013. Eight operational programmes were prepared for the new programme period (see *Table 4*).

²⁶ Karol Olejniczak and Marek Kozak, joint interview (March 09, 2009).

²⁷ Stanislaw Bienias, personal interview (March 10, 2009).

²⁸ Martin Ferry and Karol Olejniczak, *supra* note 22: 12.

POLAND OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2007-2013

Table 4

Operational programme	Amount, Billions, EUR
Infrastructure and environment	27
16 Regional programmes	16
Human Capital	9.7
Innovative economy	8.3
Development of Eastern Poland	2.3
European territorial co-operation	0.7
Technical assistance	0.5

The operational programmes were prepared hastily. There was no time to implement significant changes and radical recommendations. In principle, few recommendations that allow programme improvement are implemented; however, the most important recommendations that had to change the logics of the programmes are not implemented, as the programmes would not be implemented on time.

3. *Research time.* Evaluation is performed at different stages of the public policy cycle. While planning a policy or a programme, the ex-ante evaluation is carried out. While implementing the programme, the intermediate evaluation is performed. After the implementation is finished, the ex-post evaluation is done. According to Kozak, it is important when the information is provided and what will be useful for the decision-makers²⁹. Different external or internal factors influence the country or the EU situation and reacting to new challenges the politicians change political goals. Such factors do not depend on the evaluators, thus evaluation results may remain unused.

As respondent EW01 claims, the situation that "evaluations are ordered formally rather than looking for the answers that could help solving the problem" still exists³⁰. On the contrary, Bienias et al. maintain that evaluation is already understood not as a legal requirement but as a source and as a tool of management and accountability³¹. Respondent EW01³², however, critically remarks that "evaluation is still viewed as a legal requirement, therefore it is fulfilled in order to do a job."

4. *The used evaluation approach.* This factor divides it into two points of access: one oriented towards experts and another oriented towards participation. In the first case, the experts performing the evaluation analyse the programming

²⁹ Karol Olejniczak and Marek Kozak, joint interview (March 09, 2009).

³⁰ Respondent EW01, personal interview (March 12, 2009).

³¹ Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *et al.*, *supra* note 7: 149.

³² Respondent EW01, personal interview (March 12, 2009).

documents, statistical data and the information provided by the partners. Evaluation customers and the interested sides remain passive during the process of evaluation; therefore the evaluator interprets the proof, provides conclusions and prepares the report. In the second case, the partners are encouraged to participate in the discussion about the programme. Their point of view is important while preparing the recommendations and conclusions. It is likely that the participating partners will understand about evaluation more and use the recommendations in their work.

The administrators' knowledge that the evaluators may provide not only positive but also negative results of their activities,^a may impede cooperation. As respondent EW02 notes, "if the report provides good results, the administrators do not discuss about the evaluation and the used evidence; however, if the report contains critical things or provides poor results, the discussion about the used data and evidence starts." In addition, public administration institutions lack evaluation culture because the officials do not trust the evaluators and their suggestions.

Many discussions took place in order to create a common methodology for the EU cohesion policy evaluation. However, different methodologies are still used at present. Some use the "bottom-up" access and use questionnaires or evaluate the consequences for the receivers of resources while evaluating projects. Others follow the "top-down" access and use the input-output model to estimate the aggregated programme impact or analyse the process to identify Structural funds implementation³³. Naturally, the evaluators should be responsible for their work quality but civil servants have to be able to recognize when the methodological standards are violated; otherwise, the possibility to use evaluation results in political processes would decrease very much.

5. *Quality of the report.* Qualitative preparation of the evaluation reports is the premise for its further usage in the formation of public policy formation. Apparently, this variable depends not only on the evaluators who perform the evaluation but also on the participation of the employees of the client (the managing authority).

According to the data of the Polish Ministry of Regional Development, the quality of the reports is constantly improving, in comparison to before entering the EU and during the first years in the EU (see 3 picture). However, this data may be subjective, as quality of the reports is an indicator as to how precisely public servants formulate questions during public procurement tenders. Between question formulation and evaluation implementation there is interdependency.

³³ John Bachtler and Colin Wren, "Evaluation of EU Cohesion-Policy: Research Questions and Policy Challenges," *Regional Studies* 40 (2006): 143.

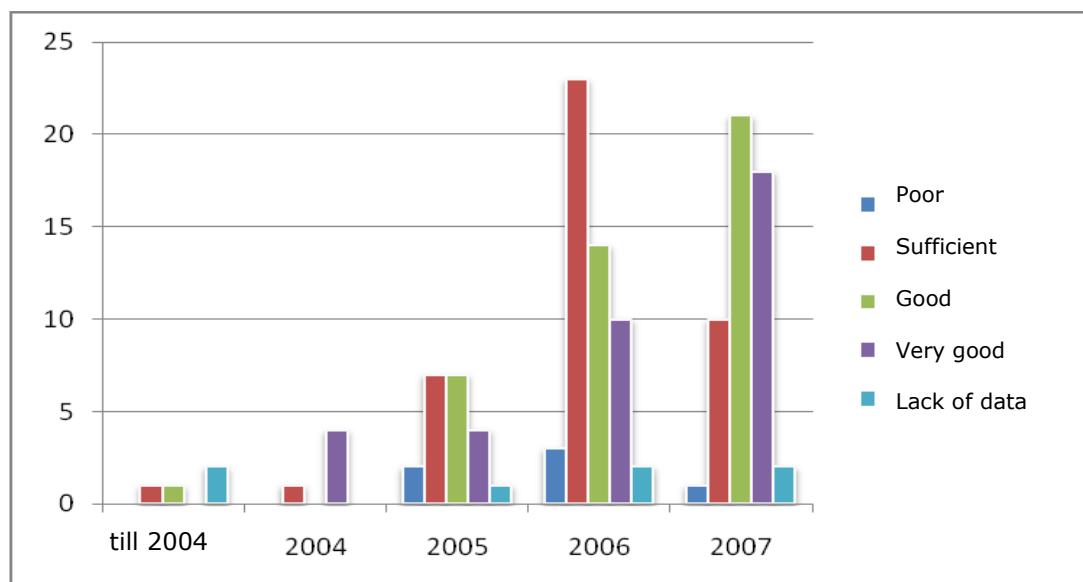


Fig. 3. Quality of evaluation studies³⁴

During the research, the evaluators and civil servants distinguished eight critical categories that must be improved, in seeking a higher quality of evaluation reports. It is possible to group the critical categories of evaluation reports into three broad areas:

1. *Methodological*. These ones comprise the remarks related to the methodology applied by the evaluators while preparing evaluation reports. It is maintained that the structure of evaluation reports lack cohesion, different accesses are applied in different places of the report. From their point of view, the evaluators emphasize that "there is a difference between the regional and the national evaluation levels. Sometimes the technical specifications lack logics <...>³⁵" If the evaluation results do not satisfy the customers, the applied methodology becomes the object of discussions.

2. *Technical*. It happens that the reports are prepared without paying attention to the rules; besides, a short period of time allotted to perform evaluation may influence quality.

3. *Use*. This tendency is very important but the administrators note that the recommendations happen to be ineffective or are not formulated appropriately to be able to start implementation. There are occasions in which the reports are focused broadly and are of a large scope. On the contrary, as respondent EW01 maintains, "<...> administrators want to evaluate everything in one project. Very

³⁴ Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *et al.*, *supra* note 7: 164.

³⁵ Respondent EW03, personal interview (March 24, 2009).

broad evaluations about everything are planned: structural funds, effect on Poland <...>. A lot of questions are asked."

Some of the quality drawbacks match the remarks expressed by the above mentioned ministry research³⁶; however, this research reflects only the ministry employees' opinion, one side of the evaluation process. Thus it is possible to maintain that partly these data are biased because the evaluators' work depends on the civil servants' activities.

5. DEALING WITH EVALUATION MARKET

Poland has chosen a model of open evaluation market. Five or six years ago there were not many companies in the market able to perform evaluation. However, the efforts of the ministry to open the market while advertising evaluation provided the grounds for 50-60 companies to appear who provide evaluation services, which is not common for the evaluation market of the new EU states, which is usually dominated by a few evaluation companies. The respondents admit that not all companies provide high quality services; it happens that the companies do not get all payment for the work done.

In order to avoid various obstacles, the national evaluation unit developed a favourable environment for the evaluation companies to appear. The evaluators are not required to have much experience or it is not required at all. There are not many foreign consultants or audit companies working in the Polish evaluation market. After creating the branches in Poland, parent companies transferred the experience of evaluation area. This fact is important taking into consideration that foreign evaluators often face serious barriers of entering a certain national market because of language, knowledge about the institutional environment and peculiarities of administrative culture³⁷. This model is much more attractive, as the employees can communicate in Polish with the clients and know the national political and administrative peculiarities well. As noted by Hofman³⁸, language barrier and the misconception about the Polish reality were one of the obstacles for a more productive cooperation between administrators and foreign evaluators.

The demand for evaluations grows each year. In total, 463 evaluations were ordered in 2002-2009. The most evaluations were carried out in 2008 (123) and 2009 (199). Also evaluation budget allotted to the ordering of evaluations increased from 100 thousand Euros in 2004 to 6250 thousand Euros in 2008. In 2009, the Regional Development Ministry projected a 6-million-Euro budget. In addition, there

³⁶ Stanislaw Bienias, Tomasz Gapski, Jakub Jakalski, *et al.*, *supra* note 7: 165.

³⁷ Frans L. Leeuw, "Evaluation in Europe 2000: Challenges to a Growth Industry," *Evaluation* 8 (2002): 5.

³⁸ Hofman Joanna, personal interview (March 26, 2009).

is one more institution in Poland that has around 1 m. Euros for evaluation, i.e. Polish Agency for Enterprise Development. The entire EU structural support budget for the period of 2007-2013 comprises approximately 15 million Euros³⁹.

As Bienias claims, the supply has not been completed⁴⁰. The number of foreign evaluation companies that take part in evaluation competitions is limited in comparison to the past when the funds for the support of entering the EU were evaluated. According to Bienias,⁴¹ this is conditioned by the salary difference, which can be suggested by the European Commission and its managed unit. Therefore, many foreign companies simply do not have any motivation to participate because the payment. For example, the payment for the head of the project and the senior expert in the evaluations ordered by the European Commission is from 1000 to 1200 Euros per day⁴², while in the local market it is from 200 to 300 Euros per day⁴³. A similar tendency is noted by respondent EW02. She claims that local companies, providing consultancy services or public opinion or customer research, often choose their main activities because the evaluation of a more specific activity requires more expert knowledge, while the payments are not high.

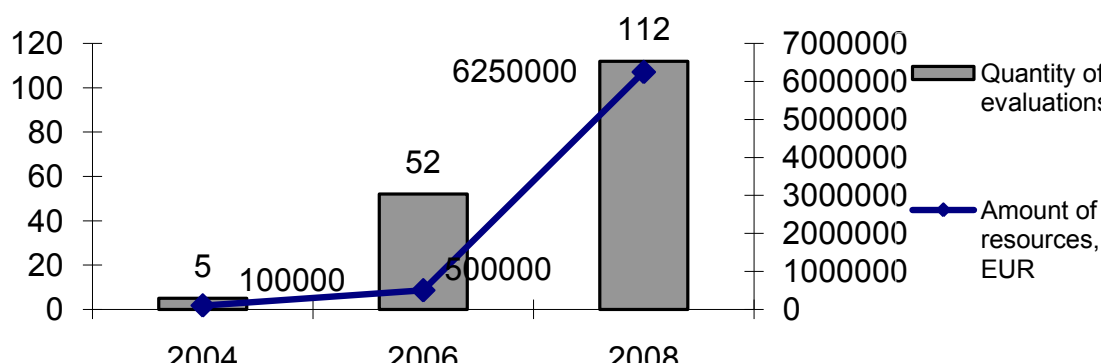


Fig. 4. The Dynamics of evaluations studies and financial resources spent in Poland, EUR⁴⁴

Universities or research institutes participate partly or do not participate in performing evaluations at all. Usually it is related to the university administration

³⁹ National Evaluation Unit, Department of Structural Policy Coordination, *supra* note 17, p. 47.

⁴⁰ Stanisław Bienias, personal interview (March 10, 2009).

⁴¹ Stanisław Bienias, personal interview (March 10, 2009).

⁴² Lietuvos Respublikos Finansų ministerija, "Pasiūlymai dėl vertinimo projekto biudžeto nustatymo," Vilnius (2009) // http://www.esparama.lt/es_parama_pletra/failai/fm/failai/Vertinimas_ESSP_Neringos/Pasiulymai_del_vertinimo_biudzeto_nustatymo.pdf (assessed June 17, 2010).

⁴³ Jaroslav Dvorak, *supra* note 1: 195.

⁴⁴ Stanisław Bienias, "Evaluation of Structural Instruments in Poland," paper presented at the *Conference Evaluation of EU Structural Funds: Reinforcing Quality and Utilisation*, Vilnius (March, 2009) // http://www.esparama.lt/ES_Paramam/angliskas_medis/programming_for_2007_2013_tree/about_the_programming/files/Evaluation_Conference_2009/1.1.2_Bienias_Poland_260309.pdf (assessed June 17, 2010).

problems. According to Bienias, it is complicated for the universities to participate because of the procedures of Public Procurement Law. Respondent EW04⁴⁵ claims that "the organization of public buying according to *Practical guide for Phare, ISPA and SAPARD* was not so complicated <...>. This system was very clear, it was easy to organize buying and to choose a supplier <...>, while the present Public Procurement Law in Poland is complicated." In order for the universities to be able to participate, a special competition was organized, during which small evaluations were carried out and innovative methodological tasks were prepared. Nevertheless, the members of academic community take part in carrying out evaluations as freelance experts or partners of evaluation companies. This evaluation model is widespread, even though some more academic research on this model has not been found.

One more area which could provide demand for evaluation is Official Development Assistance, which was established in 2005 in Poland. The main attention is focused on help for the Eastern states (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Afghanistan, Palestine autonomy and Angola). It had been already planned to allot a certain part of the budget for the consultations with evaluators but this goal was not fulfilled in 2008. However, there are ambitions to carry out evaluations for the projects of Poland-Georgian programme in 2010. A short cycle of the projects (until 1 year) is mentioned as a problem to start evaluations because there is not enough time to collect observation data, besides, the consultants and projects change very quickly.⁴⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Poland has taken a very serious approach to evaluation during its first programming period (2004-2006). Considering all 27 European Union member states, Poland is the most advanced: in terms of the evaluation capacity development, in terms of the number of evaluations, in terms of innovative approaches. The evaluation units are established at the programmes and at the level of implementing bodies. The strategic evaluation documents are prepared where structure, procedures, and plans are defined. In addition, it can be noted that Poland like other Central and Eastern European countries has similar evaluation supply and demand issues related to lack of competition, the quality of evaluation

⁴⁵ Respondent EW04, personal interview (March 18, 2009).

⁴⁶ Lucy Maizels, "ODA Evaluation in the Visegrad Four. Western Balkans Case Study," Pontis Foundation (2009): 8 // http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000023707/091201_V4ODAEvaluation.pdf (accessed January 07, 2010).

reports, lack of monitoring data and the collaboration between the government as a 'smart buyer' and weak evaluators.

After the analysis of the Polish evaluation market, it is possible to claim that the market is growing. The main driving force of this market is the EU because the support allocated for the states has to be evaluated according to the requirements of the EU in order to ensure accountability for the use of resources. On the other hand, there are some other demand sources that could supplement the evaluation market; however, at the moment they will remain unused because of the world economic crisis or unwillingness, as the governments do not have resources to purchase such services.

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