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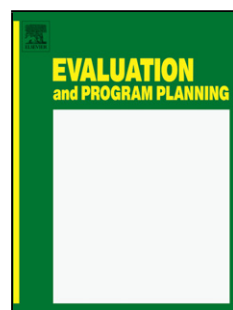
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Special Issue of *Evaluation and Program Planning. An International Journal*

Introduction by the guest editor

Policy evaluation and democracy: Do they fit?

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Highlights

- The special issue sheds light on the question of the interrelation between democracy and policy evaluation
- The collection makes a case for a stronger presence in democracy beyond expert utilization.
- Parliamentarians prove to be more acquainted with evaluations than expected
- The inclusion of evaluations in policy arguments increases the deliberative quality of democratic campaigns.
- Evaluation and democracy turn out to be well compatible after all.

Abstract

The papers assembled in this special issue shed light on the question of the interrelation between democracy and policy evaluation by discussing research on the use of evaluations in democratic processes. The collection makes a case for a stronger presence of evaluation in democracy beyond expert utilization. Parliamentarians prove to be more acquainted with evaluations than expected and the inclusion of evaluations in policy arguments increases the deliberative quality of democratic campaigns. In sum, evaluation and democracy turn out to be well compatible after all.

Introduction

Some twenty years ago, with the arrival of New Labour in British government in 1997, the new paradigm of “evidence-based policy” set out to establish “a change with past administrations, in the sense that policy making should be pragmatic, based on what works best, rather than ideological position” (Campbell 2002: 89). The evidence-based policy movement was originally tailored for Western democracies. However, while questions such as, “what is evidence?”, “how does evidence enter policy-making?”, or “how is evidence to be presented for decision-makers to acknowledge it?” have been widely addressed in research, the core question of the compatibility of democracy and evidence has not been treated much beyond what original studies on technocracy found in the mid 20th century. Seminal thinkers such as Lindblom (1959), Wildavsky (1979) or Habermas (1968) stated the tension between democracy and technocracy and offered advice how to overcome the gap between science and politics. However, the diagnosis of the tension was of rather general nature and did not address the fundamental question of whether the two systems of science and democracy actually fit at all.

The overall topic of the papers assembled in this special issue is the long term use of evaluation results and how they make their way into the general political discourse beyond short term and instrumental use. The underlying basic question is whether policy-making based on evaluation findings leads to purely technocratic, undemocratic decision-making or do evaluation results enrich democratic processes? The present symposium issue sheds light on the question of the interrelation between democracy and policy evaluation by discussing research on the use of evaluations in democratic processes. In the following, I will give a short account of the historical background of the scientific debate about the difficult relationship between science and politics in general and how it links to evaluation and democracy in particular before providing an overview of the six contributions to the special issue and their core findings.

Politics-Administration-Dichotomy, Technocracy, and the Evidence-based policy movement: a short history of ideas on the relationship between scientific evidence and democracy

Considering the current debate on post-truth democracy (Harsin 2015) with the US-American presidency and the electoral campaign preceding it, the Brexit referendum campaign, or the 2017 decision of the Hungarian government to drive its university of highest repute – the Central European University – out of the country as anecdotal evidence, the distant political observer feels tempted to answer the question of whether democracy and science go well together with a firm no. However, a glance at the history of political thought shows that both the problem and the debate may not be all that new as it

looks. It was early modern administrative thinkers who discussed the so-called politics-administration-dichotomy (P-A Dichotomy) from both analytical and normative viewpoints. These early analyses from the late 19th and early 20th century discussed institutional fit and misfit between technical and political spheres of society more explicitly than their followers in the mid-20th century did. While Max Weber argued for a neutral administration implementing political will, Woodrow Wilson made the case for the opposite: it was not democratic politics that was threatened by an all too powerful bureaucracy, but a creative administration was threatened by corrupt politics (Sager and Rosser 2009). Cuff (1978: 241) states of Wilson: "Creation, not control was the central issue; private, not public power, the chief threat to liberty." Rosser and Mavrot (2016) show for the US and France how these normative and quite rigorous institutional ideas travelled in time and context. In post-WWII political theory, the notion of a strict P-A Dichotomy was rejected in the USA in order to strengthen the input side of the political system and shift more weight in the balance of powers to the legislature and representative bureaucracy. In France, the dichotomy was rejected for the opposite reason, namely to strengthen the Executive branch as guardian of the general will. The understanding of the relationship between technical knowledge and democratic will, hence, was largely determined by its political system context.

A closely related concept to the P-A Dichotomy was the technocracy movement which also made a transatlantic career traveling from the USA to Europe in the interwar years. Technocracy as a social movement was founded in the USA. William Henry Smyth (1919) coined the term to state the need to include engineers in the decision-making process of public administration. He claimed that the USA had changed its form of government in the course of World War I "by organizing and coordinating the Scientific knowledge, the Technical Talent, the Practical Skill and the Man Power of the entire Community: Focusing them in the National Government, and applying the Unified National Force to the accomplishment of a Unified National Purpose. For this unique experiment in rationalized Industrial Democracy I have coined the term 'Technocracy'" (Smyth 1921: 13). The "industrial democracy" was intended to tailor the political organisation of the wartime economy to meet the needs of peacetime. By the early 1930s, technocracy had become the concept of "government by technical decision making" (Njalsson, 2005: 57), which was to be used as a means of solving contemporary social and economic problems. This notion appealed to German authors in the 1930s who started to translate the respective writings into German. As Hurni (2014) finds, the USA continued to be the reference point for German technocrats, even after Hitler seized power.

In post-WWII Germany, Habermas took up the term technocracy when he came up with three models of how the two social subsystems of science and politics work together (Sager 2007). Habermas (1968: 120-145) developed the idea that a political system's response to the growing complexity of modern society can be threefold: either scientifically little informed politics dominate a professional administration, or a highly specialized and scientifically well informed administration dominates the politics, or, finally, both work together in a pragmatic and non-hierarchic way in order to find the best solutions for the social problems at stake. Habermas called the first mode decisionism, the second one technocracy, and the third one pragmatism. While the first model closely followed Weber's idea of a neutral administration, the second model corresponded to Wilson's version of the P-A Dichotomy. Habermas, however, rejected both models and made his case for a pragmatic exchange between science and politics – a notion also mirrored in Svava's (2001) concept of complementarity between politics and administration.

Habermas' (1996) writings brought the debate about scientific evidence in politics closer to the question of democratic discourse. This branch of research on democracy in particular was pursued by scholars focusing on deliberative processes, the "unforced force of the better argument" (Allen 2012) in general and the use of evidence in arguments in particular such as Dryzek (1990), Chambers (2003), as well as Bohman & Rehg (1997). This philosophical line of thought inspired and entered different, mostly post-positivist approaches of policy analysis including scholars such as Majone (1989), Fischer (2009) or Saretzki (2012) arguing that policy analysis needs to provide arguments for democratic decision-making processes.

With the rise of policy evaluation as an increasingly rigid way of providing policy-specific evidence from the 1970s on, the discourse on the relationship between science and democracy found a concrete center of gravity to refer to (Weiss 1998; Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980). While the literature on evaluation use focused on the one dependent variable of use and took a mainly analytical stance to explain it, the evidence-based policy literature was part of an actual political movement and thus had a much more normative claim. The evidence-based policy movement mainly drew from a growing body of policy-knowledge gained from policy analysis and transferred them into concrete ideas on how policies should be designed (cf. Mavrot & Sager 2016). Consequently, evaluative evidence was expected to make policies more coherent: addressing the right target groups, increasing the efficiency of their implementation and increasing their effectiveness. The core questions underlying such rhetoric were primarily of instrumental nature: What is evidence and when, how, where and by whom should it be enrolled into policy-making processes? These basic tenets have been addressed by a vast bulk of literature such as Frey and Ledermann (2010), Nutley et al. (2003), Simons (2004), or Pawson (2006) to name just a very few.

At the same time and not least due to the normative side of the evidence-based policy movement, critics have argued that the evidence movement could lead to purely technocratic, undemocratic decision-making. Others retort to this criticism that evaluation results can enrich the political debate and challenge ideological and interest-based views and thus improve the quality of the discourse in political processes (e.g. Frey 2012; Howlett 2009). Yet another set of scholars argue that evaluations (and policy analysis more generally) need not only to provide knowledge and information to decision makers, but more importantly offer a basis for their arguments (Fischer & Forester 1993; Fischer & Gottweis 2012; Majone 1989). Evaluation is seen as a process rather than a mere service activity and the interest is in the filters evaluation results pass on their way into democratic decision-making. Associated with this literature is the tradition of evaluation research that deals with questions of valuing and the treatment of values in the evaluation process (Christie and Alkin 2013, 31; House & Howe 2003), as well as the literature on evaluation theory and practice focusing on participative and deliberative evaluation including Patton (1997, 2002), Valovirta (2002) or House and Howe (1999, 2003).

These literatures put the question of democratic quality of evidence-based policy and evaluation at center stage. Widmer (2009) criticizes proponents of evidence-based policy-making for claiming that such practices contribute to state legitimacy. He argues that the linkages between evidence-based policy-making and the output-oriented legitimacy of the state only partly have the potential to contribute to output legitimacy whereas many restrictions remain. Accordingly, two points of discussion prevail: first, how is scientific evidence best integrated in democratic processes and second, how are evaluations ideally carried out to provide a basis for their use in democratic processes? Widmer's (2009) critique illustrates that the debate on the relationship between democracy and evaluation has not been settled yet. While we know a lot about how evidence is used in administrative and technical

policy-making there still is little research on the democratic use of evaluation results in political processes. There is great need for findings on this neglected strand of research because it creates a different logic for drawing on knowledge than the instrumental logic used in the research on improvement of policy measures. In addition to this, the topic brings together two fields of political science, namely research on democracy and research on evaluation in taking the perspective of one field in order to look at the other field. This offers a broad platform to discuss various contexts and links and thus enriches knowledge in both fields. The papers assembled in this special issue contribute to this debate. They will be presented in the following section with a special focus on how they advance knowledge as to the relationship of evaluation and democracy.

Structure, content and core findings of the collection

Representation in parliament and direct citizen participation by direct-democratic vote are two core institutions of democratic systems (Sager and Bühlmann 2009; Sager, Ingold & Balthasar 2017). Representative democracy is more widely established in the Western world than direct democracy which is less widespread and takes on different degrees of binding decisions. While non-binding plebiscites are used widely but on an ad hoc basis, binding referendums are only found in a very limited number of countries, most prominently in Switzerland with its semi-direct democracy. Given its high evaluation activity, Switzerland therefore is a good venue to study the relationship between evaluation and democracy. Four of the six papers of this collection (Bundi 2017a; Eberli 2017; Schlauffer 2017; Stucki 2017) stem from a large research project studying the role of evaluations in the Swiss political system, the Syneval-project (cf. Sager, Widmer & Balthasar 2017). The present papers, however, do not focus on the Swiss system as such but use it as a case to study specific questions of basic democratic interest regarding the two democratic institutions of representative and direct democracy. Two papers complement the collection (Marra 2017, Pleger and Sager 2017) by focussing on additional aspects of transparency by indicators and political pressure on evaluations in democracy.

Bundi (2017a) focuses on the politics behind legislative requests for evaluations. Evaluations are an important instrument for parliaments. Evaluations can provide parliamentarians with useful information for legislation (Weiss, 1989) or they help parliaments to fulfill their oversight function towards governments (Bundi 2017b; Pelizzo and Stapenhurst, 2012). However, research suggests that members of parliament prefer evaluations, which confirm their own opinions (Whiteman 1985). Although parliamentarians have demanded more evaluations in the last couple of years (Speer, Pattyn and De Peuter, 2015), the motivation behind parliamentary evaluations still remains unclear (Bundi 2016). Scholarship so far has neglected the parliament as a commissioner of evaluations although parliamentarians are important stakeholders of evaluations. Extant literature fails to explain what goal a member of parliament pursues when he or she demands an evaluation. Bundi (2017a) considers the question of which strategic intention members of parliament have when they demand an evaluation with a parliamentary request. Bundi (2017a) provides important new insights into the parliamentarians' motivations to pursue an evaluation. Members of legislative committees submit parliamentary requests to oppose a policy, while members of oversight committees submit parliamentary requests to obtain information on specific policies.¹ Party membership of the responsible member of the Federal Government does not influence the parliamentarians' strategy. The parliamentarians thus employ evaluations

¹ These findings are complemented by Eberli and Bundi's (2017: 260) evidence about what policies were affected: most evaluations were demanded for land-use and infrastructure policies, followed by education, public finances and health. These are the fields with the highest evaluation activity in Switzerland. Less evaluations

as an instrument for different goals depending on their legislative role. However, what the study finds unanimously among all members of parliament is that the main instrument is to request evaluations rather than to use their actual findings for decision-making.

Eberli (2017) looks at exactly this use of evaluations in Parliaments and investigates the influence of evaluations in the legislative process. In the very political arena of the parliament, it is assumed that evaluations are used as a political resource, e.g. to support the argumentation or to legitimize a decision, rather than as a means to make sound decisions. However, previous research has paid little attention to the use of evaluations in the parliamentary legislative process, which not only entails the (public) plenary debate, but also the work in the (non-public) committees that is central for gaining expertise and making informed decisions. The analysis of four case studies in two Swiss cantonal parliaments partly confirms these assumptions. While evaluations were used more often to bolster the argumentation in the cases with a high level of conflict, the observed differences between the cases do not correspond to the assumptions concerning the committee systems. Eberli (2017) finds an explanation in that the relationship between the administration and the committee differs for standing and ad-hoc committees. The study further shows that evaluations are rarely used in most cases. Parliamentarians used more general background knowledge than knowledge from evaluations. The findings from the evaluations likewise had little influence on the policies' content. Nevertheless, those parliamentarians who used evaluations seemed to attribute more importance to them and considered them as influential. Eberli's (2017) study therefore corroborates that evaluations have little impact on parliamentary politics although the parliamentarians seem to appreciate evaluations as a robust foundation for policy-making.

Stucki (2017) leaves the parliamentary arena behind and moves on to the use of evaluation results in direct democratic decision-making beyond expert utilization. In spite of the vast amount of literature on how scientific evidence is used by the political-administrative nexus, the question of what policy analysis and evaluation actually have to offer for the direct-democratic decision-making by ordinary citizens remains a blind spot in research to this day. The author asks for what kind of direct-democratic arguments evaluations are used in campaigns. Rather than a positivist approach to policy analysis where findings are considered objective truths that can be used as ready-made recommendations, Stucki (2017) employs a constructivist approach where evaluation results are arguments that contribute to a political discourse that is not necessarily rational. She argues that this view of policy evaluation results is appropriate for the study of direct-democratic decision-making as voters neither are policy experts nor do they share a uniform belief in scientific rationality. Stucki (2017) studies 16 campaigns on smoking bans that took place between 2005 and 2012 in the German part of Switzerland. The main conflict line in debates on smoking bans is drawn between individual freedom and public health (Stucki 2016a,b). The study shows that not many of the arguments found in the campaigns refer to evidence. Evaluation results are mostly cited in support of causal arguments referring to the effects of policy interventions. Policy information primarily is available for causal arguments. It is known in the public discourse but only cited explicitly when the speaker wants to raise credibility. This especially applies to researchers, such as evaluators. However, the results also show that the political use of evaluation results fosters an informed discourse and the evidence may eventually become common public knowledge. The credentials of evaluators make them suitable not only for bringing more evaluation

were requested for the policy sectors of energy, security, foreign affairs, and migration. Preferences for policy sectors to be evaluated differ between political parties, though.

results into the direct-democratic discourse but also for acting as teachers in this discourse. In campaigns on smoking bans, arguments with and without evidence from both, the pro and the con sides, are presented to the voters, which provides for unbiased decision-making. However, a higher level of explicit references to evidence might enhance quality of the discourse during direct-democratic campaigns in enabling voters to disentangle assertions from substantiating explanations.

Schlauffer (2017) follows up the finding that evaluation fosters informed democratic discourse and studies the impact evaluation use has on the discourse during direct democratic campaigns. Evaluation results may be used in policy debates to support arguments. There is a frequent expectation in the literature on the political use of evaluations that such an evidence-based perspective may lead to more reasoned debates and, hence, contribute to a high quality discourse. According to deliberative democratic theory, deliberation displays high discourse quality when there are high levels of reason-giving, respect, inclusiveness and reciprocity. Schlauffer (2017) employs indicators from the Discourse Quality Index (DQI) and political communication research to formulate hypotheses as to the impact of evidence integration on the discourse quality of media content in the case of school policy (cf. Schlauffer 2016a,b). She presents a direct on-off comparison of comparable newspaper items. In total, the author compares 63 articles with reference to evaluations to 63 articles without reference to evaluations. The results of the quantitative analysis is backed with qualitative evidence in the form of newspaper quotes. Schlauffer (2017) can show that those newspaper articles containing evaluations exhibit higher levels of justification, reciprocity and respect, tend to argue in terms of the common good, and contain less storytelling than newspaper articles that do not refer to evaluations. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that the inclusion of evidence contributes to discourse quality in direct-democratic campaigns.

While the papers on legislative and direct-democratic use of evaluations, thus, draw a somewhat ambiguous picture of the influence of evaluations in democracy, the evidence-based policy literature makes a strong case for the political role of scientific evidence gained from evaluations. The political relevance of evaluation studies is mirrored by the fact that evaluators are repeatedly put under pressure to deliver results in line with given expectations as reported in different studies (Pleger & Sager, 2016; Morris & Clark, 2013; Stockmann, Meyer, & Schenke, 2011; The LSE GV314 Group, 2013). Pleger and Sager (2017) take this observation as a starting point to discuss political influence on evaluators to misrepresent findings and to conceptualize a finer grained model of influence on evaluations in democracy. Evaluations can only serve as neutral evidence-base for policy decision-making as long as they have not been altered along non-scientific criteria such as party political ideology or administrative self-interest. A conceptual challenge is the fact that pressure cannot only be negative, but also constructive. Based on a survey among Swiss evaluators, the authors develop a heuristic model of influence on evaluations that does justice to this ambivalence of influence: the BUSD-model (Betterment, Undermining, Support, and Distortion). The model is based on the distinction of two dimensions of explicitness of pressure and direction of influence. Pleger and Sager (2017) illustrate the model with concrete findings and show how it can be applied to understand pressure and protect evaluators and evaluation culture.

Finally, democratic claims such as transparency and accountability are not just a feature of political systems as wholes but also have entered the way public organizations are managed. A core problem of outcome-oriented steering is the choice of adequate indicators (Ritz and Sager 2010; Sager et al. 2010) and the resulting gaming strategies of the once governed. Marra (2017) takes Italy's administrative reforms of the past two decades to study political consequences of performance measurement

and evaluation regimes within public organizations. Evaluation was institutionalized to improve program effectiveness, staff productivity, and results-driven accountability. Marra (2017) finds various ambiguities within Italian public administration when formal compliance to standard procedures is countered by a lack of cross-agency coordination and fragmented evaluation community. The author sees a need for greater integration between program evaluation and performance measurement to foster organizational learning and democratic accountability at the different levels of government. This final contribution shifts the attention to a consolidated evaluation culture as a necessary condition for evaluation to make a constructive contribution to democratic decision-making.

Conclusion

In sum, the present collection makes a case for a stronger presence in democracy beyond expert utilization. Parliamentarians prove to be more acquainted with evaluations than expected and the inclusion of evaluations in policy arguments increases the deliberative quality of democratic campaigns. However, the presented research also shows that evaluations are not enough present in these campaigns and that members of parliament request evaluations rather than read them. In order to provide both policy-relevant and neutral information for democratic decision-making, the relation between sender and receiver of this information needs to be recalibrated. This calibration entails the need for a sensitive handling of different forms of influence and pressure on evaluators just as well as stronger congruence between performance measurement and evaluation and a consolidated evaluation culture across evaluators and public administration. Within these parameters, however, evaluation and democracy may turn out to be well compatible after all.

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