

# Partnerships in Policy and Evaluation

## European, Development Country and Member State Experiences<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the congruence between partnerships in policies and programmes and partnerships in the evaluation of policies and programmes. It employs three case studies. The first case considers a “social partnership” in a European Structural Funds programme and its subsequent evaluation. The second case examines a development co-operation partnership between developing and developed partners, including consideration of partnerships in evaluation. The third case investigates co-operation between a national government and local governments, making use of the concept “subsidiarity” and its implications for partnerships.

The conceptual framework classifies programmes and evaluations according to the degree and type of partnership involved. When partnership is of a similar type in a programme and its evaluation, this study calls the situation congruent.

In the three cases analysed, some degrees of congruence between the type of partnership in a programme and its evaluation are generally present. The research approach and the conceptual framework point to causes for deviation from the congruence. The approach and the framework also lead one to focus on reasons for the differences between the intended type and degree of partnership and the actual type and degree that materialised. Weak representatives of the programme beneficiaries, capacity deficiencies of partners that are targets of development efforts and mistrust between partners jeopardise partnerships. The study bears certain implications for partnerships in European programmes and their evaluations.

*Keywords:* Structural Funds, subsidiarity, development co-operation

The concept of “partnership” is frequently used and applied without the support of sound background theories (Ahonen 1999a, Gregory 2000). In actual policy-making and research practice the concept has many meanings, some of which are very different from the ones that are relevant in this study (Hellström and Jacob 1999; Arrowsmith 2000). Partnerships may exist in policies, programmes and their implementation, and partnerships may exist in the subsequent evaluations. This study aims to help bridging the gap between studying partnerships separately in those two domains.

It is useful to start a study on partnership with an elaboration of an approach. The approach chosen sees policy-making and policy programming as activities that result with representations of desired future states of affairs and representations of implementation chains that are designed to reach those states. The approach sees evaluations as particular *ex ante*, *ex nunc* or *ex post* representations of the states and the chains. (For inspiration to this perspective, Ahonen 1983; Hodge & Kress 1988; Fischer and Forester 1993; Fischer 1995; Kress & v. Leeuwen 1996; JEP 1999; Khakee 2000.)

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According to the approach, evaluators probe what can in everyday language be called “truths” and “untruths” of policy-making, programming and implementation. The evaluators probe the plausibility, the credibility, the accuracy and the factual status of representations that have been made in the course of policy-making and policy programming including implementation. The judgments on the policies and the programmes that the evaluators are able to make imply revisions in the original representations that were made in the original policy-making, programming and implementation.

Metaevaluators probe the plausibility, credibility, accuracy and factual status of evaluations. The judgments that they may be able to make imply revisions in the original evaluations.

Rules of convention more often than strict methodological and technical rules govern the actual practice of evaluation and metaevaluation. Experience of building and maintaining actual evaluation capacity (Boyle and Lemaire 1999) supports the view that evaluation is frequently dependent on conventional rules of tradition, conventional rules dictated by its particular social, political and intellectual standing, and conventional rules that arise from the particular way of its institutionalisation. This holds true no less in such thematic evaluation as the evaluation of partnership than elsewhere.

## **The Conceptual Framework and the Empirical Domain**

### ***Partnerships in Programmes and Their Evaluation***

Partnerships in policies and programmes and evaluations of policies and programmes both define particular policy-making, programming and evaluation contexts. The concept of “partnership” refers to joint planning, joint implementation, joint sharing of the ultimate results or two or all of those three features. It also refers to a certain degree of engagement and commitment of both or all partners and a reasonable empowerment of both or all of them. This gives partnerships in policy-making and policy programming a particular political character. When partnerships in policy-making, planning and implementing policy programmes are combined with partnerships in the subsequent evaluations, the resulting challenges are big and complex. At the same time this is an interesting and a promising field of research.

The particular empirical domain of this study restricts itself to planning, implementing and evaluating social and economic development programmes. Let us first build a simple categorisation of types of partnerships in such programmes (Table 1, inspired by Heron 1996). In actual practice the concept of a “development programme” is not more alien in regional development policies and in local economic development (“LED”, cf. OECD 1999; OECD 2000a) than it is in national development policies and development co-operation in developing countries. Both types of development programmes fall into the empirical domain of this study.

Table 1 identifies four types of partnership:

1. Centre- or donor-driven development without partnership
2. Centre- or donor-driven partial development partnership, with the recipient playing a secondary role
3. Recipient-driven partial development partnership with the donor playing a secondary role
4. Full development partnership between the two interacting partners

*Table 1. Categorisation of Programmes of Development with Variable Degrees of Partnership. Table 1. Categorisation of Programmes of Development with Variable Degrees of Partnership.*

	1. Centre- or donor-driven development without partnership	2. Centre- or donor-driven partial development partnership	3. Recipient-driven partial development partnership	4. Full development partnership
Involvement of the central (funding or master planning) partner or donating partner in decisions on the programme	Full, dominant and exclusive	Full, dominant	Partial; the centre or the donor has allowed a large part of its role devolve to the other partner	Full and equal
Involvement of the recipient partner in decisions on the programme including its overall shape, details of its resource allocation and its subdivision into projects	None or too small to have impact	Partial by strength or breadth as to policy sectors or intervention types	Full, dominant	Full and equal

There are several ways in which policies and programmes may be related to their evaluations. Let us build upon the four-fold categorisation of programme types introduced above and extend it to cover policies and programmes and their evaluation simultaneously (Table 2).

Table 2 is an expression of research hypotheses to test empirically. It arises from the nature of cross-classifications that the diagonal depicts *congruous* combinations. Where the partnership in development is of a given type, this justifies the expectation that the evaluation is analogous in its type. There is the expectation that two extreme combinations are *unlikely* (types 14 and 41). Six further combinations appear as hard to conceive of and therefore of a *lesser relevance* to this study. We are left with four categories that merit a brief elaboration:

- 21. Centre- or donor-driven partial partnership in the evaluation of a fully centre- or donor-driven development programme
- 12. Unilateral central or donor evaluation of a programme with partial centre- or donor-driven development partnership
- 13. Centre- or donor-driven evaluation of a programme with recipient-driven partial development partnership
- 43. Full partnership in evaluation of recipient-driven partial development partnership

Combination 21 takes place where the central actor or the donor and the recipient have agreed that the latter occupies a rather active role in the evaluation although it did not do so in the programme planning, design and management. One reason for this may be that the recipient may have a better capacity to engage in a partnership in the evaluation than it had in the actual programme planning and implementation.

*Table 2. Cross-classification of Types of Development Programmes and Their Evaluation.*

	1. Centre- or donor-driven development without partnership	2. Centre- or donor-driven partial development partnership	3. Recipient-driven partial development partnership	4. Full development partnership
1. Centre- or donor-driven evaluation without partnership in evaluation	11. An expected, congruous combination	12. Unilateral central or donor evaluation of partial development partnership; may come into question	13. Centre- or donor-driven evaluation of recipient-driven partial development partnership; may come into question	14. Difficult to see as feasible or likely
2. Centre- or donor-driven partial partnership in evaluation	21. Central- or donor-driven partial partnership in the evaluation of central- or donor-driven development; may come into question	22. An expected, congruous combination	23. Hard to conceive of	24. Hard to conceive of
3. Recipient-driven partial partnership in evaluation	31. Hard to conceive of	32. Hard to conceive of	33. An expected, congruous combination	34. Hard to conceive of
4. Full partnership in evaluation	41. Difficult to see as feasible or likely	42. Hard to conceive of	43. Full partnership in evaluation of recipient-driven development	44. An expected, congruous combination

Combination 12 takes place where the recipient has scant capacity to engage in a full partnership in the evaluation despite that it was able to engage in a partial partnership in the development programme. Constraints put upon the central actor or the donor by the ultimate decision-maker such as the Parliament of a donor country may strengthen the tendency that combination 12 will ensue.

Combination 13 takes place where the central actor or the donor is forced by its ultimate decision-maker to keep the reins in the evaluation stage although the recipient has enjoyed considerable freedoms in the programming and the implementation. For instance, international financial institutions may allow the recipients of their funding to carry out programmes in an independent way but may require that the recipient meet certain fiscal, political and socio-economic conditions that continue to be evaluated by the donor. For another example, a federal or a national government may preserve

evaluation prerogatives even after it has engaged in devolution of its subsidisation towards regional or local self-governments.

Combination 43 takes place where the central actor or the donor has given the reins as completely as possible to the recipient in the programming and the implementation stages. However, for various reasons such as requirements set by the ultimate decision-makers of the donors the evaluation stage is not dominated by either of the partners.

### ***Three Case Studies as a “Test Bench”***

This study uses three case studies that involve different types of partnerships. The study uses the cases to probe questions on relations between partnerships in policies and programmes and partnerships in evaluations of policies and programmes. The study ultimately aims at simultaneous analysis of partnerships in policies and programmes and partnerships in subsequent evaluations.

The first and the second partnership involved evaluations, whereas the third involved a metaevaluation of a set of previous evaluations:

1. There is a partnership between “social partners” in the domain of the European Structural Funds programmes.
2. There is a partnership between developing and the developed co-operation partners.
3. There is a potential partnership between a national government and self-governing local governments.

The following chapter gives the background and the outline of each of the three case studies. The subsequent chapter spells out judgments on the two programmes evaluated in the first two cases and on the evaluations reassessed in the third case of metaevaluation. That chapter also spells out second-order judgments on the evaluations carried out in the two first cases and the metaevaluation that was the topic of the third case study. The study finally draws implications for the science and art of evaluation.

## **An Evaluation of a Programme of the European Regional Development Fund, 1993 Implementation Regulation, Article 10**

### ***Background of the Case: Partnership in European Structural Funds Programming and Evaluation***

The Structural Funds Regulations that have been valid in the recent years include definitions of “partnership”. The earlier Regulation that was valid during the implementation of the programme and its evaluation that are analysed here, is the 1988 European Council of Ministers Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF; Regulation (EEC) No 2052/1988). The latter is the 1999 Council Regulation laying down the general provisions on the Structural Funds (1260/1999). (See also Kelleher *et al.* 1999.)

“Partnership” is defined in both regulations (Art. 4(1) and Art. 8(1)), respectively, as “establishing” and as “drawing up” Community actions to complement or to contribute to national operations in close *consultation* between given *partners*. Over time one sees in the regulations a movement from joint decision-making on the programmes to joint making of the programmes themselves. The partners mentioned in the regulations include the European Commission and the Member States together with bodies designated by the Member States. Other bodies include, as specified in the new

regulation, regional and local authorities, other competent public authorities and partners called “economic and social partners”.

It is relevant to this study to point out that the regulations assume, and continue to assume, that *partnership* will continue in the *evaluation* stage of programmes. The inclusion of evaluations under the partnerships is found in Regulation 4253/1988. However, the earlier basic ERDF regulation (2052/1988, Art. 4(1)) also includes as well the ruling that

“(t)he partnership shall cover the preparation, financing, monitoring and assessment of operations.”

The new Structural Funds regulation (1260/1999, Art. 8(2)) differs from its predecessor in that it substitutes “*evaluation*” for “assessment”. Despite the fact that Regulation 1260/1999 replaced 4253/1988, the latter was still in force when the programme being evaluated was originally implemented. The European Court of Auditors (ECA 1998) has carried out a thorough assessment of the Structural Funds interventions in periods 1989-1993 and 1994-1999. The ECA allotted considerable attention to whether the partnership principle had been adhered to in evaluations. The ECA pointed out and the Commission agreed in its reply that the evaluations had not adequately fulfilled the partnership requirement. However, both the ECA and the Commission agreed that the evaluation partnerships had improved over the years.

### ***Evaluating Promotion of Arts-Based Handicrafts Business in Finland***

As prescribed in programme funding terms, the regional implementing authority of a programme will commission independent evaluators to evaluate a programme’s each part carried out in each Member State. In the Finnish part of the programme, two evaluators interviewed the core programme personnel, some crafts entrepreneurs, officials of the regional authority and other important regional stakeholders. They also analysed the project documentation, investigated the material achievements, and surveyed the project sites. The features of the programme and its evaluation, as presented here, stem largely from the evaluation report (Ahonen & af Ursin 1999).

The programme was carried out in four Member States under Art. 10 of the European Council of Ministers regulation 2083/93, which refers to implementing the ERDF regulation 2052/88. According to the Call for Tenders published by the European Commission in 1995, the Structural Fund objectives 1, 2, 5b and 6 were to have prominence. In the Finnish component of the programme the objective 6 – regarding the sparsely populated areas of Sweden and Finland – was prominent, but objective 5b, on rural development, played a role as well. In terms of Art. 10, the programme was designed to be a pilot scheme to create incentives for investment in enterprises and to pool experiences for future co-operation in development between different Community regions. The programme’s Finnish region fulfilled the border region requirements particularly well. It is a border region between Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia. In its Call for Tenders the Commission expressed three aims:

1. The creation of partnerships between public organisations, businesses and associations in culture-related projects of inter-regional economic co-operation for development;
2. The exchange of experiences and expertise related to culture between regional and local authorities to enhance cohesion; and
3. The promotion and use of new information and communication technologies.

The Commission accepted the programme plan in April 1997. The project activities ended in June 1999, after which the consortium aimed to apply for more funding.

The programme had five objectives:

1. To develop a model for the creation of economically viable craft centres in order to provide sustainable jobs in the field of craft heritage;
2. To showcase and develop the richness and diversity of local, regional and minority cultures, while at the same time emphasising the contribution of each participant to European culture and history;
3. To strengthen economic and social cohesion;
4. To promote the use of new information and communication technologies and to exchange experience and know-how;
5. To engage in local job creation.

The Commission funded about one half of the programme's component that was carried out in Finland. The other half originated almost entirely from the Finnish regional authority, which had raised its funds from its member municipalities and from the Finnish national government.

In order to help the programme reach its first objective, the programme administrators had a survey conducted on craft centres in Finland and supported an MA thesis on the maturity of a craft company to start exporting its products. The administrators failed to produce a "best practice guide" for craft centres. In regard to the second objective, the project had indeed strengthened two existing craft centres and, albeit indirectly, helped a third centre to get going. However, the programme's effect on centre creation was negligible. Brochures, fairs, exhibitions, seminars and news coverage fell under the second objective as well.

To enhance economic and social was more difficult in the project. This was due in part to the region's large area, about 100 000 square kilometres with a north-south length of over 500 kilometres. Moreover, the project's activities took place only in the Western rim of the region and just in three locations. The local artisans also turned out to be a very diffuse group, many working only part-time. The training on offer – computer-aided design and advertising through websites – attracted only a few participants.

The project's use of modern information and communication technologies included the construction of a website, a videoconference and a particularly prepared videofilm. However, the website was modest and of little practical use. The videoconference was a success, but the videofilm was modest. The international exchange of experience and know-how in the project was only carried out between the project administrators. The craft entrepreneurs themselves had not been involved. However, the exchange of experiences was enhanced by the allocation of funding for a study on craft entrepreneurship in the target region as well as another Finnish region.

Job creation was the most difficult objective to achieve. Depending on the basis of calculation, only three to ten per cent of the intended effect was realised.

## **An Evaluation of a Bilateral Development Co-operation: Partnership Between a Developing Country and a European Union Member State**

### ***Background of the Case: Partnership in Development Co-operation***

The OECD (1996, 1998, 2000b) in its Development Action Committee (DAC) has given considerable attention to partnerships. An OECD definition is to an extent implicit but no less clear in its intentions (OECD 1988, section II B):

“(L)ocally-owned country development strategies and targets should emerge from an open and collaborative dialogue by local authorities (in OECD parlance, developing countries’ federal, national and all other governments, note by the author) with civil society and with external partners, about their shared objectives and their respective contributions to the common enterprise. Each donor’s programmes and activities should then operate within the framework of the locally-owned strategy... .”

The OECD’s concept of partnership involves stipulations for joint responsibilities for both donors and developing countries and also separate responsibilities for them.

In European Union policies, the provisions for “partnership” are less specific than those found in OECD parlance. For instance, the French Presidency in the second half of 2000 (Council 2000), announced a search for a “strategic partnership” with Russia and “partnership” in reforming the rules of EU programmes for the southern and the eastern Mediterranean countries.

### ***Evaluating Country Programming of Namibian-Finnish Development Co-operation***

The evaluation team for the Namibian-Finnish development co-operation was selected by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs through open tendering. The team was made up of four people, including one expert who headed a think tank in Windhoek, Namibia.

The terms of the evaluation included five objectives:

1. To review critically the current goals and practices of the bilateral country programming system of the Finnish development co-operation;
2. To assess the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of the Namibian-Finnish development co-operation programme without engaging in impact evaluation proper nor engaging in detailed project evaluation;
3. To assess the relevance and rationale of the present country programming system;
4. To analyse the effects of the aid co-ordination mechanisms upon the Finnish country programming (such as the co-ordination by the UNDP and the European Commission’s representation in Namibia); and
5. To prepare a separate proposal for a more comprehensive analysis of the country programming system and to make recommendations to be used in the impact analysis of the country programmes.

The evaluation involved research of the existing documentation including archive studies in Helsinki, a field mission to Namibia in September, 1999, and also a seminar in Namibia in January 2000. The report was published in June 2000 (Ahonen et al. 2000).

One way of classifying evaluation projects of development co-operation is to distinguish evaluations of *impact* and evaluations of procedures of *programming* the co-operation. Impact evaluations form the majority of overall evaluations, and frequently



evaluations of programming and impact coincide in evaluation projects. (Cox et al. 1997; Conway and Maxwell 1999.) The evaluation examined here was focused on the programming. Only implications for impact evaluation were covered.

Finland keenly observes international decisions on development co-operation, being an active member of the UN system and of the OECD. It also harmonises its development co-operation with reference to its responsibilities as an EU Member State. One can also discern an implicit division of development co-operation partners between the Nordic countries, especially in East Africa and also within countries of East Africa. The liberation movement SWAPO was a recipient of Finland's development co-operation long before SWAPO evolved as the dominant party in the independent Namibia.

The framework for development co-operation between Namibia and Finland has three sources:

1. A general diplomatic agreement between the two governments on general procedures of co-operation;
2. Almost annual bilateral country negotiations; their purpose is to keep stock on the accomplishments of projects, to consider proposals for new projects and the revisions of existing ones, and to consider whether some of the projects need to be concluded or not; and
3. Bilateral agreements for particular projects and programmes.

There has been a tendency to move from diverse projects towards more comprehensive programmes. Another tendency has refocused Finnish funding towards activities carried out by Namibian and Finnish non-governmental organisations.

Namibian politics has a higher international visibility than politics in many other African countries. This arises from the elevation of English into the official language at the country's independence and the freedom of the press prevailing in the country. It appeared in the evaluation that the international news media have few difficulties to detect even minor infringements upon human rights and principles of good governance in Namibia.

The evaluation confirmed that many Namibian institutions remain weak. The forced rule by South Africa until Namibia's independence continues to have an effect. Namibian institutions improve only slowly because of features of a one-party state, the rise of an indigenous upper class, corruption and the use of public sector employment for social pacification.

The evaluation also confirmed findings recorded five years earlier in a published Swedish evaluation (Melber et al. 1994). The role of the National Planning Commission (NPC) was not clear nor was the Commission given the muscle to do its co-ordination job well. A large share of aid continued to flow without its inclusion in the Namibian state budget. Many ministries continued to collude with long-time donors without allocating a strong role for either the NPC or the Namibian Ministry of Finance. The evaluation also found features of aid dependency despite that the share of external aid vis-à-vis the GDP is moderate at six per cent.

Human resources turned out to be a critical feature in programming co-operation. Rather few people were actually involved in the programming. A small donor country cannot allocate more than part of the work of a single desk officer in the national Ministry for co-operation with another small country. Moreover, a small donor country has small embassies. Namibian government organisations and officials deal with many donors and cannot focus on any donor that does not allocate substantial sums. The

strengthening role of co-operation between Namibian and Finnish NGOs had not brought crucial relief. It had been difficult to involve the NGOs in the official decision-making on the co-operation.

Programming of development co-operation between Namibia and Finland is not based upon strict written guidelines and documents. The basic Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs guideline regards project and programme design, management and evaluation only (FMFA 1998). Aspects of written documentation exist on the programming. However, increasingly many donors have turned into programming their development co-operation by large multi-country regions. This has precluded attention directed to small recipient countries.

The concept of “programming” was ambiguous in the donor’s key Ministry. Some of the officials interviewed felt that no programming should be pursued, because only Namibians should program their development by and for themselves.

The evaluation found that many donors have similar problems. Furthermore, co-ordination between donors is difficult. In Namibia the UNPD is the principal co-ordinator. However, because most donors are EU Member States, the European Commission’s Namibian representation also played a co-ordinating role. However, the donor countries are independent countries irrespective of their EU membership, making a smoothly functioning division of labour hard to achieve. It is particularly hard to ensure that each donor has an exit strategy should the need for aid be relieved or should circumstances change to preclude aid.

## **A Metaevaluation of Public Service Provision**

### ***Background of the Case: Sub-National Subsidiarity and Sub-National Partnerships***

The core concept of relations between central and sub-central political actors in European law and the related political theory is “subsidiarity”. The concept has long roots (Bruchs 2000). However, its immediate source is in the social teachings of the Catholic Church:

“... (T)hat most weighty principle ... remains fixed ... in social philosophy: ... it is ... a grave evil ... to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. Every social activity is by its nature and concept subsidiary; it shall support member of the Body Social, but must never strike them down or exploit them... . The supreme authority of the State ought ... to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance... .” (The Encyclical by Pope Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno* 1931, titled “Social Reconstruction”, Art. 79-80, in English translation, corrected by comparison to translations in other languages.)

In European law, the key reference to subsidiarity was originally Art. 3b (2) of the Treaty on the European Communities (“ECT”, replacing the previous EEC Treaty; the definition is now in Art. 5 ECT):

“In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effect of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community.”

In the preamble of the Maastricht Treaty (Treaty on the European Union, “TEU”) reference to subsidiarity includes: “(D)ecisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen”. This definition is wider than that found in Art. 3b (2) ECT. The wider definition apparently also covers relationships prevailing within each Member State.

According to Schilling (1995), “subsidiarity” may mean four things:

1. The “subsidiarity norm” of European legislation;
2. A mere “political subsidiarity principle”, which would receive its content in each case through political wheeling and dealing, although Schilling abandons this meaning;
3. The “subsidiarity rule”, which, unlike a mere political subsidiarity principle, is applicable in an all-or-nothing fashion without yielding to any superordinate principles;
4. A legal, “technical subsidiarity principle”, which implies that the Community – and *mutatis mutandis*, a national government as well – should act as a decision maker only when closer decision making to the citizen is ruled out.

In the preparatory stages leading to the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, the Finnish government expounded that “subsidiarity” is above all a political principle (IGC 1997). However, this can be seen as problematic given the nature subsidiarity as a norm, a rule and a technical precept. Specifically, four problems can be identified:

- The principle is more than a mere political one that would always be open to political contestation.
- Finland’s implementation of European policies as a Member State since 1995 obligates it to apply “subsidiarity” within its own borders and between the Finnish national central state and sub-national governments. Adhering to the subsidiarity precept primarily affected the administration of the Structural Funds programmes. There, the Finnish government had to allow decentralisation of certain of its power to regional authorities created just before Finland’s membership started. Although in principle subsidiarity only applies to relations between the Union and the Member States, it has consequences within the Member States as well.
- The strongest point arises from a legal debate that took place long before Finland considered membership in the Union. The debate involved deliberations on the relationship between the national central government and local municipal self-governments. A key issue in the debate was the legal inalienability of the self-government. (E.g., Holopainen 1969.) The final opinion reached on this question was in accordance with subsidiarity.

As a European principle, “partnership” derives from the same source as “subsidiarity”:

“...in the present condition of human society... so far as is possible, the work-contract be somewhat modified by a partnership-contract” (Quadragesimo Anno 1931, Art. 65, in English translation).

The partners referred to are the employers and the employees. It is no coincidence that both are the most important socio-economic partners found in the Structural Funds regulations. They stipulate that the Community’s actions shall *complement* or *contribute*

to the respective *national* operations in close *consultation* between given *partners* (Regulation (EEC) No 2052/1988 on the ERDF, Art 4(1), the author's emphases).

***The Metaevaluation: An Evaluation of Evaluations by the Finnish National Government's Provincial Administrations on Public Service Provision***

The metaevaluation was based upon a contract concluded by the Ministry of the Interior with a single expert evaluator. The metaevaluation regarded two sets of evaluations of basic public service provision, carried out and published by the Finnish national government's Provincial Administrations in 1997-8 and 1998-9, respectively. The joint metaevaluation report was published (Ahonen 1999b).

The metaevaluation was based upon, *first*, an analysis of research literature and experiences of previous evaluations on similar themes. *Second*, the metaevaluation had an empirical grounding based upon a form that the evaluator used to record the evaluations. The form was built on the basis of available standards to evaluate evaluations (e.g., AEA 1997). The form covered, using a five-point assessment scale in each question, about 220 items. The metaevaluation question groups were:

- 1.1. Questions on how the evaluator had interpreted his or her mission;
- 1.2. Questions on the evaluator and the evaluation team;
2. Questions of method with regard to the background, design and data of the evaluation;
3. Questions of method with regard to the analysis methods applied in the evaluation;
4. Questions on the conclusions and the recommendations made in the evaluation;
5. Questions on reporting the evaluation;
6. Further general questions on the evaluation;
7. Summary on the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation;
8. General numerical evaluation of the evaluation's utility and usability;
9. Final verbal conclusions; and
10. Ultimate numerical and verbal assessment of the evaluation as "exemplary", "good", "normal", "mediocre", or "weak".

The Finnish Ministry of the Interior, pursuing the overall supervisory function over the Provincial Administrations, decided to include the evaluation of basic services as a task that the Provincial Administrations should pursue. The evaluation responsibility was confirmed in the subsequent contracts concluded between the Ministry and the Provincial Administrations. In 2000 the Act on the Provincial Administrations was revised, making the evaluation task an obligatory one.

In conducting their evaluations, the Provincial Administrations were not supposed approach the municipalities to collect further information despite the fact that most of the services in question were delivered by the municipalities and their federations. The guidance letters issued by the Ministry of Interior in 1997 and 1998 for the ensuing evaluations, stressed the perspective of the citizen and emphasised the importance of the services being evaluated for every citizen. The evaluation topics were rather similar to those found in the 1997-8 and 1998-9 evaluations. Moreover, the evaluation criteria of reachability, economy, impact and quality stayed the same.

The evaluation topics included the following:

- In the large welfare sector of education only two selected topics related to training to reduce or avoid unemployment were evaluated, which left most of the basic services made up of primary education outside.
- In the large welfare sector of social welfare certain special albeit widely provided services were evaluated: child protection measures, drug user and alcoholic rehabilitation, services for the disabled, and mental health services. The other topics were the sufficiency of social workers, and social and welfare services rendered in the homes of senior citizens.
- The national government policies of promotion and regulation of transportation in the public interest in the province were likewise evaluated.
- The activities of the police in each province (the Finnish police being a function managed and provided by the national government instead of the municipalities) were another target of evaluation.
- Services of public safety (fire brigades whether public or private and voluntary, ambulances, precautions for catastrophes, technical screening of radiation and environmental dangers) were evaluated as well.
- Policies of combat against drug abuse were an inter-sector evaluation topic.
- Only in 1997-8, the utilisation of information and communication technologies in the supply of public services was evaluated. However, the topic was re-introduced in the evaluations of 1999-2000, not covered by the metaevaluation.
- Only in 1998-9, the organisation of pre-schooling of young children was evaluated.
- Note that the large basic service sector of health care was evaluated almost not at all.

Most of the services evaluated are provided by the municipalities in Finland. Some are provided by municipalities or by voluntary private citizens, the local fire brigades being the case of point. In some cases there is targeted government subsidisation and not only the general and sector subsidisation paid in the bulk of the basic services. The former targets include parts of the adult education and the youth workshops. The transportation services evaluated involve sectors under government regulation whether the providers be private firms or municipalities, and sectors receiving government subsidies for servicing sparsely populated areas, the providers mostly being private bus companies. The police is the only basic service evaluated that is organised and funded entirely by the central government.

The evaluation reports to be metaevaluated were generally bulky and complex, annually five in number. The metaevaluation (Ahonen 1999b) was indeed able to divide the altogether ten evaluation reports published in 1998-9 into different categories of quality. There, “normal” let alone a mixture of “normal” and “mediocre” was a sign of needs of improvement, and only one report each year – but not by the same Provincial Administration both years – was able to receive a mark between “exemplary” and “good”. In general, quality and cohesion of quality in the reports and the respective evaluations had clearly increased between the two volume sets of evaluation reports. The size and the complexity of the three large provinces, each having been created through mergers of 3-4 previous provinces, had precluded rapid reaching of high evaluation quality. The highest quality evaluation passage was the evaluation of the information and communication technology utilisation in public services by the Province of Oulu, which in its Western part is known as a high technology Mecca with operations by leading technology firms such as Nokia and its supplier firms.

There was considerable variation in the quality of the evaluations *qua* evaluations. The evaluations of the police services were monotonous with their operational criteria of response times, although wider criteria were making their approach in the 1999 reports. The evaluations of the public safety services included problems from the viewpoint of evaluation. There was a tendency in several of the provincial evaluations to turn towards auditing and control of legality, with a focus on the success or the failure of the municipalities to fill service criteria written in legislation. Necessary though such auditing and control is, the metaevaluator found the practice to jeopardise the possibilities of evaluation as an activity based upon, involving and strengthening partnerships.

The evaluations of the social welfare services and the two types of education services were generally of a reasonable quality. However, their authors seemed to have had difficulties in adding to what was already known in a 1997 national report. In a few cases the evaluation of the sufficiency of social workers suffered from an excessive stress of the social workers' own point of view as a professional group. When explicitly asked in an evaluation, few professional group members are likely to accept that their numbers are sufficient.

## **Judgments on the Programmes Evaluated and Judgments on the Evaluations**

### ***First Order Judgments: Judgments on the Programmes Originally Evaluated***

The *first* case, the Structural Funds programme evaluation, hinted to problems of credibility in the original programme undetected by the financiers and other decision-makers before the programme start. This was clearest in regard to workplace creation through the programme. The programme funding was in no way of the size that it could have created the tens of workplaces indicated in the programme plan. However, the ultimate number of workplaces credibly created was not lesser than it should have been given approximate cost of workplace creation. These are problems not badly known in evaluations of Structural Funds Programmes (ECA 1999).

The problems in the programme implementation – the low participation rate of the ultimate beneficiaries and the low utilisation rate of the facilities and equipment – referred to a deeper credibility and plausibility problem. The programme was in effect two-bottomed. At its face value it was of the programme type 3 in Table 1: a recipient-driven partial development partnership. This was also in accordance with the Structural Funds regulations. However, in regard to the relationships between the stakeholders represented in the programme governance and the ultimate beneficiaries the programme was a centre-driven one, meaning programme type 1. Representation carried out by organised regional stakeholders was certainly in accordance with the Structural Funds Regulations, but this was not enough, as this representation turned out to be only a shallow one in that it did not ensure high participation rates of the beneficiaries in the programme activities. The ensuing weak partnership conveys a message ultimately to the programme designers and redesigners of the Structural Funds policies.

In the *second* case the partnership between a developing country and a donor country was to an extent lacking in terms of feasibility, efficiency and effectiveness. This was so despite a trend from partnership type 2 of Figure 1 towards types 4 and 3. Type 3 had become prominent indeed in many programmes and projects with a community development or governance improvement aspect, and in programmes where non-governmental organisations were enhanced.

Limits to the partnership derived from chronically frailties in governance and lacking institutional solidity and capacity in organisations of the developing country partner. There were features of clientism as well between given ministries in the developing country and certain donors. It was possible to check that these relationships not rarely went beyond mere good, solid and sustainable partnerships, but involved instances of perpetuating co-operation where more productive co-operation targets might have been available. Finally, there was long-term bypassing of the receiving country's official public financial administration through special donor-recipient schemes, both by the donor country at stake and many other donors, referring to both capacity and credibility problems with the developing country partner.

In the home country headquarters of the Ministry representing the donor there were certain tendencies to mix two views. The former was the defensible view that a donor country is well allowed to program its own policies with respect to its developing partner countries. The latter was the non-sustainable view that the country programming should not be pursued in the first place, because it would involve programming which the developing partner country should do itself. Without any programming, the threat arises that donors will not exist countries or aid targets for the benefit of other countries and targets needing and deserving aid better.

Finally, the evaluation was able to a certain extent to contest the received view that the moderate volume of external aid with respect to the recipient country's GDP – some six per cent – would have precluded aid dependency. On the contrary, the expectation of aid continued to maintain features of aid dependency built upon the expectations of established partners in the developing country that they could continue to support their activities by the means of donor funding. This, further, reduced the viability of the partnership between the two respective governments.

The *last case* was unlike the others one of metaevaluation. The metaevaluation results tell that the potential partnership between the national government evaluating the provision of basic public services and the municipalities rendering most of those services was jeopardised by adverse tendencies. In one of the sectors of public service provision they involved in the disguise of evaluation auditing and control of legality with respect to norms issued by the national government. This was eating ground under workable evaluation partnerships in regard to the services in question and, by extension, any services. However, this adversity was surpassed in importance by the national government's policy to save both the municipalities and the citizens from rendering novel information for the evaluations. In terms of the programme types of Table 2 the metaevaluation was mostly of the type 1, or a centre-driven one, as far as we can consider the original evaluations to have been a "programme" in the very special sense of an "evaluation programme".

The centre-driven nature of the original evaluations that were metaevaluated was mellowed down by an important feature of two large and well-established sectors of basic social services: health care and social welfare. There, central-local partnerships prevailing within established welfare service professions transcended the boundary line between the national central government and the municipal self-governments. This brought in features transcending the categorisation given in Table 1 altogether. The problem referred to earlier – social workers having a visible say in evaluating the sufficiency of their own numbers – made that the professional influence was not without its faults, either.

The third case involved a further problematic feature. In the documentation of the national government whose provincial administrations were carrying out the evaluations the principal motivation given for the evaluation effort regarding the basic services was

the importance of those services to the citizens. However, to a first and not so minor astonishment of the evaluator, it turned out that evaluation did not involve any approach to the citizens themselves but utilised ready-made studies and minor collection of additional data from the municipalities. This adds a further feature of centre-drivenness, tending the evaluation metaevaluated further towards evaluation type 1 of Table 1.

### ***Second-Order Judgments: Judgments on the Evaluations***

The evaluation of the Structural Funds programme in the *first* case turns out to be of type 13 of Figure 2, that is, a centre- or donor-driven evaluation of a recipient-driven partial partnership. The Structural Funds regulations put regional authorities that shall have to be independent of the national government into the leading position in programme implementation, but the same regulations have a converse effect in evaluation. Given that a large part of the funds used stemmed from the Communities budget, the accountability emphasis of the evaluation was understandable as such. However, from the viewpoint of the ultimate beneficiaries – the handicrafts entrepreneurs in the region – the evaluation was of the type 11, or central evaluation of a centralised programme.

The *second* case, the one of development co-operation, was a congruous case. Equally as the overall partnership between the donor and the developing country was of the type 2 of Table 1, so was the evaluation of the type 22 of Table 2. That is, the evaluation involved a donor-driven albeit partial partnership in evaluation. Regarding programmes targeted to NGO enhancement the evaluation received features of evaluation type 33, that is, recipient-driven evaluation of recipient-driven development programmes.

If in the *third* case the evaluation activity that was metaevaluated is seen as an “evaluation programme”, then the metaevaluation can be seen to represent two different types of evaluation in terms of Table 2. From the viewpoint of the citizens – and certain other stakeholders such as companies and local and regional NGOs – the metaevaluation was definitely a centre-driven one and therefore of the type 11. The same holds as to most fields of basic service provision where the municipalities are the providers. However, there are a few exceptions where the municipalities had been willing to provide fresh information had the central government’s provincial administration transgressed the guidelines it had received from Ministry of the Interior and asked for such information. In provinces where this had happened the *metaevaluation* can be seen to be of type 12 as to its type as an *evaluation*. On one occasion the metaevaluation received features of the evaluation type 14, namely where a true evaluation partnership appeared between the national government’s given Provincial Administration and the bulk of the municipalities situated in its area. Finally, the minority of public services are rendered in Finland by local and regional branches of national government authorities *en lieu* of the municipal self-governments. The metaevaluation regarding those services comes close to the congruous type 22: centre-driven partial partnership in evaluation.

## **Implications for the Art and Science of Evaluation**

### ***The Structural Funds Evaluation Case***

The results of this study imply that part of success in the art of Structural Funds evaluation hinges upon the acknowledgement of the degree of organisation of the



ultimate beneficiaries and the quality of their representation by partners acting in their name. More exactly, the results have, *first*, their message for the art of programme planning and implementation. There, the likelihood of programme success increases where the organised partners in the roles they occupy in the actual programme implementation indeed are able to commit the ultimate beneficiaries to engage in the programme activities. *Second*, it may turn out in *ex post* evaluation that the ultimate beneficiaries have been so diffuse that the evaluators end up with difficulties in finding them to analyse their experiences in the first place. There, it is not ruled out that there have been faults in the original programme design including the role that the organised partners were assumed to bear well. In such situations we should study if not the right partners were singled out at to represent the ultimate beneficiaries. The case not being so, either, the needs and demands among the beneficiaries may indeed have been too diffuse to allow their workable representation by any organised programme partners.

The Structural Funds evaluation advises the science of evaluation not to turn its back to the venerable yet today marginalised knowledge of theoretical policy analysis (cf. Geva-May and Pal 1999). In policy analysis attention has been given to the role that the high vs. the low structuration of policy fields plays in predicting high vs. low engagement, commitment and participation rate of ultimate beneficiaries and a low vs. medium vs. high consequent success of programmes in accomplishing their objectives and goals:

1. Where the organised partners indeed keenly, ably and validly aggregate and articulate the interests of the ultimate beneficiaries both programme implementation and evaluation are at their easiest.
2. There may be mixed cases where non-homogeneous degrees of organisation prevail in different parts of the total beneficiary population in that in some parts the organised partners indeed aggregate and articulate interests well, whereas in other parts this is hardly so.
3. Both programme implementation and evaluation meet difficulties where the ultimate beneficiaries are atomistic and so heterogeneous as not to be well represented by organisations acting in their name and also badly available as programme participants and sources of evaluation information.

### ***The Evaluation of Development Co-operation Case***

For the art of evaluation the evaluation case of development co-operation suggests that the much discussed question of *aid conditionality* is more complex than might seem. Explicitly, all members of the global donor community have committed themselves not to making any of their aid conditional upon their own values, policies or interests let alone acquisition of the goods and services enabled by the aid from the donors' own countries. Unfortunately, this sounds too good to be quite true. *First* of all, the donors render support to the developing countries to make the latter evolve as full members of the global market economy. However, there companies from the donor countries are the major players. *Second*, the donors work to maintain and impose the values generally accepted by a major part of the global community, including most of the developing countries. However, we must ask if each and every one of those values let alone each of their nuances leave the developing countries in the "driver's seat" of their own development and the true "owners" of their development programmes.

The evaluation of development co-operation leads to the further, ethical question if all developing countries are treated equally in evaluations. For instance, are small, weak

developing countries not hopelessly far from a virtuous cycle of development placed as if in a glass house in comparison to larger and more powerful developing countries?

Another question for the art of evaluation concerns the non-governmental organisations in developing countries. It is not ruled out that some of them would not exist without constant and substantial donor contributions. Let us assume that at least a few of the values promoted by the donor community are problematic in the sense that their universal validity can be put into question. How should the donor contributions to the maintenance of NGOs pursuing such problematic values be evaluated?

For the science of evaluation the evaluation case of development co-operation suggests, not differently from the Structural Funds evaluation case, that the structuration of the supply vs. the demand sides of programme implementation and the respective sides of the evaluation effort are worth a serious consideration. Part of this thematic has become an established dimension of research on and practice of development co-operation. Project and programme failures have continued to witness of the important contributing role that the recipient country's institutions – its national and sub-national governments included – play in making aid effective and its effects sustainable. Where the government is frail, the development co-operation efforts are more in vain than where those institutions thrive (e.g., Wedel 1998).

The structuration of the supply vs. the demand of aid poses a serious and in the same a classical problem. The problem prevails between two actors the one of which more than the other is supposed to render help whereas the position of the other is more characterised to be that of a recipient. From the viewpoint of the philosophy of social science the question goes: to what extent and down to what depth may the actor acting in the role of the helper render support to the other partner without jeopardising its status as a fully entitled subject? Here, development co-operation may not have become during the decades as innocent as it might first seem. It is true that the thrust has changed from technical assistance rendered by high-earning expatriate technical experts who tried to create key technical infrastructures to “softer” methods such as capacity building reaching well beyond sheer training and training-of-trainers in the recipient country and its organisations. At which point is the support-rendering actor manipulating and indoctrinating the receiving actor to adopt the former's mindset and value set? In the same, the problematic leads to critical questions of cultural relativism.

### *The Metaevaluation of Public Service Evaluations Case*

For the art of evaluation the case suggests that centre-driven evaluation may on occasion be too cautious. Even if caution may be a virtue as such in interaction between a central national government and self-governing sub-national governments, caution precluding partnership in evaluation is a problem as well. Moreover, exclusion of citizens on the motivation of saving in data collection expenses and the citizen's time is problematic given that the very definition of “basic services” with reference to the importance of those services for the citizens themselves. In the case analysed the citizens were not well represented by any organised actor, either. The case hints to problems of distrust and suspicion between the two levels government – the national government and its Provincial Administrations on the one hand, and on the other the self-governing municipalities. Given that both derive most or their revenue from taxes paid by the citizens, the latter have the right-in-principle to demand that both governments they fund engage in a workable partnership.

From the viewpoint of the art of evaluation, the metaevaluation brings forward good albeit limited experiences in two of the Finnish provinces. Transcending and even transgressing the guidelines that precluded collection of novel information for the

evaluation instead of relying upon existing data, those provinces reached good results. As a matter of fact, the single evaluation with the best outstanding quality, namely the evaluation of information and communication technologies in public service provision, was the highest quality evaluation of any of the sector evaluations carried out by any province. To a large extent this derives from the rich data collected directly from municipalities and their respective partnership in the evaluation effort.

Solutions to problems in evaluating basic services in Finland are appearing from a somewhat unexpected direction. The Finnish Evaluation Society (FES 2000) was founded in late 1999 after two full and two preliminary rounds of evaluation of the basic services had lately finished. It is important that the board involves a strong representation both from the national government and the municipal sector.

### ***Implications for the Art and Science of European Evaluation***

The conceptual framework of this study has directed the attention to congruence between the types of partnership in programmes on the one hand and on the other hand in evaluations of programmes. Deviations from congruence provide the clues for qualifying the basic message that the study aims to convey.

Weak representation of ultimate programme beneficiaries by their representatives, capacity deficiencies of partners that are target to development efforts, and suspicion between partners stand out as factors that jeopardise partnerships. The study results suggest that certain converging European features are present in the three programmes at hand despite their apparently different domains. The qualifications to those features are different in each of the three cases studied:

1. In the first case studied the definite European aspect of the programme and its evaluation derived *directly* from the Structural Funds regulation at hand.
2. In the second case the European aspect is present not directly but by *analogy* between the EU concept of “partnership” and the same concept as utilised by the international development co-operation community.
3. In the third case the European aspect operates through an *implication* chain that stretches from the integration concept “subsidiarity” to the integration concept “partnership”.

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