International practices of Agricultural Research Impact Assessment

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Context

- Research Impact Assessment (RIA) is high on the agenda of PROs
- The scientific credibility of the assessment is of great concern to them

Yet

- There seem to be a gap (Shapira and Kuhlmann, 2013) between
1. State of the art theoretical recommendations for RIA published in academic journal (Donovan et al, 2011)
2. and assessment methods implemented by PROs

Still, RIA in practice is poorly documented (Joly et al 2016)

Objective of the research

- To enlighten RIA practices

- To document the gap between theory and practice of impact assessment in agricultural PROs

Data description and method

- Screening of practices of 5 agricultural PROs which are active in impact assessment :

  CGIAR (International consortium)

  CSIRO (Australia)

  USDA (USA)

  EMBRAPA (Brazil)

  INRA (France)

- Desk research and semi-conducted interviews with senior managers of each PRO (#12 interviewees)

Results

- Most agricultural PROs <u>recently</u> attemped to assess societal impact

- A variety of methods and implementations schemes are used

- A theory-practice gap is confirmed:

State of the art literature	Observed practices
Combined qualitative and quantitative methods (Donovan)	Qualitative approaches exist, but are often very limited and are used to justify quantification
Ex-post assessment (Feller)	Impact is hardly approached. In-itinere impacts are monitored and existing ex-post approaches barely enlighten the design of monitoring approaches
Contribution analysis (Mayne)	Efforts are made to compute attribution shares of impacts

Explaination of the theory-practice gap

Reasons for this gap originate at to steps:

1. The institutional rationale for selecting a method

2. The implementation design of the method in each PRO

1. Rationale for the institutional choice of a RIA method

•Competing objectives

Accountability to external funders is often prioritized. Funders set quantified targets and expect monitoring of impact reach quantification of their attribution share

$\Rightarrow$No qualitative ex-post if accountability aimed

Strategic learning and management is also often targeted when performing RIA, but cannot match the long impact generation temporality

$\Rightarrow$No ex-post if strategic learning aimed

•Legitimacy and isomorphism

A dominant method get widely adopted by PROs, particularly when funding is uncertain, at the expense of perceived illegitimate alternatives

$\Rightarrow$Traditional quantitative method remain

Existing routines of RIA have gained their legitimacy through past successful experiences.

=> Inertia in RIA routines

2. RIA implementation setting and constraints

- Temporality of evaluation

Given impact temporality, ex-post assessment of 'real societal impacts' is to be performed several years after the research project and its funding ended. No budget is allocated to assessment.

$\Rightarrow$ No ex-post after project budget is discontinued

- Credibility of evaluation

Credibility of assessment requires external evaluation, less able to qualitatively describe innovation processes

$\Rightarrow$ No qualitative if external credibilty is at stakes

… RIA implementation setting and constraints

- Powers balance to funding agencies

Externally commissioned and funded evaluations are to comply with funder requirements (often asking regular monitoring, quantification and attribution share)

$\Rightarrow$ Evaluation design constraints by external commission and funding

- Availability of data

Temporality of impacts may trigger memory losses of research processes and data

$\Rightarrow$ Ex-post is limited by memory retained

- Evaluators legitimacy

Limited budget and staff dedicated to assessment lead to engage researchers in (self-)assessment. Assessing past research, to which they did not necessarily take part, is challenging for motivation and legitimacy.

$\Rightarrow$ Ex-post is limited by legitimacy and motivation matters

Conclusion

- Literature claims that several objectives may be pursued when performing RIA

- In practice, these objectives are competing, and require different (/antagonist?) methods and implementation settings

- It may be necessary to make choices between these objectives, and adopt the corresponding ideal-type of evaluation (type 1/type 2; Power, 1994) (oriented toward external control or internal learning; unidimensional or multidimensional; evaluation process may assume low trust or high trust between evaluators and evaluated; evaluation may be performed by external experts in control institutions or selected insiders;…)

- The literature on state of the art methods of RIA should better account for practical issues related to institutional requirements and implementation constraints in order to edict scientifically grounded best practices of RIA

Perspectives

- Results on 5 PROs: not exhaustive but a certain diversity of situations

- Results to be strenghtened on a greater sample of data and using focus group

- Hypotheses to explain theory-practice gap are now to be tested

- The methods PROs use have an effect…
- This is an ongoing work…

Thank you for your attention

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