NEW HORIZONS \ NEW CHALLENGES
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Evaluation through impact: a different view point

Emanuela Reale* Maria Nedeva°

Duncan Thomas° Emilia Primeri*

*CERIS CNR, Italy °MiOIR-MBS, University of Manchester

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- Types of impact

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Why impact is relevant?

- Topical issue because of:

  - *Evaluation*: effectiveness question whether the policy instrument is doing the right thing

  - *Reflexivity*: scrutinizing the relationships between the actual requirements of a system, activities and results, and the ultimate change the policy instrument wants to achieve

  - *Advocacy*: impact is used to justify the future of a particular policy instrument (e.g. funding scheme) taking into account values and commitment

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What is impact?

- Process of identifying future consequences of current actions at individual, organisational or system level
  - "...any difference and/or change of social actors or phenomena that can be partially or wholly attributed to other social actors or phenomena." (Becker, 2001)

- *Impact is a difference of B that can be attributed to A*
  - Impact as attributable change
  - Outline the object precipitating change
  - Outline the changing object(s)
  - Causal attribution of change
  - Measuring the change

- *Impact as the potential change a policy instrument is likely to generate*
  - Achieving a political aim (normative rationale - in our case internationalization)
  - Addressing issues faced by knowledge dynamics (problem solving rationale - what drive internationalization, what explain the selection of a particular instrument, what are the institutional constraints, etc)

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Types of impact

	Intended	Unintended
Expected	Straight runs	Collateral
Unexpected	Long shots	Accidentals

Problems with impact assessment

- Methodological problems: measuring and attributing impact is problematic (time lag, multiple causes)

- Ontological problems: the relationship between the 'impactor' and 'impacted' is not direct (there are many intervening factors/variables)

- Axiological problems: actual outcome has only very distant relationship to signals and actions from the scheme
  - whether or not a piece of funded research become 'path-breaking' is not within the influence of the funder (EURECIA, 2012, Nedeva, 2013)
  - the same holds true when programs aim at improving research activities in the firms, and an impact on the wealth creation is expected

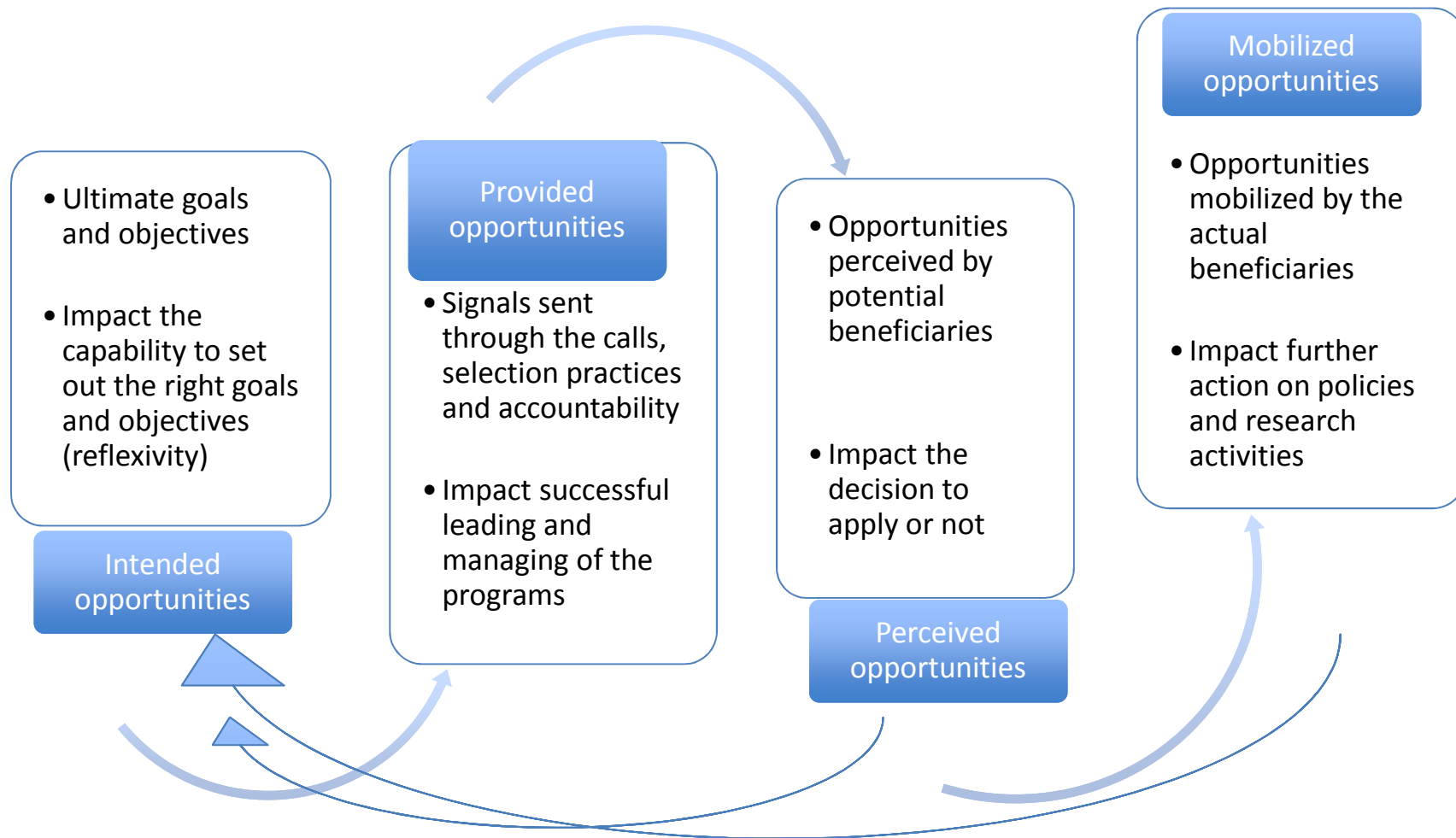CERIS-CNR

What research funding programs are?

- Programs are "the creatures of legislative politics and of bureaucratic politics" (Weiss, 1993)

- Research funding programs are aimed at affecting strategies

- They involves different actors (political, implementation, beneficiaries, stakeholders) that have different intentions and way of interpreting the programs (Lepori and Reale, 2012)

- They use a set of core practices (selection, funding rules and accountability) that contribute to shape the interpretation of meanings and to shape actions

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Impact as set of opportunities

- A research funding programme can be seen as a mechanism embodying four kinds of opportunities: 'intended opportunities', 'provided opportunities', 'perceived opportunities' and 'mobilised opportunities'

- These opportunities create the conditions for change to occur, or not as the case may be

- Opportunities affect the different actors involved and are shaped by the complex social interactions, negotiations and bargaining that characterize the policy instruments

- Opportunities can generate variety of outcomes and changes – these depend on the way in which they are enacted and perceived

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Opportunities

Intended opportunities

- Ultimate goals and objectives
- Impact the capability to set out the right goals and objectives (reflexivity)

Provided opportunities

- Signals sent through the calls, selection practices and accountability
- Impact successful leading and managing of the programs

Perceived opportunities

- Opportunities perceived by potential beneficiaries
- Impact the decision to apply or not

Mobilized opportunities

- Opportunities mobilized by the actual beneficiaries
- Impact further action on policies and research activities

Empirical base

- Empirical testing 2 out of 10 cases from the JOREP Project
  - 1 Open research funding scheme: SINERGIA (Switzerland)
  - 1 Joint research funding scheme: ORA (UK, FR, DE)

- *Intended-Provided opportunities and operational reasoning: interviews*
  - Official documents, Practices of selection, funding and accountability;
- *Perceived and mobilized opportunities, follow on: survey of beneficiaries*
  - Before and after the funding

- Rules and management
  - money, bureaucracy, transparency, funding duration, evaluation
- Uniqueness of the funding programs
  - Bigger networking, Geographic/or intellectual cross boundaries, risk taking, public-private collaboration, internationalization
- Exploitation of the results and concrete advantages

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Methodological choices

Type of impact	Straight runs	Long shots	Collateral	Accidentals

Data collection	Single	Multiple

Control group	Yes	No

Timing of study	Ex-ante	Real-time	Ex-post

Attribution	Statistics	Mechanisms

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The research-funding programs

- SINERGIA
  - started in 2008 - CHF 48 million in 2010
  - All disciplines, interdisciplinarity, national priorities
  - Networking between groups and synergies between fields
  - Up to one non Swiss applicant per project
  - *"to have normal project funding with an international component"*

- ORA – Open Research Area
  - Started in 2009 originating from the 'Bonn Group'
  - Social sciences and Humanities
  - Internationalization
  - Coordination between Funding Agencies (UK,DE,NL+FR)
  - *"bring the best brains together"*

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Perceived and mobilized opportunities SINERGIA

	Risk-taking	Bureaucratic aspects (less bureaucracy)	Industry-academic collaboration	Trans-national/cross disciplinary research
YY	29,5%	55,3%	0%	74,5%
NY	40,9%	44,7%	4,4%	14,9%
YN	0%	0%	2,2%	8,5%
NN	29,5%	0%	93,3%	2,1%

(% of respondents = 47 out of 85) 63,3% cross-disciplinary, 30% trans-national

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Perceived and mobilized opportunities ORA

	Risk-taking	Bureaucratic aspects	Industry-academic collaboration	Transnational research/cross disciplinary research
YY	23,8%	37,5%	0%	88,5%
NY	9,5%	58,3%	4,3%	7,7%
YN	9,5%	0%	0%	0%
NN	57,1%	4,2%	95,7%	3,8%

% of respondents = 27 out of 42; trans-national research 91%

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Results: the follow up from SINERGIA

- No partner country restrictions
- Possibility to apply again to do follow-on work
- Cross-domain, cross-university collaboration opportunities *(crossing 'artificial borders')*, with support to truly integrated teams and to networks
- Support to novelty/risk-taking activities
- Ability to fund non-Swiss partners and/or bring in non-Swiss PhDs, not as a compulsory rule rather as a further possibility to be used when it is concretely helpful
- Prestigious
- Competent evaluation *(writing proposals was 'about science and nothing else')*
- No political top-down framework; *no need 'right wording' to 'fit a call'; 'no need to look for partners in other countries when the world's best people are next door*

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Results: the follow up from ORA

- *"Less bureaucratic than in other European-based funding schemes"*

- Possibility to set up smaller, more coherent teams than in other EU-funded initiatives to focus on precise goals

- Cross-national/international, innovative collaborations on targeted research topics and with longer-term duration

- Better, more thorough, fairer, and "*more international review process than other schemes*" (mainly the EU ones)

- *"Greater acceptance of high-risk research proposals"*, when they come up

- *"Competitive spirit"* of the participating national funders

- Since certain countries are excluded, it was not possible to involve all the partners the beneficiaries wished to

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Concluding remarks

- Moving from attributable change to conditions for change (evaluation through the impact)

- Assessing the possibilities for an impact might enter in action (uniqueness-substantial differences)

- The content of evaluation is not how far the programs 'do the right things' rather how far the programs allow 'to do things better' (enabling capability)

- Going inside the mechanisms in order to unpacking the conditions that might generate an impact –whatever it shall be
  - Content of the research (new lines under risk-taking)
  - Funding Agencies (advantages of flexibility, bureaucracy, funding portfolio)
  - Individuals/institutions (internationalization, cross-disciplinary)
  - Investigating unintended (what is likely to produce collaterals and accidentals)

- Valuable approach for policy reflexivity and advocacy

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