



International Scientific Conference on STI Policy Evaluation,  
Vienna, 14-15 November 2013



## The influence of evaluations on STI policy making

Juergen Streicher  
15 November 2013

PhD Candidate at WU Vienna  
Supported by the IEV Programme of the Austrian Institute of Technology

- Growing line of research about the actual or probable **consequences of evaluations:**
  - Concerns have been raised about their effectiveness to **fuel change in policy making** (in Austria, e.g. Griebler 2003, Biegelbauer 2007, 2013, CREST 2008, Reiner & Smoliner 2012).
  - Limited consequences in STI/RTI area, rather incremental than radical (e.g. INNO Appraisal 2010)
- Research on evaluation use has largely focused on the instrument. Less attention is paid to actors, interactions amongst them, and institutionalized rules. (see e.g. Leviton and Hughes (1981), Thompson and King (1981), Cousins and Leithwood (1986), Shulha and Cousins (1997), Johnson et al. (2009))

# Thesis: Actors, institutions and the role of STI/RTI evaluations

- **Objective:** to better understand the influence of evaluation processes and results on STI/RTI policy making, using Austria as case in point.
- **Guiding questions:**
  - Through which pathways do evaluation processes and results influence the STI/RTI policy making process?
  - Which factors and mechanisms determine the influence of the evaluation processes and results on the STI/RTI policy making process in general, and the behaviour of actors in particular?
- **Framework:** Actor-centred institutionalism (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995), concept of “evaluation influence” (e.g. Kirkhart 2000, Henry and Mark 2003)

# The case for influence: Exploring mechanism of change

- Investigate effects of an evaluation in the **broadest possible terms**, incorporating (if possible) also indirect and unintended effects.
- Examine **how influence is exerted**, to understand mechanisms of change and build knowledge about them:
  - E.g. tracing learning processes aside from evaluation use
  - “How are evaluations integrated into learning processes?”
- Shed light on interlinked processes through which evaluation findings are processed.
- Understand stakeholder interactions, their viewpoints, interests and strategies.

- **Literature review** and document analysis to delineate potential pathways of influence which are re-assessed against the findings of empirical research.
- **Case study approach** with cross-case comparison
  - Selected: IV2S/IV2Splus (evaluated in 2012), Headquarter (2011), TAKE OFF (2009)
  - Fed. Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT) as the programme owner, managed by the Austrian Research Promotional Agency (FFG)
- In-depth interviews with representatives from BMVIT, FFG, evaluators and other stakeholders (e.g. programme beneficiaries)

# Factors potentially affecting evaluation influence: Examples

- **Institutional context:**
  - Political/administrative system, discussion culture and policy style, evaluation history and culture,...
  - Actor constellations/interactions in programmes before, during and after an evaluation,...
- **The role of actors:**
  - Influence depends on actors' capabilities, perceptions and preferences (i.e. strategies)
  - Actors' participation and involvement in the evaluation process
- **Evaluation design and attributes:**
  - Participatory approach, timing, quality, relevance,...

# Potential pathways of influence: Examples

- **Setting up** an evaluation, e.g. specifying the tender, stakeholder participation...
- Evaluation **process**, e.g. the design and methodology, thus the interaction alongside envisaged interfaces such as kick-off meeting(s), interviews, focus groups, presentation...
- Evaluation **output and follow-up**, e.g. how the findings are perceived and how they are processed, the formal/informal ways through which evaluations are linked to policy development, the deployment of follow-up procedures and re-design processes...

- Diverse institutional set-up (“agencification”), actors with different strategies and agendas (“game of interest”, e.g. Griebler 2003)
- Strong and shared evaluation culture and promotion of evaluation capacity development (e.g. FTEVAL)
- **Evaluations:** (e.g. INNO Appraisal 2010, Reiner and Smoliner 2012)
  - Relevant, timely, and high-quality programme evaluations;
  - Issues: Lack of specific types, availability and quality of data, lack of binding mechanisms for implementing results, **different expectations** and evaluation needs among programme managers, agencies and ministries.



# Lessons learned

- Aligned mind-sets of actors, in particular between ministry and agency at the administrative level
- Clear rules and norms that endorse evaluations as a routine, which entails two sides of a coin:
  - Broad acceptance among actors, high evaluation capacity, established patterns on how to set up and run evaluations.
  - Standardised, instrumental approach which puts accountability and legitimation at forefront.
- Evaluations are rather loosely connected to performance improvement and policy development.

## Lessons learned (cont.)

- Interaction, learning as important change mechanisms:
  - Strongest influence on the individual, lower on the interpersonal and collective level (see also Burr 2009).
  - Influence is determined by how people or units are linked, e.g. to (formalised, strategy) processes.
- Evaluations of this size are too small to bend rules or norms: But they add to the accumulation of knowledge (Weiss 1998), causing “trickle down” effects (Biegelbauer and Griebler 2009).
- Visibility of programmes in overarching (STI/RTI-related) strategies and/or policy documents play a crucial role.

- Increasing the degree of formalisation?
  - A **mandatory statement** of programme stakeholder on the evaluation, published alongside the evaluation report?
  - **Status seminars**, in which achievements and implementation steps are presented and discussed?
- In-house “**policy intelligence hub**” that systematically reviews and synthesised evaluation findings?

**Thank you!**

- Biegelbauer (2007) How much evidence is there in evidence based policy making? Paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> annual ECPR General Conference, September 6-8, 2007, Pisa, Italy
- Biegelbauer P and Grießler E (2009) Political Practices of Civil Servants in the Austrian Law-Making Process. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 38(1): 61-78
- Biegelbauer P (2013) How Does Politics Learn - Learning from Experience in Politics and Administration. VS Verlag, Wiesbaden
- Burr EM (2009) Evaluation Use and Influence among Project Directors of State GEAR UP Grants, Ph.D. thesis, University of Tennessee
- Cousins JB and Leithwood KA (1986) Current empirical research on evaluation utilization. *Review of Educational Research* 56(3): 331-364
- CREST (2008) CREST expert group report on the design and implementation of national policy mixes. Policy Mix Peer Reviews. Country Report Austria. September 2008
- Grießler E. (2003): Innovation und Politikgestaltung: Administrative Kulturen in der Technologiepolitik – ein Vergleich zwischen Österreich und den Niederlanden. In: Pichler R. (Ed.): Innovationsmuster in der österreichischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung, Unternehmen, Politik und Innovationsverhalten, Wien
- Henry GT and Mark MM (2003) Beyond use: Understanding evaluation's influence on attitudes and actions. *American Journal of Evaluation* 24(3): 293-314
- INNO-Appraisal (2010): Understanding Evaluation of Innovation Policy in Europe. Brussels and Manchester: European Commission, DG Enterprise

# Literature (cont.)

Johnson K, Greenseid LO, Toal SA, King JA, Lawrenz F and Volkov B (2009) Re-search on evaluation use: A review of the empirical literature from 1986 to 2005. *American Journal of Evaluation* 30(3): 377-410

Kirkhart KE (2000) Reconceptualizing evaluation use: An integrated theory of influence. In: Caracelli VJ and Preskill H (eds.) *The Expanding Scope of Evaluation Use*. *New Directions for Evaluation* 88:5-23. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco [CA]

Leviton LC and Hughes EFX (1981) Research on the utilization of evaluations: A review and synthesis. *Evaluation Review* 5(4): 525-549

Mayntz R and Scharpf FW (1995) Der Ansatz des akteurszentrierten Institutionalismus. In: Mayntz R and Scharpf FW (eds.) *Gesellschaftliche Selbstregelung und politische Steuerung*, pp. 39-72. Campus, Frankfurt and New York

Reiner C and Smoliner S (2012) *Outputorientierte Evaluierung öffentlich geförderter FTI-Programme*. Wien

Shulha LM and Cousins JB (1997) Evaluation use: Theory, research, and practice since 1986. *Evaluation Practice* 18(1): 195-208

Thompson B and King JA (1981) Evaluation utilization: A literature review and re-search agenda. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles [CA]

Weiss C (1998) Have we learned anything new about the use of evaluation? *American Journal of Evaluation* 19(1): 21-33