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Accelerating the energy transition for all: Evaluation's role in effective policy making

Is there still time for evaluation? A review of good practices to integrate evaluation into the policy cycle

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ABSTRACT

Review of evaluation practices shows that improving them is not only about technical (e.g., data collection) or methodological (e.g., defining a baseline) issues. Organizational issues can be as important, and particularly when considering the planning and use of evaluation. These issues can be critical at a time with both, a sense of urgency to act and a need to optimize the use of public resources.

This paper explores the connections between evaluation and the policy cycle, and how to make evaluation an integral part of policy management, focusing on energy efficiency policies. As a starting point, a review of case studies of evaluations, including interviews with evaluation customers and evaluators, is used to analyse through practical examples how doing evaluation can help improve policies.

Then, the concept of policy cycle is analysed in view of how evaluation can be related to it. This shows how an integrated approach can be fruitful for both, policy developments and evaluation. Based on usual ways to describe policy cycle and evaluation processes, a joint representation is then developed to illustrate how both processes could interact.

However, this integration does rarely occur naturally, due to barriers. The paper thus reviews key issues to tackle when aiming at this integration. This provides a basis to characterize and structure the main barriers as reported by stakeholders involved in evaluations. This framework was finally used to present good practices in the form of actions that can be done by persons or units in charge of evaluation within public bodies, to tackle these issues and facilitate the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle. These actions have been identified through the review of case studies and the suggestions from stakeholders. They have been grouped in short-term actions possible to implement along an evaluation, and medium-term actions. Suggestions of actions on three issues are presented to illustrate the approach.

Introduction

Analysing evaluation practices and barriers to their development has shown that performing evaluation is not only about practical (e.g., data collection) or methodological (e.g., defining a baseline) issues. Organizational issues can be as important, and particularly when considering the planning and use of evaluation (Bini et al. 2017; Broc et al. 2018a).

Evaluation use has been a topic of research for more than 50 years (Alkin and Daillak 1971; Weiss 1967). However, when dealing with evaluation of energy efficiency policies, this topic appears to be much less researched and discussed than evaluation methods and methodological issues (see e.g. Broc et al. 2007; Peters et al. 2007; Vine 2008). This can for example be seen in the low number of papers dealing with evaluation use in the proceedings of IEPEC and IEPPEC.

This paper presents findings from the European project EPATEE (Evaluation into Practice to Achieve Targets for Energy Efficiency) that aimed at the development of evaluation practices for energy efficiency policies. This project covered both sides of the evaluation practices: methodological (see e.g. Broc et al. 2018a, 2019a) and organisational. This paper deals with the latter, with the assumption that promoting the integration of evaluation into the policy can be an effective way to enhance evaluation practices. Weiss (1998) indeed emphasized that "*the best way that we know to date of encouraging use of evaluation is through involving potential users in defining the study and helping to interpret results and through reporting results to them regularly while the study is in progress*."

We start by looking at how evaluation can be used, as a test of our assumption. Then, the concept of policy cycle is analysed in view of how evaluation can be related to it. Based on usual ways to describe policy cycle and evaluation processes, a joint representation is then developed to illustrate how both processes could interact. However, this integration does rarely occur naturally, due to barriers. The paper thus reviews key issues to tackle when aiming at this integration. This provides a basis to characterize and structure the main barriers as reported by stakeholders involved in evaluations. This framework was finally used to present actions that could help a better integration of evaluation into the policy cycle, as illustrated through three examples.

Showing why and how evaluation can be used is essential to the development of evaluation practices

Evaluation practices related to 23 energy efficiency policies in various European countries were analysed to investigate why and how evaluation was used, among other objectives. The selection of the case studies was not meant to be exhaustive in the sense of being representative of evaluation practices in Europe, but to cover a diversity of situations (policy instruments, sectors, countries, evaluation methods) and to provide interesting feedback in order to identify both, good practices and difficulties encountered. For each case, two sources were combined: first, the evaluation report(s) and related information available (online or in paper documentation); second, an interview made with the evaluation customer and/or the lead evaluator.

The findings presented here are mostly based on the information collected through the interviews. For more details about these case studies, see (Broc et al. 2018b). Another source used to identify practical examples about how evaluation has been used was the feedback provided by policy officers or evaluation experts in presentations made at the EPATEE workshops[1].

One of the key messages from all these exchanges was that all the persons we interviewed, or who made presentations at EPATEE workshop, reported a positive feedback about what evaluation can bring to improve policies. This observation is of course biased, as the persons who accepted to be interviewed or to make a presentation have been actively involved in evaluations. Therefore, we can assume that they were convinced beforehand of the interest of doing evaluations.

It would be misleading to deny that evaluation can sometimes be perceived as a burden. A larger survey of stakeholders done in EPATEE indeed showed that the possible lack of interest of top management for evaluation was among the three main barriers to evaluation graded by the respondents (Bini et al. 2017; Broc et al. 2018a). Our research to find interesting examples for case studies also showed that it was more difficult to find examples in some countries. We cannot conclude that evaluation practices were non-existent there, as we did not aim at a comprehensive review of the evaluation practices. However, the contacts interviewed in many countries confirmed that the development of evaluation practices varies across countries (Maric et al. 2018). Reminding the added value of performing evaluations can therefore be useful to support the development of evaluation practices in these countries. The feedback from participants to the EPATEE activities indeed showed that an effective way to convince policy officers about the usefulness of evaluation was to get feedback from their peers about how it helped them.

The feedback we collected along the project showed the diversity of possible evaluation objectives, and provided a rich set of practical examples of evaluation use (see table below). All these examples show the added value that evaluation can bring and how it can help improving policies: from providing evidence to get political

[1] The proceedings of these workshops can be found on the EPATEE website: https://epatee.eu/events-workshops

support (and thereby funding!) to fine-tuning the implementation processes (for more details, see Broc et al. 2018b and Broc et al. 2019a).

Table 1. Examples about how evaluation has been used to improve policies.

Examples of outputs/outcomes from the evaluation	**Cases where these examples were mentioned**
Political outputs	
Evidence/accountability for decision-making (particularly about funding)	Better Energy Homes (IE), EE Fund (DE), Environment Support Scheme (AT), Individual heat metering (CR), Voluntary energy audits (FI), White Certificates scheme (IT), WAP (US)
Reinforcing support from policymakers and other stakeholders	Better Energy Homes (IE), Voluntary agreements (FI), Voluntary energy audits (FI), Nordsyn, WAP (US)
Improving policy management	
Optimising the programme management	EE Programmes of Vienna (AT), Renovation programmes (LT), Supplier Obligation (UK)
New components added to increase scheme participation	Voluntary agreements (FI), Renovation programmes (LT), Supplier Obligation (UK)
Improving the application process	Primes Energie (BE), Environment Support Scheme (AT)
Improving monitoring and conditions for future evaluations	EE Programmes of Vienna (AT), EEO scheme (DK), Agreement for freight companies (FR), "Future Investments" programme (FR), Better Energy Homes (IE), Nordsyn, WAP (US)
Adapting the scheme and its rules	
Redesign of the incentives	Energy renovation of public sector buildings (CR), Individual heat metering (CR) Environment Support Scheme (AT), Renovation programmes (LT)
Improving data collection and verification processes	EEO scheme (UK), Environment Support Scheme (AT), Agreement for freight companies (FR), "Future Investments" programme (FR), Supplier Obligation (UK)
Updating the list of eligible actions	Primes Energie (BE), EEO scheme (DK)
Improved technical recommendations/requirements	Warm Front (England), Environment Support Scheme (AT), Voluntary energy audits (FI), EE Fund (DE), Multi-year agreements (NL), Warm Front (UK), WAP (US)
Better understanding of how the scheme works	
Reactivity of households to changes in the incentive design	Primes Energie (BE)
Detecting new trends and changes	Environment Support Scheme (AT)

Examples of outputs/outcomes from the evaluation	Cases where these examples were mentioned
Better understanding of interactions between policies	Voluntary energy audits (FI)
Better understanding of the reasons to participate (or not participate) in the scheme	Agreement for freight companies (FR), Renovation programmes (LT)
Understanding of interactions between policies	Voluntary energy audits (FI)
Understanding reasons for innovations' successes and failures	Agreement for freight companies (FR)
Understanding impacts and side-effects of the policy	Purchase tax on new cars (NL), Supplier Obligation (UK), Warm Front (UK), WAP (US)

Evaluation and the policy cycle

The policy cycle: a useful concept to analyse policy management

The policy cycle is an approach used to plan and analyse the different phases of policy development (Giorgi 2017; HM Treasury 2011; Young and Quinn 2002). There are many ways to represent the policy cycle (see one example in Figure 1). As highlighted by Young and Quinn (2002), "*it is important to emphasise that policy processes are never as linear, or cyclical, as implied in the model. But, looking at the policy process in terms of these stages or functional elements can help us to understand how this process does (or should) work*."

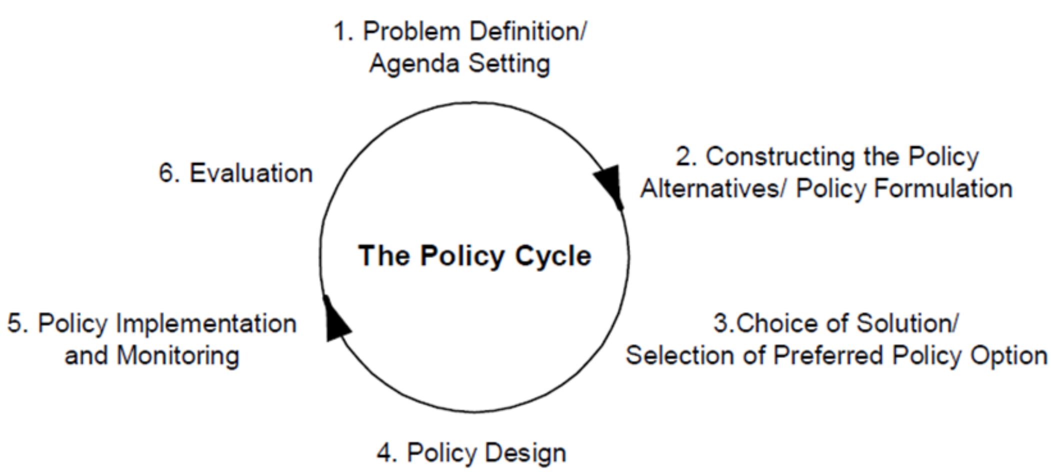

Figure 1. The policy cycle (Source: Young and Quinn 2002).

As emphasised by Giorgi (2017), "the number and names of each phase can vary but the essence behind each step remains consistent". Giorgi then summarizes the main general steps of a policy cycle as follows:

1. Agenda setting: "*The general approach starts out with agenda setting which identifies the problem or issue that needs addressing. This first step often has specific phases of 'defining the issue' and 'understanding the situation'*."
2. Considering and formulating policy options / alternatives: "*This is then followed by steps which formulate and assess the different alternative courses of action and preparation for delivery*."

3. Choosing and specifying (designing) the preferred option: "*In the following phase, Government decides on the course of action (which includes maintaining the status quo i.e. taking no action)*."
4. Implementing and monitoring: "*The decision made in the previous step will then be put into practice through implementation and monitoring*".
5. Evaluating and providing feedback for next period: "*The final phase (which is the first step in the next cycle) is about assessing the effectiveness of the policy in terms of its intended objectives, outcomes and impacts. This 'assessment of effectiveness' is done through evaluation and adapting lessons learned into the future delivery of the policy*."

As reminded in the UK Magenta Book (HM Treasury 2011), "*in practice this one-directional relationship rarely holds, the process is often iterative and there are significant interdependencies between the various elements*".

The qualitative feedback collected from policy stakeholders by Giorgi (2017) confirms that they usually know about policy cycle's representations, but that they don't necessarily use it. Mostly because it describes "*how things should work in theory rather than how they actually worked in practice. Though the steps in the cycle were depicted as neat and compact, the real world was much messier and complex*". Still, most of the stakeholders interviewed by Giorgi acknowledge that the policy cycle provides a basis to present, analyse and discuss a policy and particularly the process of its development.

Evaluation is more than the last step of the policy cycle

When representing the policy cycle, evaluation is usually shown as one step of the cycle, being the last one and closing the loop. This indeed corresponds to the usual definition of ex-post evaluations. However, evaluation practices and the policy cycle are much more interrelated in practice, as pointed in the UK Magenta Book (HM Treasury 2011): "*evaluations can, in fact, occur at practically any other time. And importantly, decisions affecting and relating to any evaluation will almost always be taken much earlier in the policy process*".

This point is essential. Giorgi (2017) indeed reported from her survey of policy makers and implementers that "*interviewees often stated that, though evaluation was embedded throughout the policy cycle, having it as the final step suggested it is something you only think about at the end*." Thinking about evaluation only at the end of the policy cycle is a major source of difficulties to conduct evaluations (as also observed in the case studies done for the EPATEE project): not enough time available to get evaluation results for the decision making process, problems with data collection, difficulties to find or reconstitute the initial policy theory and objectives, etc.

At the opposite, Giorgi's interviewees recommended a more integrated approach: " *'preparation for evaluation' and 'evidence gathering' happened or should happen at each phase while the completion of a formal evaluation happened at the final step 'evaluate & adapt'* ".

Several stakeholders interviewed for EPATEE (see Bini et al. 2017) also pointed that integrating evaluation in the policy design was a good practice: results from previous ex-post evaluations and/or ex-ante evaluations of policies under consideration can inform the design process. Then thinking about evaluation from the start (i.e. when designing a policy) helps ensuring the feasibility of future ex-post evaluations, particularly by optimizing data collection.

Interactions between the policy and evaluation processes

Beyond the usual good practice of planning evaluation early in the policy cycle, the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle should thus be seen in the two ways, as shown in Figure 2.

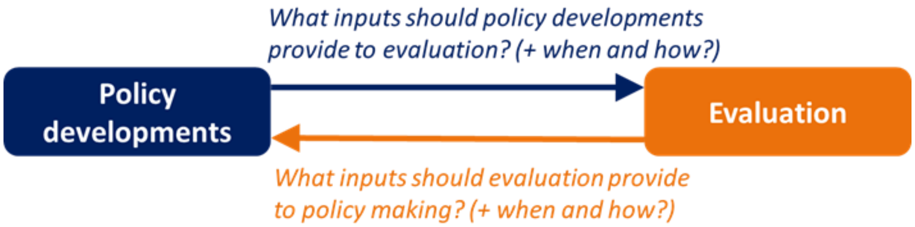

Figure 2. Two-way integration of evaluation into the policy cycle (source: Broc et al. 2019b).

The usual descriptions of evaluation process (see e.g. BetterEvaluation 2014 or DECC 2011) and policy cycle (see Figure 1 above) can be crossed to identify key interactions (red arrows in Figure 3below), in order to illustrate how they can be integrated.

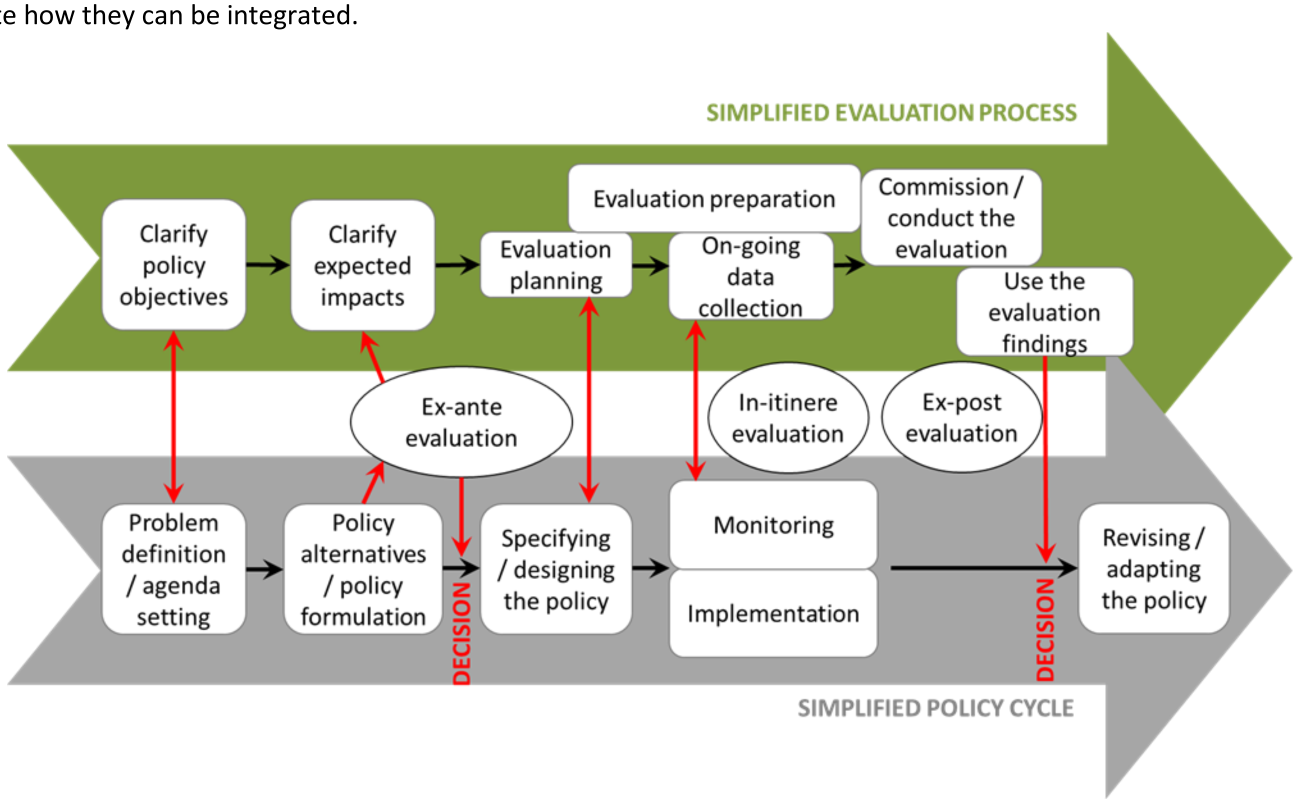

Figure 3. Joint representation of the policy cycle and evaluation processes (source: Broc et al. 2019b).

As reminded above about the policy cycle, these processes are not necessarily linear. In particular, a good integration of evaluation into the policy cycle would mean multiple, and almost on-going, interactions between both.

Integrating of evaluation into the policy cycle: from theory to practice

Key issues for the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle

Based on the interviews with policy stakeholders, Giorgi (2017) identified possible conflicts between the desired ideal of how evaluation should fit into the policy cycle and how things work in practice. She summarized this in the following key points on how does/should evaluation fit into the policy cycle:

- "*Evidence gathering and preparation for evaluation is going on in different ways across all phases; this is/should be adapted and fed back to the relevant phase;*

- *Evaluation cannot delay policy development; there needs to be a timely input with quick feedback loops;*
- *Co-produced working between policymakers and analysts at each phase automatically embeds evaluation in each step, challenging the view that evaluation is done separately by the evaluation team and is, therefore, something that happens to policy rather than a way of working; and*
- *The policy cycle is/should be a 'cycle'; the 'final' step in one wheel is the 'first' step in the next wheel ad infinitum*."

Based on this analysis and the review of the EPATEE case studies (see Broc et al. 2018b), a set of key issues for integrating evaluation into the policy cycle could be identified, analysing the links between evaluation and policy cycle and why these issues are important to take into account (see Table 2).

Table 2. Key issues for integrating evaluation into the policy cycle (source: Broc et al. 2019b).

Issue	Links between evaluation and policy cycle	Why it is important
Political will (top-management commitment)	Interest of the top management in the evaluation process, and clear commitment about the role of the evaluation in the decision making process.	A clear political will about the evaluation process is essential to ensure sufficient resources will be dedicated to evaluation, and to support the legitimacy of the evaluation.
Resource allocation (time, people, budget)	Balance between resources dedicated to policy implementation and to evaluation. Possible synergies to optimise resource use and limit the risks of "evaluation burden" (e.g. about data collection).	Lack of resources is one of the most frequently reported barrier to evaluation, leading to a lack of evaluation or evaluations done in bad conditions leading to unreliable results. Good integration of evaluation into the policy cycle can minimize evaluation costs, and shows added value of evaluation.
Evaluation planning and preparation	Timing of evaluation vs. decision-making process. Policy design → policy theory → starting point of the evaluation. Evaluation objectives should be based on policy objectives. Data needs and collection vs. monitoring system.	If the evaluation is not planned/prepared early enough, this will make it more difficult (and costly!), and will make it challenging to get results when needed. Early or embedded planning helps evaluation to be reliable, timely and focused on relevant priorities. In other words: to be effective and useful.
Legitimacy	Involvement of policy stakeholders in the evaluation process. Stakeholders' perception (and reception) of the evaluation. Conditions for evaluation results to be accepted and used for communication, consultation and/or decision making.	If the evaluation (and its process) is not seen by stakeholders as legitimate, then there is low chances that its results be considered and used. Stakeholders may refuse to share information needed for the evaluation, oppose to the communication of the results, or contest them.
Organisation	Definition of roles for each party (policy officers, evaluators, other stakeholders) in the evaluation process. Interactions (synergies and conflicts) between policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation.	An explicit and agreed organisation is essential for an effective implementation of the evaluation, and particularly for exchanges of information and data collection. It is also related to the legitimacy of the evaluation (see above).
Communication and mutual understanding	Communication and mutual understanding between policy implementers/officers and evaluators (and also among different services, departments or institutions).	Lack in communication creates difficulties in the information flows (both ways: information needed by the evaluators from the implementers, and information provided by the evaluators to the implementers and decision makers).

		Mutual understanding is also needed in both ways: for evaluators to understand the policy background and elements, and for policy officers or makers to understand the evaluation results (including their limitations).
Communication about the evaluation and its results	Audience of the evaluation vs. parties involved or interested in the policy. Timing and forum to discuss evaluation results.	These aspects are essential to create the conditions for the evaluation to be acknowledged and used.

Insights from current practices about integrating evaluation into the policy cycle

The many issues (e.g. financial, technical, organisational, political, etc.) that can impede an effective evaluation or reduce its scope are also affecting the capability of evaluation to be integrated in the policy cycle, thereby contributing to continuous improvement. The interviews done for the EPATEE case studies confirm that by introducing and integrating evaluation in the policy cycle, policy effectiveness can be improved.

The second online survey of stakeholders done for the EPATEE project investigated, among other issues, challenges for the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle (Bini et al. 2018). Answers about current practices were analysed according to the profile of the respondents (evaluation customers and evaluators).

Half of the 12 evaluation customers answered that the evaluation results and conclusions were usually communicated to the various levels of hierarchy within the organisation (up to the top management / top levels). This was confirmed by another question for which only 1 (out of 12) respondent said that evaluation results were rarely discussed in his or her organisation. Whereas two said it was systematically the case, five that evaluation results were frequently discussed, and two that they were sufficiently discussed. So overall, when an evaluation is done, evaluation results would be discussed. This result should be taken with caution, due to the small sample size and the possible risk of bias that respondents could be considered front-runners in terms of evaluation practices.

As point of comparison, the qualitative survey done by Giorgi (2017) provides a more mixed picture: "*Policy stakeholders all stated that evaluation was and ought to be key to good and open policymaking. Evaluation, often indirectly and in certain circumstances, was believed to inform policy; however, interviewees stated that policy is not driven by evaluation outcomes. Often policy interviewees highlighted two facades of evaluation: an external, formal, independent assessment carried out for accountability purposes and an internal more iterative and reflective dialogue of what works*."

The situation varies a lot among the respondents to the EPATEE survey when dealing with practices for planning and undertaking evaluations. A sign that different practices are found among countries and/or institutions, from the absence of clear evaluation framework or guidelines to the systematic use of clear rules. This was confirmed by another question about the practices related to early planning of evaluation (i.e. plan the evaluation from the start of the policy measure): 6 respondents said that this practice is either frequent (3), systematic (1) or sufficient (1) in their organisation, 3 that it was rare, and the remaining 3 that they don't know.

The answers from evaluators also showed a diversity in the practices they encountered, from purely administrative evaluations to evaluations well linked to the policy process. More specifically about evaluation planning, 34% of the 29 evaluators said that the evaluations they made were either mostly (24%) or completely (10%) planned in advance. Whereas 25% said that they were mostly (21%) or completely (4%) decided and managed at the last moment. 38% mentioned a mix situation (partly planned, partly managed at the last moment). Evaluators' point of view would thus reflect more 'late planning' than evaluation customers. However, this point is to take with caution due to the small size of both samples.

A large majority of the surveyed evaluators (73%) said that their evaluation results were discussed by the policymakers or officers, either systematically (17%), frequently (21%) or sufficiently (35%). However, compared to the feedback from surveyed evaluation customers, the share of surveyed evaluators saying that this was rarely the case is higher (24% vs. 8%, i.e. only 1 evaluation customer).

At the end, the results of the survey showed a diversity in the practices, and that if good practices do exist, they are not systematically used.

Barriers to the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle

The second EPATEE online survey also provided insights about barriers that can impede an effective integration of evaluation into the policy cycle. Many answers about the barriers to integration of evaluation into the policy cycle raise issues similar to the barriers reported in the first EPATEE survey about evaluation practices (see Bini et al. 2017). Particularly about resources. But some are more specific to the links between evaluation and the policy cycle.

This was an open-ended question in the survey. So the results are mostly qualitative. Nevertheless, similar answers were grouped to analyse if some issues stand out, and to see if the answers could be matched with the issues identified in Table 2 above.

Four issues (Political will; Resource allocation; Evaluation planning and preparation; Communication and mutual understanding) are clearly present in the answers to the survey. The three other issues (Legitimacy; Organisation; Communication about the evaluation and its results) were not explicitly reflected in the answers. However, these issues were clearly raised in several of the interviews done for the EPATEE case studies, and also in the interviews done by Giorgi (2017).

About political will, seven answers emphasised that policymakers' lack of interest in evaluation and/or priority given to launching new policies or implementation could be one reason for other barriers to happen (financial and time resources, timing and planning, cultural aspects). Some of these answers pointed that these issues can be related to the turnover in the policymakers. One respondent also suggested that the lack of interest in evaluation could be because policymakers would assume that they know well the impacts of the policies. Four other answers go even further on this line, mentioning that policymakers might sometimes not be willing to see results different from what they are expecting. This feedback is moderated by another answer reporting a positive experience of public authorities that showed clear interest in the evaluation results and in using them. Another answer brought a complementary view indicating that evaluation is not always necessary from a decision making point of view. Some answers indeed highlighted that decisions can be the result of political compromise that do not necessarily take into account evidences brought by evaluation.

About resource allocation, the financial barrier was mentioned in a straightforward way in six answers, also emphasising that the resources available for evaluation can depend on the size (or budget) of the policy. Other answers raise cost-related issues rather than budget constraints (e.g. costs for data collection and analysis, administrative burden for participating parties). Time as a resource is also directly mentioned in three answers (less frequently than financial resources). In parallel, Giorgi (2017) mentioned that the issue of time resource is not only about having enough time to collect data, perform analysis, etc. It is also about not having enough time to involve people in the evaluation process or to set up agreements, partnerships to facilitate the evaluation.

About evaluation planning and preparation, two answers raise issues related to evaluation planning (e.g. data collection not planned early enough). More answers (5) deal with timing in terms of difficulties to match timeframe for evaluation and timeframe for decision processes. Giorgi (2017) also found from her interviews with policy stakeholders that timing is one of the main issues to achieve evidence-based policy making. She highlighted that "*policy and evaluation have two distinct tempos*". Policy implementation needs to be dynamic and reactive. Whereas evaluation requires to stand back and take time for analysing. Hence the challenge to coordinate both. Another issue raised by Giorgi's interviewees is the fact that policies are "*not being designed from the onset as 'evaluable' policies taking place in an interrelated system with a myriad of intervening factors impacting a non-linear process*".

Answers related to evaluation planning also pointed that problems with evaluation planning might be due to differences in the cultures or habits between decisional level (policymakers) and operational or technical level (policy officers and other implementers). These differences, or usual routines in decision making or policy management, are raised in six other answers pointing out communication issues within or between institutions, specifically between political and operational levels, as well as the need of knowledge transfer and capacity building for the different persons to be involved in the evaluation process and use of evaluation. Capacity building (for both sides, policymakers and evaluators) was also mentioned in six other answers.

Connected to the cultural aspects, four answers raised issues related to the definition or selection of evaluation indicators or criteria. This issue was also connected to the differences in viewpoints between operational agents, policymakers and evaluators who could be interested in different evaluation objectives or metrics, and have different understandings of the policy.

The qualitative survey done by Giorgi (2017) provides complementary insights, including about the issues not raised in the answers to the second EPATEE survey.

About the communication and use of the evaluation results, Giorgi highlighted that "*amongst respondents there was a sense of realism that, at times, circumstances and data do not allow for evaluation outcomes to influence policies*."

About the organisation of evaluation, one finding of Giorgi's survey is that the usual steps of an evaluation are not really linked up as the theory would suggest. In practice, they often operate separately. Mostly because they are managed by different persons, services or bodies. Each person might then have a limited view about the other steps (issue related to possible lack of time, or lack of communication between services or organisations).

Two other points highlighted by Giorgi can be linked to the issue of communication (between services or organisations): "*not having access to colleagues (e.g. policymakers not having access to policy analysts); and the high turnover of staff due to how career paths get forged*".

Another issue pointed in Giorgi's survey is that the expectations or objectives of the policy stakeholders might change between the very beginning of the evaluation process and its end. This can be due to evaluation priorities firstly based on a kind of wish list instead of being based on an analysis of the policy theory and needs for decision-making. But this can also be due to a change in the top management or even government.

About allocation of resources, some practitioners interviewed by Giorgi reported tensions between implementers and evaluators, because implementers saw evaluation as "*taking time, resources and energy away from delivery*". Which echoes the need to show the usefulness of evaluation, as discussed earlier.

Good practices to facilitate the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle

Giorgi (2017) summarizes as follows the overall approach of aiming at integrating evaluation into the policy cycle: "*Evaluation needs to be an integrative, continuous process not a one-off exercise at the end or a series of self-contained steps, it needs to become a way of working*".

Based on the analysis of the EPATEE case studies and online surveys, and on results from Giorgi (2017), we suggested practical examples of practices to facilitate the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle. They are not meant to be exhaustive, but to reflect empirical findings from the analysis of current practices for samples of evaluations. The objective is to contribute to experience sharing and capacity building. The suggested practices or actions have been structured according to the main issues identified in Table 2, and grouped in two categories, respectively short-term and medium-term actions.

The first category can be considered whenever launching a new evaluation (or better whenever launching a new or revising an existing policy). The second category includes suggestions to improve practices and facilitate the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle over time. Some of the actions can overlap as the different issues are often linked.

These actions should be seen as suggestions. They do not necessarily apply to all contexts and situations. Their relevance also depends on the 'magnitude' or ambition of the evaluation activities, the political stakes, size of the policy evaluated, history of the policy, etc.

The whole list of suggestions can be found in (Broc et al. 2019b). We present here three examples to illustrate the approach.

Clarifying expectations, what evaluation can bring and how it can be used

Political will to do evaluations is often linked to policymakers' interest in what they can get or learn from an evaluation. This can thus depend on their background and previous experience with policy making and evaluation. Ensuring that all parties involved in the evaluation are on the same line about what it can (or cannot) bring can thus be critical for the decision to launch an evaluation or the success of the evaluation.

Another key issue is policymakers' willingness to accept risk and failure. Experience sharing is then a way to overcome preconceived ideas. Particularly by showing that understanding reasons of failures, weaknesses or limitations is the best solution to learn how to design successful policies.

Table 3. Suggested actions about clarifying expectations.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS	Purpose(s)
Organise an exchange between the person in charge of the evaluation internally and the top-management in charge of the policy	• identify top-management's expectations towards evaluation; • agree on realistic expectations about what evaluation can and cannot achieve (Giorgi 2017)
Ensure that the evaluation includes indicators or metrics in line with policymakers' priorities	• ensure that the evaluation will bring findings that policymakers will be interested in • speak the same language as the policymakers

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS	Purpose(s)
Communicate about what evaluation can bring to policymakers, and share experience about how to handle 'bad' results. Raise awareness of policymakers about evaluation approaches (e.g. organising experience sharing workshops; preparing briefing notes that present testimonies from other policymakers about evaluations they have used)	• highlight findings and examples that will resonate with the priorities of the policymakers contacted; • overcome preconceived ideas about evaluation • avoid evaluation to be instrumented • get support from the top-management to evaluation activities
Providing a clear view of the evaluation process (and particularly of the means involved) and relate the evaluation budget to the whole budget of the policy (e.g. explaining that the evaluation process will be embedded in the policy cycle, and will use synergies with the policy implementation and monitoring; explaining that evaluation can help to optimize policy design and implementation, thereby generating cost savings)	• provide hands-on examples that will have an echo for the policymakers; • demystify the evaluation process, its costs, etc.; • answer to concerns/fears creating reluctance to evaluation

Reconciling the timing of evaluation and decision

Matching the timeframes of evaluation and decision (or consultation) processes is a recurrent challenge for evaluators, who often mention the lack of time as one of the key difficulties they face. Giorgi (2017) analysed that one way to tackle this challenge is to work on a mutual understanding between policy officers and evaluators.

Table 4. Suggested actions about reconciling the timing of evaluation and decision.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS	Purpose(s)

Ensure that policy officers consult evaluation experts about realistic timelines for evaluation (depending on the evaluation objectives) And reciprocally, ensure that evaluators are fully aware about the timeline and time constraints of the policy (and particularly about the timing of public consultation and decision processes)	• Ensure that evaluation commissioners have realistic expectations, taking into account time constraints • Ensure that evaluation findings will be available early enough to be taken into account in the consultation or decision processes
Consider the use of regular intermediate feedback loops	• Ensure timely inputs for policy management • Enable to adapt data collection, evaluation questions, etc. if needed

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS	Purpose(s)
Consider alternative to classical ex-post evaluations, depending on the evaluation objectives and time constraints (e.g. consider 'accompanying' or mid-term evaluations that are done while the policy measure is still running)	Facilitate the adaptation of evaluation planning to the needs and priorities of policy making

Facilitating communication and mutual understanding

An evaluation can involve persons with different backgrounds (e.g. statistics, economics, engineering, sociology) and having different experience or connections with the policy evaluated. They can thus have different perceptions or views about what evaluation means, what it should be. Likewise about the objectives of the policy, its delivery scheme or its results. Ensuring a good communication can therefore be challenging, while it is essential for information sharing and to get a complete picture of the policy. Interactions and exchanges between the different parties, and particularly between policy officers (and policymakers whenever possible) and evaluators or policy analysts, are ways to favour the integration of evaluation into the policy cycle, and to avoid evaluation to be perceived as a fully separate process.

Table 5. Suggested actions about facilitating communication and mutual understanding.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS	Purpose(s)
Make sure the right contacts are identified for each party to be involved in the evaluation process (note: the 'right' contact is not only about finding the contact for the communication link. It is also about finding the contact that is open to the evaluation process.)	• Ensure an easy communication along the evaluation process
Clarify the evaluation objectives, and organise a feedback loop (when relevant) (e.g., put evaluation on the agenda of the steering committee of the policy; create an email that stakeholders can use to ask questions about the evaluation)	• Ensure a shared understanding of the evaluation objectives (and thereby realistic expectations)
Facilitate exchanges between policymakers, practitioners/implementers and analysts/evaluators (e.g., plan meetings at the key stages of the evaluation; create a steering committee of the evaluation)	• Maintain regular contacts between the evaluation team and evaluation recipients • Ensure a mutual understanding (which does not necessarily mean a consensus or agreement) • Favour a pluralist approach of evaluation (taking into account differences in viewpoints) • Foster closer collaboration between policymakers/policy officers and analysts/evaluators)

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS	Purpose(s)

Maintain an updated list of contacts from the different services and bodies involved in the different stages of the policy	• Maintain regular contacts • Facilitate an easy communication • Avoid missing or outdated links in the communication loops
Facilitate capacity building and experience sharing about evaluation issues (e.g., targeted workshops or trainings; technical briefs; testimonies about past evaluations)	• Increase awareness and knowledge about evaluation

Conclusion and discussions

Review of evaluation practices shows that improving them is not only about technical (e.g., data collection) or methodological (e.g., defining a baseline) issues. Organizational issues can be as important, and particularly when considering the planning and use of evaluation. These issues can be critical at a time with both, a sense of urgency to act and a need to optimize the use of public resources. There could indeed be contradictory trends. On the one hand, an increasing demand for evaluations to assess if the increasing means allocated to mitigating climate change are used effectively and deliver as expected. On the other hand, the will (and need) to obtain results as quickly as possible could give the priority to action (i.e. policy implementation), postponing evaluation planning to later with very limited budget.

When looking at how evaluation practices can be improved, it is therefore essential to search how evaluation can be integrated into the policy cycle, so that it does not impede the prompt implementation of the policies while ensuring favourable conditions for an effective evaluation.

From a theoretical point of view, crossing policy and evaluation processes shows how they can interact and how this can be fruitful for both. However, making these ideal conditions happen can be difficult in practice. The policy cycle is rarely a linear process. And the way the policy evolves over time is often different from what was planned (e.g. due to changes in the budget available or in priorities, turnover in policy makers or officers). Evaluation practices therefore need to be reactive and flexible to adapt when needed.

Developing resources for evaluation commissioners and evaluators can provide a useful support if these resources are produced by taking into account the feedback from the field, and the constraints that they face.

This is why the resources developed in the EPATEE project were based on the analysis of current evaluation practices and feedback from evaluation commissioners and evaluators. The project is now done. But the resources remain available on its website (https://epatee.eu/). We will try to follow if these resources keep being used and collect suggestions about how they could be further improved or complemented. Depending on the interest we see and the feedback we get, opportunities to continue what was started with this project could be looked for.

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