



Experiences from supporting the self-evaluation of the French innovation programme "City of Tomorrow"

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The presentation will provide a review of the experience of Technopolis supporting the French Banque des Territoires (a Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations subsidiary) to carry out the ex post evaluation of an innovation program of €665m dedicated to the "City of tomorrow" according to a self-assessment methodology.

Introduction / background

Created in 2010, the Investments for the Future (*Programme d'Investissement d'Avenir* PIA) is a programme aiming at fostering innovation in France to boost productivity and increase competitiveness, thus stimulating employment. Through different actions, it supports innovation projects in priority sectors which have a strong potential for the French economy. It totals €77bn over 10 years, as the first programme in 2010 was allocated €35bn, a second in 2013 €12bn, a third in 2017 €10bn and a fourth in 2020 €20bn.

One of its action is the "City of Tomorrow" sub-programme, with a budget of €665m entrusted to Banque des Territoires (a Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations subsidiary). The action aims at supporting investment in cities, in order to develop new urban models, to encourage the evolution of urban uses and practices, to rely on an integrated and innovative approach to transport and mobility, energy and resources, urban organization and housing. Its geographical scope includes about 30 pilot territories involved in the 'EcoCité' network, an approach set-up by the French environmental Minister in 2008 to foster exchanges on ambitious territorial strategies fostering sustainable development. In total, more than 500 projects were supported (e.g. investment, engineering, studies, etc.), in different forms (e.g. subsidies, equity), in different fields (e.g. transportation, energy, building) and with various objectives (e.g. improving life quality, reducing pollution, ensuring social equity, supporting employment, etc.).

As all the actions of the PIA, "City of tomorrow" should be evaluated ex post 'to assess the impact of investments made on beneficiaries' and 'on the results and impact of actions in relation to the objectives set by the Convention [between the State and Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations]'

Methodology

The ex post evaluation methodology was specifically developed in 2017 by the French Research and development centre dedicated to urban energy transition Efficacity¹. The evaluation methodology recommended a self-assessment for two different levels of stakeholders: the beneficiaries of the 'City of Tomorrow' sub-programme on the one hand, and points of contact of supported territories on the other hand. The on-going evaluation aims at assessing the impacts of the action on the beneficiaries and on its territory, as well as the efficiency of credit use. It relies on a digital platform² that was commissioned in mid-2018.

The self-evaluation relies on three different steps, which slightly differs depending on the type of supported project or the level of the evaluation (territory or project):

¹ <https://www.efficacity.com>

² <https://explorateur.ecocites.logement.gouv.fr/>

- Tagging: characterising from a set of labels the fields and the objectives
- Quantitative evaluation: choosing or creating specific or territorial indicators (output, result impact), setting targets and periodically filling them with measures
- Qualitative evaluation: measuring the level of innovation(s), explaining development, indicating key success factors and replicability potential

Between March 2018 and September 2020, Technopolis and its partner I Care & Consult were in charge of supporting stakeholders to implement this self-assessment. The support was composed of a training part to inform stakeholders about the methodology, of ad-hoc support for all stakeholders, of expertise to challenge the reported levels of innovation(s) and of periodic monitoring and reporting.

Results

At the territorial level, the tagging step showed that one programme, 'Cities of Tomorrow', was supporting various ambitions and objectives according to the different territory beneficiaries. It also showed that territories chose to focus on various topics related to the sustainable city. It also confirmed that the supported projects were in line with territorial strategies. On the quantitative side, the use of 7 mandatory indicators defined in the evaluation methodology provided insights on the effects of the programme (e.g. 1 400 innovative housing, 52km of public transport). However, it was not, at this stage and according to the information provided on the digital platform, possible to provide **aggregated** results beyond these compulsory indicators. On the qualitative side, the evaluation provided with useful understandings of the effects of the programme.

At the project level, the tagging step showed the diversity of supported actions, responding to various objectives. On the quantitative side, the level of achievement of targets is high although projects are still being implemented: 45% of the beneficiaries indicated measures overpassing targets for result or impact indicators. The choice of similar indicators and units by beneficiaries allowed to aggregate results, e.g. refurbishment of 1,300 housing, 12,700 parking spaces for bikes, 1 million of day trips in supported public transport, etc. The qualitative part contributed to identify a clear leverage on engineering projects leading to future developments, as well as key success factors for replication for all kind of projects. The level of innovation of the programme was deemed high, with all projects having at least one level (out of three, from national first to replication of a widespread innovation in a different context) of innovation on at least one of the 6 different types of innovation (e.g. technical, business model, organisational). The ratio is 2,9 types of innovation per action. In addition, more than 16% of supported actions were confirmed national first.

Conclusion & discussions

The self-assessment methodology proved innovative and adaptable to a wide range of situation. It was relatively intuitive, and was globally accessible to a variety of users. Its adaptability proved useful to characterise the heterogeneity of actions supported by the action. It however requires implementation over an extended period, larger than the initially planned support, due to the duration of most actions and the need to periodically fill in the indicators. The inertia that can be logically expected with the secondment of the evaluation to the beneficiary (e.g. staff turnover, lack of willingness to contribute) also contributes to minimise the results achieved by the evaluation exercise.

The disparity of indicators and units available at both the EcoCité or action scale are very useful to precisely describe the programme and its effects at the projet level. It however makes the aggregation work difficult, and can require intermediate proxies to provide results at programme level³.

³ A subsequent assignment was entrusted to Efficacy to work on 7 macro-indicators: greenhouse gases emissions reduction, energy savings, renewable energy production, land artificialization prevention and nature in the city, innovation, number of beneficiaries and contribution to research efforts.