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Review: l'évaluation des Politiques Publiques Locales: éditions de 'la lettre du cadre territorial'

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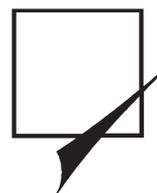
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The Reviews section features in occasional issues of the journal. We take a pluralistic and transdisciplinary approach, including within the coverage not only books but also 'grey' material of contemporary relevance to the diverse evaluation community. 'Classic' texts may also be revisited for their contemporary significance.

We encourage readers to enter into dialogue and exchange – whether through providing feedback on the coverage of evaluation texts and the extent to which the selection caters for the diverse interests of different evaluation communities, or by suggesting texts for review. We hope that review articles will provoke reflection and debate among the readership, which will be given space in the journal.

Reviews Editor

L'évaluation des Politiques Publiques Locales: éditions de 'la lettre du cadre territorial'

Jérôme Dupuis. Voiron, 1998. 375 pp.

ISBN: 2-84130-241-5

The will to become an expert in the field of evaluation of local public policies, such could be the motivation for reading the work by Jérôme Dupuis. The book is edited in the series 'to become an expert' in the 'letter of local public managers'. As the sub-title of the book suggests, the book should give local public managers the means to define and order evaluations and be relevant partners to the other actors in this kind of exercise.

The three main chapters of the book deal with concepts, methods and examples of local and regional evaluations. In the annexes you find, besides a short vocabulary, a classification of different schools in the field of evaluation, as well as guidelines about how to set up an evaluation, and some reflections about the French approach to evaluations in general. Finally, a set of technical memos provides the reader with introductions to qualitative and quantitative tools used for evaluation purposes, lists of indicators, or tools used for strategic analyses, for instance.

To begin with, the author insists on the need for a strategic segmentation of public policies at three different moments: for the design, the management and the evaluation of public policies. He defines strategic segmentation as assembling or dividing actions into homogenous units that should allow evaluators to diagnose, to forecast or to advocate. The segmentation is useful to any organization willing to define its targets and its own resources (know-how etc.). This approach, developed by Michael Porter, is well known in the private sector, and Jérôme Dupuis pleads that it is also relevant for the public sector. He focuses on

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the use of strategic segmentation as a prerequisite for evaluation and argues that traditional analyses of public action focusing on financial, organizational or legal aspects are not sufficient. Instead, public action could be seen as 'a set of services provided to different social groups, on a limited territory, that contribute to the same objective, though the methods of management and of delivery may be the illustration of political choices'. In that sense local programs should be analysed from a strategic rather than functional point of view, which implies gathering the portfolio of activities transversally instead of vertically. As a general architecture, a public policy should be divided subsequently into segments, actions and services provided. The author describes the different steps of the segmentation, by analysing the value of various activities and the key factors of success. He also gives examples of different uses of segmentation, especially in the field of policy design.

As one regularly involved in the design of evaluation devices, I think such a segmentation may be an efficient process at one of the difficult steps in an evaluation, i.e. to define the object and the scope of the evaluation. The segmentation should allow a sharper definition of what should be evaluated and a clearer idea about what information is needed in that perspective. However, the presentation of the segmentation approach made by the author is not precise enough. Often you wonder whether he is considering the 'design phase' or the 'evaluation phase', and the schemes used to illustrate his reflections add to the confusion.

The second chapter of the book focuses on conceptual and methodological issues of evaluation. The author discusses different conceptions and the ultimate objectives of evaluation and methodological paradigms as well as possible questions that may be the basis for evaluation processes (evaluative questions). Though the book mainly deals with the evaluation of local and regional policies, the content of this chapter is quite general, and the discussions and advice seem relevant also for the national level. The chapter represents, according to me, an interesting contribution for it enlightens the connection between the questions raised through an evaluation and the methods used to answer them.

Jérôme Dupuis distinguishes four different approaches to evaluation, each corresponding to a specific approach in the analysis of public action. This means evaluations consider either institutional and legal aspects, economic aspects, organizational aspects or a set of processes of actions called 'policies'. The author explains the pros and cons of each approach, pleading for the more systemic one: the evaluation of public policies, since he considers it more complete. The author even adds a fifth approach, that he calls the 'evaluation of public action', integrating the four approaches mentioned above. That is what most professionals today in France would understand as an evaluation.

In the section dedicated to 'methods', M. Dupuis discusses the moments of evaluation 'ex ante, ex post, in itinere', and skims over the conditions of success of an evaluation. It seems to me that this part should be the object of a more detailed discussion, including examples of evaluations considered as successful and others as less successful. The author then tries to define a 'hard core' of evaluation by discussing a certain number of approaches like 'formative/recapitulative', the general objectives of an evaluation (to gather or produce knowledge, to

elaborate a judgement and recommendations) and the social purposes of evaluation. Such aspects are of course very important, but the lack of explanations about their internal articulation sometimes diminishes the interest for the reader.

In order to make explicit the different conceptions of evaluation, the author first discusses the distinction between the experimental and systematic paradigm, showing the consequences of each one of these for the definition of an evaluation. Jérôme Dupuis then explains the dichotomy between positivism and constructivism and the implications of the choice of one of these approaches for the nature of the possible evaluation. Being in charge of elaborating terms of references for evaluations at the French Department of Public Works, Transport and Housing, I find this part of the chapter seems especially useful. It clarifies in simple words the confusions that are often made between the contributions of qualitative and quantitative methods on the one hand, and on the other hand the degree of externality of the evaluator to the object evaluated. These clarifications should make it easier for a client of an evaluation to define their expectations by improving their understanding of the potential contributions of the different methods.

This chapter also includes some advice for the elaboration of the terms of reference of an evaluation. These guidelines are probably useful, but they could have been more detailed and presented in one of the technical memos at the end of the book. Fifty pages are then dedicated to a detailed explanation of different evaluative questions, regarding efficiency, relevance, impact etc., giving technical advice on how to approach these issues. Because of their pragmatism these pages turn out to be very useful, especially since few books, at least in French, include methodological and practical guidelines on such issues.

The third chapter gives eleven examples of evaluation of local public policies in fields such as social action, environment, tourism and local development. These examples are quite concrete and show that evaluations at the local level are not only possible but also interesting. The given examples are various, and are not all presented with the same level of detail. Some of them contain interesting discussions on the *raison d'être* of a public program, its consequences for evaluation and the methods that seem the most appropriate in a specific case. One could however regret that the author often neglects the discussion of the limits of each example. Furthermore, there is little information on *how* the evaluations have been realized and on how local politicians, those who implement the programs and the final users have been associated. The usefulness of the results, according to my own experience, also depends on the evaluative process. It also would have been interesting to show how the results of the evaluations have been used, by whom, and in what perspective. The main part of the examples given are more focused on the contributions of elaborated knowledge, which as such cannot really be assimilated to an evaluation.

This book gives helpful indications on the evaluation of local public policies. Jérôme Dupuis uses a frank and realistic tone. However, one may find that the book is not particularly pleasant to read, due to the use of a certain number of tables and schemes that would need an explanation in order to constitute a real 'added value'. Further, different paragraphs dealing with particularly technical

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aspects, included for instance in the examples, could have been transferred to the annexes.

It also seems to me that the question of the use of the results of an evaluation, in the decision-making processes and by the actors themselves, is overshadowed. At least in my own field of practice, proving the usefulness of evaluation in the short, the medium and the long term is a main issue. Taking into account the target public of the book, I think it would have been interesting to get more into details on the construction of the terms of reference, the role of different actors in evaluation, and especially of the '*instance d'évaluation*'. One may refer to P. Lascoumes and M. Setbon for a detailed discussion about the different roles played by these '*instances*'.

As a conclusion, in spite of some problems of confusion and that mentioned above, this work is a useful contribution for local and regional officers in the public sector, as well as for other persons who are interested in issues regarding evaluation of public policies, even though they certainly would need to read other books and articles, and especially practice, to 'become an expert'.

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International Handbook of Labour Market Policy and Evaluation,
edited by Gunter Schmid, Jacqueline O'Reilly and Klaus Schomann.
Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996. 954 pp.
ISBN: 1-85898-344-4

The title '*International Handbook*' inevitably creates high expectations of a comprehensive and thorough treatment of the issues in question. This book delivers the goods in relation to labour market policy and evaluation. It is a monumental achievement – some 950 pages including a useful summary list of acronyms and technical terms and index. It comprises 30 chapters contributed by 37 authors from eight countries with four-fifths of these from European (primarily Northern European) countries. There is indeed quite a strong 'European flavour' to the book in the coverage of the assessment of labour market policies and programmes, in the strong focus on Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP), in the emphasis on the importance of institutional frameworks and in the advocacy of a 'target-oriented' approach to evaluating labour market policy. In bringing together authoritative treatment both of issues relating to the evaluation of labour market policy and programmes and of the effectiveness of a wide range of policies and institutional frameworks in improving the functioning of labour markets, this book provides an essential and valuable resource for both researchers and practitioners.

In their introduction, the editors state an admirable and ambitious aim '... to contribute to the solution to structural unemployment by deepening the analysis of it and by enriching policy guidelines' (p. 1). With a wide coverage of areas of