

# Evaluering i Norden:hva kan vi laera av varandra?

1. Briefly: The history, development and organisation of evaluation in Sweden
2. Important lessons – an evaluative approach towards evaluation

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# Sweden imported evaluation in the 70s.

Evaluation as a practice was formed during the 60:s in US.

A group of countries followed "the US efforts relatively early" (Derlien 1990, s.148): Sweden, Canada, Federal Republic of Germany.

*International Atlas of Evaluation* describes the following diffusion to many other countries, which was due both to Internal and External Pressure.

The importance of evaluation has been advocated by a number of powerful institutions, such as the World Bank, EU and UN.

"The relationship to US evaluation was everywhere a point of departure" (Stame 2013).

But of course, evaluation was not suddenly innovated

**Some early examples:**

Already in the bible (Daniel 1:3-17).

James Lind 1753 (Scurvy)

The debate after 1755 (Rousseaus letter to Voltaire).

Kurt Lewin during World war II

Problems in evaluation had been discussed (Myrdal 1934, Merton 1936, Mannheim 1940).

During the 1960s: Three preconditions for evaluation as a social practice and feature of modern statecraft.

- The growth of social sciences, the expansion of “scope and methods” in the first part of the last century.
- The social sciences understood their capacity to find solutions to different problems in society.
- The relation between decision makers and the social sciences.  
President Kennedy: the country’s problem are technical rather than political.

# What was exported...and imported?

- Suchman states that evaluation is an aspect of "social research" (Suchman 1967, p.1.). Weiss that evaluation is about "systematic assessment" (1998), others have talked about "research procedures" or "noggränhet" (Vedung).
- Evaluation has to explain, not only describe what has happened
- Values are part of evaluation. It is about improvement.

**Today** I will emphasise that the object of an Evaluation is a program or policy or more broadly some form of intervention, "intentional action designed to influence people or change a material situation" (Riecken 1972).

Sweden as a first wave country. Things are not always so certain, but in the 80s

- evaluation in Sweden were conducted in a number of policy domains.
- Sweden had evaluators within different disciplines
- evaluation was part of different (political and administrative) decision makings processes (institutionalization).
- both outcome, output and process evaluations were conducted
- had a (albeit limited) national discourse concerning evaluation

# Evaluation in Sweden

- A task for all agencies
- Sectorial evaluation agencies
- Ad hoc policy commissions
- The audit office
- The Parliament (standing committees)

So, evaluation is certainly not a brand-new thing in Sweden.

It is perhaps time to apply an evaluative perspective – on evaluation? And such a debate have also started (for example Dahler-Larsen).

Today I will discuss two questions important in a discussion about “what can we learn” and about the future of evaluation:



# Question 1: Is evaluation sometimes less useful than in other situations?

Remember (four) pictures back):

The object of evaluation is interventions aimed to impact behaviour and actions. These interventions are based on assumptions about which mechanisms impact behaviour and actions taken by for example individuals, business enterprises municipalities. However, the object of evaluation is not these mechanism *per se*.

# This means...

... that evaluation has been delimited from much of the knowledge that is useful, and often necessary when designing for example governmental interventions. An example: A researcher can study how social, biological and psychological mechanism affect how children learn to read. Such studies can be crucial in the construction of governmental interventions.

However, the fact that such studies can be useful in constructing programs, does not mean that we call them evaluations.

But, note what Weiss said in this context.

but it also means that evaluation was seen as part of an ongoing process of incremental improvement

Interventions could gradually be improved.

Evaluations could deliver knowledge useful in the ongoing process of adjustments and improvements

However, sometimes incremental change is not enough “old ways of doing things are swept aside” (Baumgartner and Jones 1993) or “the dogmas of the past are inadequate to the stormy present” (Lincoln 1862).

And sometimes we are facing crises.

# Evaluation has different roles in crises and turbulent times

- In incremental times evaluation is part of a sequential process (often planned in advance). The terrain is familiar.
- Evaluation has been formed in incremental times. But we have been reminded that sometimes “all that is solid melts into air”.
- In such times the questions are not about how present policies work and can be improved.
- They are much more about what knowledge can help decision makers to identify different and new courses of actions.

My second question: Does evaluation sometimes confirm underlying assumptions which should be questioned.

Evaluations (and evaluations systems) are based on assumptions about different mechanisms (does increased knowledge increase the willingness to reduce energy consumption).

We often base the evaluation on the same assumptions as the decision makers who decided about the information (for example the information campaign).

# References

I have written about most of the things I have talked about today in:

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