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The role of evaluation in the identification of opportunities and threats to development

Panel: "Evaluation facing threats and challenges of modernity".

Development Intervention and Institutional Change

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Integrated evaluation of change.

A different perspective for planning and evaluation in multiple intervention environments[1]

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Most evaluations are done from a policy/programme/project perspective. The downstream perspective which accompanies the flow of resources through the dissipative structures[2] of the agencies to produce change in societies requires an organised upstream flow of information in order to keep the resources flowing downstream, where they feed the agencies and produce the intended impact. This perspective has dominated and limited method-driven evaluation as well as the different approaches of theory-based evaluation. **An integrated evaluation of change** approach tries to understand what is happening at the **receiving end of development and social intervention** through a perspective that looks first at the society and the wide range of organisations in the organisational landscape. Evaluation can thus cross the boundary of the learning organisation and contributes to a **learning organisational landscape** – networks, clusters or just assorted organisations targeting the same reality, and thereby contribute to the improvement of interventions in a way that transcends the organisational and programme/project perspective.

Key words: development co-operation, social intervention, integrated participatory planning and evaluation systems, inter-organisational networks, learning organisational landscapes.

Anyone who isn't confused
doesn't really understand the situation.

Ed Murrow

This study starts with a general critique of development and social intervention - derived from extensive case studies in Africa and South-Western Europe. It then discusses its underlying assumptions and their implications for the most widely used planning and evaluation model and states some new challenges for planning and evaluation in multi-intervention contexts. A profile for an integrated system of planning and evaluation for area-based inter-organisational networks is then defined and illustrated by a specific case model. Finally, its possible implications for knowledge production in organisational landscapes and for development and social intervention will be discussed.

Development intervention as dissipative economy

The logic underlying programme evaluation appears simple, straightforward and convincing: whoever hands out money for intervention – be it in a development or social perspective or both – has the right to know where it goes and what impact it ultimately produces[3]. The multiplicity of sources and the existence of different layers of donor and implementing agencies (usually analysed as a principal/agent problem) complicate the picture somewhat, as different constituencies on different levels claim the right to know. Some ostensibly to justify the spending, others to improve their performance, both using more or less converging sets of criteria to see what impact has been produced and in what way. Or, to put it another way, the perspective of evaluation follows the flow of money and is conditioned by it.

Most evaluations are done from a programme or project perspective, from the perspective of one or more organisations that fund or implement a programme or project. The downstream perspective which accompanies the flow of money and resources through the dissipative structures of the agencies to produce change in societies requires an organised upstream flow of information. This upstream flow (reporting, controlling, evaluation feedback loop, etc) is intended to keep the resources flowing downstream, from level to level in a cascade made up of funding and implementation

agencies, who feed on them and, eventually, produce the intended impact on reality - or not.

This perspective has dominated and limited method-driven evaluation as well as the different approaches of theory-based evaluation. Most theoretical and methodological production about evaluation concerns this organised upstream flow of symbolic and highly codified information, its production, content, form and feedback mechanisms, which condition – through the planning process - the downstream flow of resources.

This dissipative economy[4] produces a complex set of interlocking self-referential systems[5]. If we follow von Foerster's[6] second order cybernetics, and change to a perspective that brings the observer into the picture, we can see some of the blind spots that these systems, like all systems, produce.

The first and maybe most important blind spot:

It hides the self-interest of the organisations, the dissipative structures of the dissipative economy that feed on the flow of resources. While it is evident that there has to be some equilibrium between the interests of all the parts involved in the process, in some areas of intervention the interests of the organisations clearly dominate the whole process, which is kept alive only for the sake of the organisations and cannot be justified by any positive impact they supposedly produce.

The second blind spot:

It produces its own intervention reality. Through a complex system of filters, the actual societies at the receiving end are carefully excluded from the picture. The only way they are allowed in are as meticulously defined abstractions: target group[7], stakeholder, civil society organisation, community (the typical one-size-fits-all approach), grass-root organisation or poor household. These concepts clearly betray the missionary position in which they were originally conceived.

The third blind spot:

It excludes every form of human organisation that does not correspond to a modern or quasi-modern model of organisation. As the "target groups" at the receiving end of intervention are nearly completely excluded (with the exception of entitlement programmes) from the direct transfer of resources (a basic principle of development intervention everybody in the business seems to agree upon) only organisations modelled on the bureaucratic pattern can benefit from the flow of resources. This approach propagates the expansion of the modern (or quasi-modern) organisation model. Where the flow of resources is strong enough this approach weakens and may even lead to the destruction of other forms of

societal organisation. Not surprisingly therefore, development intervention is perceived quite often as a threat by those societies organised in different ways and meets with different forms of resistance.

The **development paradigm**, the overarching construction that spans over multiple theoretical frameworks, comes under increasing pressure. For all practical purposes, development actors of all shades and denominations agree – at least implicitly - that development is something that has to be externally induced by development actors and their organisations. They hold lively (and well funded) debates of what development should mean and how it is best to be achieved,

That viewpoint is disconfirmed by reality. Large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa are not developing at all but are breaking down. 'Where evidence of collapse of states gets too strong, development aid and development theory are temporarily suspended, emergency relief and rehabilitation take their place, until development agencies and development theory come back to reclaim theirs…. The collapse of societies does not seem to get as much attention as the collapse of states. International agencies seem to feel stronger when their 'development partner' institutions cease to function completely than when societies fall apart. They never deal with them without an interface anyway'[8].

Three "evaluation questions" are studiously ignored:

- Would the people (not the elites) of African countries be any worse off if there had been no development co-operation?
- Has development intervention contributed to the collapse of institutions and societies?
- How do the interests of the development organizations influence the development intervention?

The interests of organisations also affect the evaluation sub-system by requiring an upward stream of information in order to guarantee the continuous flow of resources downstream. Evaluation, more generally speaking, is expected to produce information that responds to the following imperatives to:

- guarantee the flow of money downstream through organisations;
- hide the self-interest of the organisations at different levels;
- be useful for power-play within and between organisations;
- justify the spending of money to different constituencies;
- improve efficiency and effectiveness of interventions and increase the desired impacts of change in the targeted societies, communities or groups.

Weave a circle round him thrice: a different look at planning and evaluation methods[9].

The forces defining the dissipative economy also show their influence at the methodological level. The Project Cycle Management (PCM) and its derivatives are perhaps the most widely used planning methods in social and development intervention[10]. Over the past few decades, though still not completely standardised, project management methodology has converged more and more. This in part reflects growing co-operation and integration between different actors within the development complex.
In fact, the success of PCM in becoming a quasi standard partly can be explained by its virtues as well as by its flaws. Therefore, a few observations may be useful.

- The most widely propagated instruments such as project cycle management focus intervention on target groups which then are excluded from any transfers. The interests of the organisations are, stakeholder analysis notwithstanding, carefully kept out of sight.
- The project form is alien to many societies and poses real difficulties of communication between project staff and population.
- The rhetoric about participation notwithstanding, project cycle management has been transformed into an all-purpose vehicle between donor and implementing agencies. So its original intention, to focus on the benefit of the target group, has in many cases been subverted completely.
- PCM was developed in organisations based on the modern organisation model in the context of societies characterised by high trust and compliance. Where societies are low-trust and organised on different principles (say ethnically or kinship-based), and where institutions are not of the modern mould, PCM encounters obstacles difficult to overcome.
- It uses industrialised societies' concept of time[11], a concept that causes friction when applied in societies or populations with different time concepts.
- PCM and its derivatives in common with most project planning methods are based on the assumption of (linear) causality. Where causalities are difficult to identify - e. g. in unstable societies or in anomic parts of societies - because too many factors come into play, or where there is a general lack of reliable data needed to calculate probabilistic causalities, the standardised planning techniques don't work very well.

- Currently applied planning techniques are not well suited to the context discussed here and don't allow for fast adaptation to rapidly changing circumstances. Nor do they permit the adjustment of goals, inputs and methods. The imposition of a behavioural straightjacket often causes strong friction with the wider environment with correspondingly high levels of frustration of the project staff, not to mention the frustrations of other people involved or targeted.
- Whilst the usual rotation of external development staff after one cycle hampers the production of an institutional memory[12], it increases staff ability to tolerate frustration. They know will they have to endure only for a limited period whilst anticipating a better project elsewhere.
- Many organisations lack the resources to transform these frustrations into knowledge, so quite often the frustrations result in violent behaviour or, more often channel the organisation into ever more autistic ways of behaving. This tunnel vision, which often results in the self-isolation of project teams in difficult surroundings, is a widespread phenomenon.
- The definition of the target groups, originally designed to focus project efforts towards a clearly defined group of beneficiaries, is based on the tacit assumption that the project is acting alone. Where project interventions overlap, the definition of target groups may easily become absurd[13].
- In many intervention agencies the so-called agents of change hide their ambivalence (which stems from the fact that they control the project's financial, material and knowledge resources but do not want to impose their point of view too overtly on the target groups), behind the project structure to deny the effective power they wield over their target populations. This enables them to skirt the question of intervention ethics. Organisations with a strong mission culture and experience of wielding real power, as is the case with some churches or faith-based organisations, often take a much clearer and less ambiguous stance towards their target groups by explicitly imposing their rules on the target groups, even by ritualising adherence to their professed value systems. In this way they often introduce additional contradictions and fault lines (e.g. between Christian and Islamic beliefs), into already fragmented societies in Africa.
- The project, therefore, has become much more a standard communication device between the different organisations of the

development complex than a communication vehicle between the implementing agencies and the societies which are reduced to target groups. It is therefore not surprising that many of the actors – within organisations as well as outside - consider the 'project' as a vehicle for getting funding rather than as an instrument for getting things done.

From the reduction of complexity to the negation of reality

The PCM, however, is instrumental in fulfilling the much more basic need of these self-referential systems by producing their own reality of intervention. The internal dynamics of societies are easily reduced to being merely external conditions of the intervention project. In this way the intervention organisation is able to define the boundary between inside and outside which is a basic requirement for all modern type organisations. This also helps the implementing project team to establish its own identity outside the society they allegedly develop.

Or to put it in a different way: the 'project', at the perceptual level the main filter for the reduction of complexity for development or social intervention is a basic device for the production of its own reality in a multi-faceted and multi-phased process based on the negation of the reality it was supposed to change. Although apparently merely an instrument for development, it in fact uses its position in that process to act in terms of organisational self-interest, to the detriment of those whom it was supposed to help[14].

The functioning of interlocking self-referential systems is thus reduced to their internal communications and the production of interfaces with the societies they pretend to develop. Our studies have shown that in many cases this even goes as far as the simulation of the interfaces with and between external institutions that require at least a facade of communication with their 'development partner' institutions[15]. This explains in part the universal and ubiquitous presence of the development and social intervention complex which presents very similar interfaces to very different external realities. We found striking similarities in the "quasi-spontaneous" organisational landscapes in places as far away from each other as Portuguese townships, provinces of East and West-African countries, a newly constituted country in Asia and transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe[16].

Resource driven multiple intervention

Although many of the insights presented here have been won in a wider African context where our research into rural areas and regions - some of them spanning several big provinces with millions of inhabitants – revealed surprisingly similar modes of intervention, the – typified - case presented here is based on experiences in Portugal.

A given territory, say a problematic neighbourhood with a population of maybe several thousand people is surrounded and invaded by intervention agencies of all kinds, state institutions, local government agencies, church organisations, citizens' associations, NGOs, the whole range of organisations active in local development and social intervention. Some of the quarters may even have been produced by the intervention agencies through slum clearing and resettlement programmes. The number of organisations may vary considerably, ranging between 20 and 40 at any given time.

If we move one level up, say to a municipality with a range from several thousand to several hundred thousands of inhabitants the number of projects and organisations can easily exceed a hundred in one area of intervention. Most of them whether area based or not, receive funds from different international programmes, either directly or through national, regional or local government institutions. Quite often the international funding is complemented by national or local funds – real or fictitious. At any one moment, we can see about between a dozen and several dozen intervention programmes in action[17].

Most funds come with clear conditions attached: a specified target group, clearly defined objectives, intervention methodology, criteria for implementation, reporting and control mechanisms and evaluation requirements that will have to be fulfilled at least on paper[18]. Nearly all funding comes with a short term timeframe of two or three years.

Theory and the handbooks clearly state how development and social intervention should proceed: at the start there is a needs assessment, then a project is defined, with goals, objectives, results, a target group and stakeholder analysis etc, then the funding is obtained and the project or programme is implemented and then evaluated.

In reality it works the other way round. First there is an organisation. It has to survive and in most cases it has an impulse to grow. Organisations (the surviving ones, at least) are alert to funding opportunities which they

hone their skills to secure. Most of them, though not necessarily all, have developed a capacity for intervention. Then they start looking for (or inventing) problems they might tackle within the range of solutions they can deliver, which may be aligned with funding requirements, and so start filling in the forms, defining target groups and so on.

Now in our area, say a municipality, we find a wide array of organisations (of different sizes, with different basic values, intervention methodologies, cultures, etc.), many of them with multiple sources of funding and a variety of intervention areas. Most programmes and projects have different starting dates and durations.

Many programmes require organisations to work in partnerships, which they duly will, at least on paper. As partnerships are imposed by funding organisations, they vary considerably in composition, coherence, consistency and durability[19]. This increases complexity (with its attendant transaction costs). Mostly such 'partnerships' do not last longer than the project they are supposed to jointly implement.

The organisations divide the local population into different target groups, in accordance with the funding requirements of the respective programmes or projects. Many of the target groups are defined along abstract criteria (producing different profiles) and very often they overlap considerably. The definition of target groups represented real progress in intervention programmes and projects a few decades ago as first the logical framework, and then the PCM slowly displaced the "principle of the watering can" which tried to create benefits to anybody who happened to be around, in a quite often heavy handed and usually rather biased manner. The PCM approach does still make sense in some contexts. In some intervention programmes, however, the targeting of groups in effect has socially constructed such groups (and in consequence quite often has contributed to the destruction of the existing social fabric)[20].

Mostly organisations – especially in transition societies - still follow organisation models inspired by the corporatist public administration of yesteryear even where there is no apparent current need. This is uncritically accepted as how things are naturally supposed to be. Such organisations usually have many hierarchical levels, look inwards more than to their environment, do not easily share information and generally speaking, work back to back to each other, trying to keep their sources of revenue secret, jealously trying to keep access to their target groups for themselves and fighting to keep competing organisations out of their patch. Often they belong to different and competing macro-political clientele

systems. Therefore, friction between organisations abounds and consumes a lot of energy.

This kind of **resource driven intervention**, uncoordinated, short-lived and short tempered, undertaken by organisations competing for resources through paperwork and lobbying in clientele systems more than through performance, quite often does not produce the intended impacts of specific programmes or projects. As organisations are under strong pressure to produce success in the short term they will try to do so by many means, at least on paper and resort to simulation if deemed necessary and possible[21]. In this kind of intervention the sum is more than its parts: together they certainly produce more confusion than any single programme could.

What is valid for a small area is true also for bigger territories where many different interventions overlap as our case studies in Africa clearly show.

Even the now propagated sector wide approach (SWAP), conceived to remedy the one-sided swap of development aid going to Civil Society Organisations and which certainly contributed to weakening already weak states further, does not really change this, as intervention in the field is still done according to the project model.

New challenges for evaluation

For evaluation this kind of situation poses some real challenges. For one, it is simply impossible to gauge the impact of a single project, programme or organisation on a specific target population. We simply have no methodological instruments to sort out impacts and to attribute causalities – not even systemic or probabilistic causalities – to specific programmes or organisations. Imposing a programme or project perspective on evaluators thus may be an invitation to fudge the results[22]. For the other, evaluation from a programme or project perspective in most cases is not very useful for the people at the receiving end of the intervention. This perspective separates the organisations from the interventions and the population and reinforces barriers between them instead of lowering thresholds for co-operation. It also creates artificial barriers between the improvement of intervention and **organisational learning and organisational development in a trans-organisational perspective**.

The learning effect even of participatory evaluations in the field is usually limited to the single organisation or group of organisations that implement a specific programme. Naturally, the commissioners and funding agencies,

as well as the interested public in general, might still learn something from the findings… if they are published...and if they read them.

Integrated evaluation of change: a change in perspective

An integrated evaluation of change is done from a perspective quite different from that of programme or project evaluation. It integrates a comprehensive territorial, societal perspective with a diachronic approach. It aims to integrate planning and evaluation in the same process. It looks at the changes of a specific reality, be this a given territory or a specific society or parts of a society. It looks at the process of change in this reality, so it first has to draw the boundaries of the territory it will examine. In practice this is much easier to do than it might appear.
It sets out to understand the **configuration**[23], that is, the conditions under which the collective or individual actors act and within which transformation occurs. These external conditions can be divided into:

- unchangeable or stable conditions (like geographic location, climate, etc),
- unstable and rapidly changing conditions (like markets, migrations, exchange rates, security, etc) which can not be easily changed by intervention;
- conditions that can be changed or influenced by intervention (like transport, access or qualification of the workforce).

It analyses the potential of the situation, the "not yet" inherent in the situation[24], and then studies the internal dynamics of the society, the characteristics of its actors and the possible outcomes of the constellation of the internal forces in the play, as well as the crucial divisions. It is very important to study the potential of the situation with an open mind and not be bound by preconceived ideas. The development paradigm has clouded the vision of scientists for a long time, concealing potential negative and ambivalent tendencies in its process.
Integrated evaluation then takes into account the external conditions of the dynamic societal processes created by development or social intervention, starting with an analysis of the organisational landscape (that is, the full range of organisations and institutions that influence the reality under study). In this way it transcends stakeholder analysis, which looks at collective or individual actors from the programme or project perspective, thus limiting understanding by reducing their dynamics and potential merely to the parts directly relevant to the intervention.

Besides this analysis at a strategic level that examines both the disposition of forces in the terrain and their tendencies, it looks at the more operational level taking into account the programmes and projects with as much relevant information as can be obtained, regarding past, present and future together with their – often disputed - meanings.
This helps to identify the full range of players and the full range of their interaction which is usually not limited to "service delivery" but includes all interaction. Included also are the informal arrangements, interactions, and networks which often play a crucial, even if sometimes negative, role in organisational landscapes. In many cases, especially but not only in the poorer regions of the world, the cumulative secondary effects of co-existing development or social intervention may well be quite different from the original intentions as stated in programmes or projects. This analysis includes phenomena which from an outside perspective of "externally induced development" are often labelled as resistance – which in the perspective of the agencies at least – has to be broken or circumvented but which might simply be perceived as legitimate defences against external assaults.
This comprehensive analysis is very different in its nature from an impact analysis or from an analysis of "service delivery" as seen from the receiving end. To use an illustration: you survey in depth what and how and why people eat and then research from where they are getting and how they are preparing their food. Such knowledge is not extrapolated from the menus of the restaurants in the vicinity or, as might happen in a normal programme or project evaluation, from looking at one restaurant only.
In this way it allows attribution of observed changes to internal dynamic processes, to external conditions, to conditions created by external interventions and to the interaction of internal and external forces.

Characteristics, requirements and constraints

The first requirement for introducing integrated evaluation of change is a change of outlook by the different actors, funding as well as implementing agencies. The second is a change in perception of and by organisations and partnerships. When perceptions of the boundaries of organisations change as organisations open up to their environments, the perception of partnerships also requires rethinking. Mostly partnerships are seen from a project perspective by the implementing agencies, so they are thought about either as a condition imposed by donors to get funding or as an

instrument to link up local partners with international agencies. If analysed as part of an organisational landscape, however, they can be perceived as (partial) inter-organisational networks.

The introduction of integrated evaluation of change may be a powerful instrument in building inter-organisational networks. It requires, however, a number of conditions that are different from the conditions of most programme or project evaluations. The following points show some of the prerequisites and constraints of the proposed change of perspective in evaluation. Integrated evaluation of change is not supposed to supplant programme or project evaluation, which have their merit in many circumstances, but rather to complement them or to permit evaluation in circumstances where they come to their limits. It can be useful, however, when introducing evaluation into cultures not yet used to it.

- The growing number of **partnerships** and networks has given many organisations the understanding that evaluation from a programme or project perspective is not really adequate and is a somewhat futile exercise. A new perspective of evaluation that improves their knowledge directly therefore might be accepted in certain circumstances. If working in networks and partnerships implies joint planning and shared decision-making, a joint evaluation with the possibility of an integrated planning process makes sense.
- The typical **low trust environment** and the closed-shop-mentality that characterises many multiple intervention realities, often go together with a low compliance culture and poorly motivated intervention staff and a "target population" that has experienced many broken promises and failed projects on one hand and highly repressive and corrupt political regimes on the other.
- Participative approaches in intervention and equally in evaluation usually do not work very well under these circumstances. A less participative model of integrated evaluation still may produce important and useful knowledge about the transformation processes and the role of external intervention from a perspective that transcends individual projects and organisations.
- Integrated evaluation systems can only be created by organisations with a co-operative orientation and a willingness to transcend the limits of programme evaluation. This requires going beyond the organisational perspective which has a strong hold over most people working in funding as well as in implementing agencies.
- The fact that multiple intervention areas are usually highly populated by large numbers of organisations of very different types, with

different missions, remits, cultures and intervention models, makes it a very complex undertaking to get a significant number of them together in the same enterprise. The same reasons that separate their interventions may also keep them apart in evaluation.

- As many of them still see evaluation either as a punitive action directed against them or as a bureaucratic exercise which requires formal compliance so as not to jeopardise their funding, their commitment to a participative evaluation is not easy to win.
- As programme and project interventions are usually either not or badly co-ordinated, they have different territorial reach and different starting points as well as different rhythms. So from the organisations' point of view a joint evaluation "does not make sense".
- As the donor (or sometimes implementing) organisations have to provide the **funding** for the evaluations of their programmes and projects usually their interests prevail: they need evaluation results to justify their spending. Naturally the accountability perspective is perfectly justified. Therefore it will be difficult to overcome the organisational perspective even for big donor organisations in order to convince them either to fund integrated evaluations or to enter partnerships with other donors to create conditions for joint funding. Integrated evaluation of change could, however, contribute to an "accountability from below" perspective.
- Integrated evaluation requires different arrangements for funding and for commissioning evaluations. Donor co-ordination will have to play an important role in setting up integrated evaluation systems which will have to have quite a different remit that will have to be tailored to specific territories. The funding arrangements, as well as the terms of reference for evaluation are completely different and require careful negotiation between a wide array of funding and implementing agencies. On the other hand, the increasing sums spent on isolated programme and project evaluations which produce only fragmented results, would – combined - easily fund integrated evaluations so that money could in effect be saved.
- The comprehensive analysis of transformation processes requires **time**. The 'fast in, fast out' of project evaluators who have only a very limited amount of time (counted in days rather than in months) for the actual fieldwork will not allow for in-depth understanding of underlying transformation processes, as their TORs usually are limited to one or a few organisations in partnership and one intervention at a time.

- Especially under **difficult field conditions**, it requires determination, persistence and courage from evaluators to study the conditions of the population and transformation processes that are not always peaceful or developmental – in fact they may be the exact opposite. Many researchers simply do not have the stomach for working for a long time under often trying conditions and therefore limit their research to the immediate environment of organisations which can offer better working conditions than say a rural community in Africa or a difficult suburb in Europe. Thus integrated evaluation of change requires evaluators willing to get to know at first hand sometimes very difficult realities, and with sufficient time to understand the complex transformation processes. They also need conceptual and operational knowledge of the area in which they are working.
- Evaluators must also have the capacity to interact with a wide range of different organisations in the field which are quite often not on the best terms with each other and might therefore well need conflict management skills.
- As integrated evaluation of change uses mostly **participative methodology** it requires the active co-operation of a part of the people involved, and - at least - the tolerance of many others. It needs active participation from some of the organisations involved in the process. As it has the possibility of combining evaluation with strategic and operational (re-)planning and may serve as a bridge for building area-based networks, (itself a contribution to supplant existing fragmentary and often overlapping partnerships and thus to an increase in the effectiveness of intervention) the interests of organisations concerning their strategic positioning and their access to resources and their influence on the allocation of resources will help mobilise participation.

An integrated system for planning and evaluation for area based inter-organisational networks. A case model.

In development co-operation as well as in social intervention, there often is a widely diverse organisational landscape of intervention agencies. This situation may arise after the conspicuous failure of corporatist states or other centralised planning systems or, in other cases, after the more or less obvious demise of functioning public administration. In democratic (transition) societies which guarantee the freedom of action of civil society

organisations, there is often no effective co-ordination between the different interventions which, at least in many African countries, are also partly the result of the switch of Development Aid to Civil Society Organisations. So in the absence of external power or the political will to regulate centrally, a functional equivalent may be needed to overcome the negative effects of fragmented, uncoordinated and overlapping, intervention. A **self-organising and self-regulating inter-organisational network**, based on trust and voluntary co-operation, might be one possible option.

The context

Portugal has set up a national programme called 'Social Network' (*Rede Social*[25]) that tries to integrate into inter-organisational networks the plethora of organisations active in the social sector and, to a certain extent, local development. The programme is area-based, and nearly all of the 278 municipalities have by now tried to set up their networks. The municipally based networks have a Local Council for Social Action, where all member organisations are represented. This council is headed by the president of the municipality and elects an executive commission which is supposed to run the programme. Each borough (*freguesia*) sets up another council, the Borough Council; in cases where there are too many boroughs in one municipality, several boroughs may join and set up one council together. In order to get funding from the programme, the municipalities have to produce three documents: a Pre-diagnostic Report, a Social Diagnostic Report and a Social Development Plan, including annual Operational Plans.
Getting all different types of organisations, some big, some small, some old and some young, some fairly autonomous and only dependent on external funding for their intervention, some run by remote control by ministries or other central institutions and with no real power of decision making, into a working network is not a simple task. It is not made easier by the culture of the organisations which are mostly inward looking, closed to the outside, resistant to change and to innovation, traditionalist in their structure - mimicking the extremely hierarchical structure of the public administration which neither facilitates the internal flow of information nor decision-making. Often intervention is resource driven, extremely fragmented, not co-ordinated with other interventions, not very effective and neither properly planned nor evaluated in any real sense.

Integrated evaluation of change makes sense for these area-based inter-organisational networks. It may be used even during the implementation stage in order to introduce changes into the inner workings of the member organisations as well as into their inter-organisational co-operation[26].

System design[27].

This system integrates the dimensions of diagnostics, planning, monitoring and evaluation into inter-organisational networks working in the same territory. Although this may sound very much like PCM it is not the same, as diagnostics, implementation, evaluation and (re-)planning are not separate sequential phases of a cycle but are operationally integrated and may all happen at the same time. They are also not limited to a project perspective, but are rather more comprehensive as they include the whole geographical area and the full range of participating organisations and their interventions and start from consideration of that configuration rather than from intervention.

In order to be effective the system requires certain conditions:

- Political agreement of the local government which must concede some autonomy to its constituents; this must go beyond merely formal recognition;
- Acceptance by central institutions and national and international funding agencies of the new approach and methodologies;
- Willingness of the partner organisations to introduce participatory planning and evaluation methods that produce transparency, and to open up their performance for external scrutiny;
- Resources: knowledge about participatory planning and evaluation on an inter-organisational, organisational, and operational level. The necessary training for staff planning can be done partly by participating in the exercises. Specific methodological knowledge, however, should be transmitted through training courses.
- Funding for the evaluators and availability of staff of the organisations must be guaranteed;
- A duly mandated, qualified and responsible group must be set up to run the system.

As part of one or more inter-organisational networks, the system works on two levels, one strategic and one operational. At the strategic level the organisations plan their positioning in the territory, their co-operation with the other organisations and their intervention. They clearly distinguish

between the desired changes in the society, the necessary services and products needed to produce those changes, and the necessary resources.
At the operational level the actors co-operate directly, with an integrated, participatory planning and evaluation methodology and with clearly defined time horizons for each intervention. They also distinguish between desired changes, services and allocation of the necessary resources according to their activities with a clear timeframe as represented in a Gantt chart. They can use an adapted form of the logical framework matrix or the logic model or any other standardised planning and evaluation model that facilitates communication between organisations and an operational plan, including a budget.
The integrated system for planning and evaluation operates in various dimensions:

- The first entails a **continuous analysis of the territory**. This is divided into fixed external conditions, variable external conditions which can not be influenced, and variable conditions that can be influenced or changed by intervention, and dynamic processes of the society in the territory. It is important to study positive dynamics in order to understand the potential as well as negative dynamics in order to understand current and future problems and constraints. The acceleration of social change (as currently attributed to "globalisation") requires a continuous process of monitoring, evaluation and re-planning. All these dimensions have to be understood and described diachronically. These dynamic processes can not be reduced to a system of indicators, although indicators may have an important function. The advantage of producing a narrative allows tendencies that go beyond the extrapolation of indicators to be established. A narrative also facilitates communication between the different actors as well as with political decision makers and the general public. Understanding these dimensions allows the strategic positioning of contributing organisations, their intervention and the allocation of resources.
- The analysis of the territory will be completed by an analysis, also continuous, of the **organisational landscape**, that is an analysis of all intervention capacity active in the territory: the organisations, their history, their projects, their infrastructure, personnel, material, financial and other resources, their sources of income, their interventions, their approach, methodology, and so on, and where possible their impact. In every evaluation and re-planning exercise participants can decide to give special attention to one or more

specific areas which will be studied in more detail than the others. This focus should change in every cycle.

- It is of the utmost importance to **integrate evaluation and re-planning operationally**, because the chance to participate in the allocation of resources may well be the only way to involve people in evaluation at all levels. Evaluation as well as re-planning should be done in a participative way as only direct participation ensures learning, especially in (organisational) cultures, where people do not tend to read reports.
- The **rhythm of evaluation** differs, depending on the level. At the strategic network level, evaluation must be synchronised with the political cycle which in Portugal means a four year period. So for the inter-organisational network evaluation and re-planning should be completed about a year before the municipal election in order to create some distance from the electioneering and thus avoid too much political influence of local governments which might be strongest when local governments are over-turned by their political opponents.
- This **strategic evaluation and re-planning** should be participatory and combine the efforts of internal and external evaluators.
- It is also useful to specifically evaluate the internal functioning of the **network**.
- **Groups of organisations** and their respective teams meet for combined evaluation and re-planning in specific areas (e.g. home care services) in a yearly rhythm.
- **Organisations** run participatory evaluation and re-planning processes in a yearly rhythm. Initially this will be done individually, each by itself, but in later stages, after gaining more confidence in the process and building inter-organisational trust, through peer review or by inviting external evaluators. It may however take a few cycles in order to build the necessary trust for this kind of evaluation. This is made easier by the relative stability of most organisations which have – with the notable exceptions of schools - a very low staff turnover. Every year a specific area of intervention can be chosen for a more detailed review.
- **Teams and working groups** evaluate and re-plan every six months in a simplified way, if possible with the participation of their respective superiors from the two levels above them.

- **Project** evaluation as required by the donors will have to be integrated into the system and the necessary reports produced in the requested format.
- Specific evaluations like sector evaluations, or diagnostics of **emerging dynamics** should be organised whenever deemed necessary.

So integrated evaluation breaks the Project Cycle and moves to a kind of differentiated periodicity of evaluation and re-planning in inter-connected intervention cycles. Although substantial obstacles exist, introducing an integrated system for planning and evaluation into an organisational landscape that is neither used to working with objectives nor to evaluation, nor to work in inter-organisational networks, for better inter-organisational co-operation is never the less possible.

There are also some advantages in the case described. All the organisations work in a fairly close geographical context in the same administrative area, so obstacles for communication and co-operation are more internal than external. The gradual introduction of important elements of the system, like participatory planning and evaluation methods has shown the advantages of co-operation and prepared the ground for a more comprehensive system. At least in the more or less functioning networks there is some kind of effective leadership, be it institutional or by groups of people who have gained some experience in introducing innovation into the organisational landscape.

As there are no external development organisations with their programmes or projects present in the territory, the organisations are local and their staff are, with a few exceptions, from the area. So they easily understand the advantages of joint planning, because it helps them to build a collective strength which is far more effective when lobbying for resources etc. It also increases their leverage against local government and central institutions. The most important factor is, however, the improvement of the services they provide to their clients, because that is the strongest motivation for people working in the social sector.

The model currently applied in Portugal suggests a way for introducing evaluation that enables projects and programmes to build on existing strengths rather than destroying the social fabric. This model can, however, not simply be replicated or exported into say a province of an African country, as conditions there are rather different and pose challenges of a different kind.

So for every context, specific integrated systems will have to be designed.

Knowledge, learning and organisational change

From the understanding of configurations and their internal dynamics and potential on one hand and the "incoming" development interventions on the other hand, the evaluation process can produce knowledge that can be fed into different feedback loops. The proper process of evaluation, if organised in participative way, can not only produce information but transform it into knowledge held by the participants. Especially in low trust and low compliance environments where many people either do not read reports or do not trust them, the participative process may be the best way to get their attention and to stimulate their involvement.

If one of the aims of the evaluation is to initiate or assist learning processes, different levels can be distinguished and the feedback loops adjusted to their specific requirements:

- The individual;
- The team;
- The organisation;
- The inter-organisational group (as in partnerships and the like);
- The organisational landscape (either organised into networks, or influenced by the existence of networks);
- The society in question, individuals and collectives;
- Outsiders, be they individuals, groups, organisations, government institutions, etc. who want to learn from examples and who may or may not have any direct concern with the area.

The first loops evidently have to address the acknowledged actors in the area, that is, the population and all organisations which have a role in the area. As integrated evaluation is based at least in part on participatory principles and usually integrates evaluation and re-planning it produces immediate effects of learning by most of the people and organisations involved in the process. This approach helps to shorten the feedback loops by involving many of the actors directly into the production and validation of the evaluation results.

The knowledge generated by evaluation also serves directly for the re-planning of interventions and thus helps to harness people's interest directly in the process as taking part in evaluation means taking part in the re-planning and thus in the decision making about resource allocation. It also helps to gradually align the different approaches, methodologies and programme or project activities used by different organisations. In this way integrated evaluation can be used as a management tool for capacity building to improve the performance of partnerships, networks and

organisational landscapes and to continuously adjust intervention to ever changing environments.

This perspective is also useful because it makes it very clear who takes decisions about the area in question. Local instances are being developed – which start from an assessment of the area's needs, go from there to the changes to be envisaged and only then proceed to take decisions about necessary interventions. Everything "incoming" then can be treated as potential resources to be applied - or not. In this way it may help to lessen tensions between local, national and international levels.

It thus helps to invert the resource driven intervention. Evaluation with integrated re-planning in a comprehensive perspective can provide a powerful tool for the integration and co-operation of intervening agencies by creating an arena for structured negotiation between all participants. From this perspective evaluation can cross the threshold of the "learning organisation" and contribute to a "learning organisational landscape" – be that in the form of networks, clusters or just assorted organisations targeting the same area. It thus contributes to the improvement of intervention that transcends the organisational and programme perspective. The existence of partnerships and networks in organisational landscapes often has an indirect effect on organisations even if they are not directly involved in the networks. Ultimately it contributes to the transformation of a non-structured array of intervention forces - which produce and reproduce the haphazard nature of their "quasi-spontaneous" existence which is produced by the non-co-ordinated flow of resources - into a *dispositive*, a self-regulated grouping of organisations that makes sense in their environment.

In the process this approach can help to break the organisations' stranglehold on information encouraging organisations to look beyond their own boundaries. It is therefore a very useful tool for organisational and inter-organisational development, especially so in transition periods. It can also play a part in breaking the donor-implementer project cycle that so often has produced unintended effects by splintering development and social interventions which increasingly prove to be counter-productive to their stated goals.

It reveals the duplication of intervention and helps to discover problems not yet addressed. It enables the detection of emerging problems thus allowing for a timely response before the problems get too big to handle.

The results of integrated evaluation may also produce a positive impact through the other feedback loops they can be fed into, such as

implementing organisations, funding organisations, local, regional and national government institutions, policy makers, etc.

This integrated evaluation and planning perspective is especially useful in transition societies (this term is very broadly defined) where public administration is undergoing change from a corporatist and repressive model to a more democratic and open model of intervention and service delivery.

It furthers change that affects the structures, procedures and mental models of organisations and agencies that are focussed onto themselves and that try to control rather than to encourage open communication. Where the *leitmotiv* of administration was repression, the change to transparent, effective, responsible and co-operative service delivery may well take about a generation.

As integrated evaluation gives a picture that is much more complete than programme evaluation it will make a better case for improving policy design when fed back properly into the policy circuit. It also permits the strategic positioning of programmes and organisations, not just in relation to the (more or less artificial) target group but also in relation to the dynamics of the society and to the whole organisational landscape. In the process of integrated evaluation of change it is fairly easy to see where organisations have to reposition themselves strategically by redefining their mission and strategic goals as well as their *modus operandi*. This may also require restructuring of organisations or parts of organisation.

It can be used to discover the optimal strategic points of intervention from an overall perspective. "Developing" as well as "collapsing" societies can be seen as dynamic systems, (and can be represented as upward or downward spirals). It is crucial to detect the critical sub-systems that control the increase or decrease of the functionality of the whole system as well as the critical bifurcations where sub-systems flip or flop[28]. This helps to pinpoint the intervention, to get the timing right and so reduce the necessary resources for the intervention[29]. Integrated evaluation when combined with re-planning does not add another layer of complexity (that would make the evaluator part of the dissipative economy by allowing the appropriation of an additional slice of the action) but reduces complexity of intervention by bringing different types of actors together working with the same set of standards without trying to put people into administrative procedural straightjackets. It also allows people to take part in the evaluation and re-planning of intervention without forcing them to produce a quasi-modern organisational interface like NGOs or local associations and therefore does not propagate the modern western type of organisation

which too often challenges traditional forms of societies and is therefore resented. This also has the effect of building trust within organisations, between organisations and between organisations and the population which is another, people centred, mechanism for the reduction of complexity.

By producing transparency about the organisational landscape as a whole, integrated evaluation may also help to rid the intervention area of projects and, eventually, organisations that do not contribute in any positive way and quite often even produce negative effects in the territory. By increasing knowledge order might be won out of the disarray produced by uncoordinated intervention[30].

Integrated evaluation of change relies heavily on the understanding of the internal dynamics of an area and therefore requires, besides a set of methodological tools, local knowledge, which can usually be found *in situ*.

It is also useful for building organisational and trans-organisational memory as, even when staff are routinely rotated out of development projects after one cycle, at least some of the knowledge remains in the area.

Therefore a very important dimension of integrated evaluation is a good system of communication (between people, not between computers) and information. The evaluation should give considerable attention to setting up a system that produces knowledge, not just information. It should try to transcend the usual monitoring and evaluation systems that operate from a project or programme perspective producing partial and fragmented information by monitoring different aspects of programmes or projects which then serves as a base for further project cycles. Integrated evaluation in this way tends to become a continuous process rather than a separate and discrete activity[31].

In practice this requires not just mechanisms to produce information (and put it on paper or on the web), but also processes that transform this information into knowledge through a process of validation and appropriation by all kinds of actors involved in the area in question. In short, it has to make sense to the actors.

Notes

1A first draft of this paper was presented at VI Congresso nazionale dell' AIV. Associazione Italiana di Valutazione. 10 e 11 aprile 2003. Reggio di Calabria.
The results presented in this study were produced in a long time research context in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the end of the seventies the focus of the interest was the development of post-colonial societies, in the eighties the research moved to the development potential of agrarian societies (Research project "Agrargesellschaften und ländliche Entwicklungspolitik in Guinea-Bissau" at the IfS der Universität Münster, headed by Christian Sigrist and funded by *Stiftung Volkswagenwerk*). Then the research was organized by the Centro de Pesqisa, COPIN, Bissau. It was in part funded by *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG*). Subsequent research followed real developments which invalidated the development paradigm and led to the research project "Disintegration of Agrarian Societies in Africa and Their Potential for Reconstruction" at the CEA, ISCTE, Lisbon, funded by *FCT, Lisbon, Portugal (Project Praxis/P/SOC/1110/1998 // Poctii/Soc/11110/98).* This project included fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and S. Tomé and Principe and related research in Timor. Research on Development Cooperation of Portuguese Civil Society Organizations was complemented by intervention for social and local development in Portugal.
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[2] Cf. Prigogine (1998); Schiefer (2002).
[3] The focus on "impact" clearly shows that the main interest of this kind of evaluation lies with externally induced change that can be attributed to the intervention.
4 Cf. Schiefer (2002a; 2002b). The concept of dissipative economy was first developed in studies about the collapse of African agrarian societies in the context of development co-operation. A few of its basic traits:
"The concept of dissipative economy, defined as a type of economy where in a multi-linear, discontinuous process external resources are injected into the system of a local economy to be dissipated there, enables us to establish a relationship between development aid, central societies and agrarian societies. […]. The development agencies were both the driving force and the most important mechanism behind the dissipative economy. Their action of injecting external resources into the economy of the central society - resources which were consequently appropriated, initially through the state, after market liberalisation by NGOs and businesses - reinforced the political elite in their conviction, very similar to the conviction of agrarian societies, that external resources are limitless, thereby hindering the establishment of proper productive structures. […] The dissipative economy, through a process of continuous destabilisation, destroys the very structures of the local secondary economy which it has created and therefore basically serves to recycle and distribute development aid in unproductive ways, through direct appropriation and by raising transaction costs. It also destabilizes the political structures which are built on the appropriation of development aid and live off the secondary economy. […] The generally accepted rule of the dissipative economy, to which all agencies subscribe without reservation, is that no external resources should be transferred to the agrarian societies themselves, as this might reduce the chances of the agencies and central society alike of appropriating those same resources. But the secondary effects of the development efforts have contributed to a gradual destabilisation of agrarian societies even more than the development projects themselves."
Even programmes that focus on the direct transfer of resources, like e.g. micro-credit schemes, do so only in the form of credits and usually not as a direct transfer of goods, services or cash. In these cases the actual credits going to the poor population are usually only a tiny percentage of the overall costs of the programme. Especially in traumatized societies where social and economic resources are very low, the usual approach which tries to put responsibility to the local population and requests that they contribute with their resources to the "joint development effort" is not very effective.
Quite often I have heard from development practitioners "Why don't we just put the stuff on a truck and hand it over to the villagers?" In fact I did exactly this in a few small projects and it produced a double impact: the villagers improved their quality of life and I got into trouble.
[5] „Selbstreferentielle Systeme". Cf Luhmann, N. (1985).

[6] Cf. Von Foerster (1994).

[7] "Target, target groups, logical framework, PERT, impact, vulnerability, operational, strategy, intervention, exit strategy, there seems to be a proper lend and lease scheme in place, where development theory borrows from military theory. In part directly, in part through management theory, development theory has imported concepts and techniques from the military that dominate the development intervention. Often the mostly pacifist protagonists don't seem to be aware of the fact. From the design of the strategy to the organization of the development intervention, the military doctrine of the west is very much in evidence. The changes in military doctrine of the last two centuries reflect clearly on the organizational level of development intervention. Where in former times the general commanded his troops in the field, we have now central organizations with their staffs that do the advance planning and take the decisions and then send their troops into the field from their headquarters. But there are all too many headquarters sending off their troops who then in the field meet or more often miss each other when allegedly fighting the same enemy". (Cf Schiefer 2002).

[8] Cf. Schiefer 2002.

[9] Obviously planning and evaluation are intrinsically linked, even if presented as different phases in the PCM. In a handbook we tried to operationally integrate evaluation and (re-)planning and to put "Integrated Participatory Project Planning and Evaluation in [a] Perspective: […] integrated participatory project planning and evaluation are but one aspect of all the various modern attempts to introduce change into social systems and institutions. All these attempts require some kind of intervention that is usually guided by a strategic vision. This vision provides the bigger picture, of which the individual project and the organizations running the project are particular parts. The overall picture also comprises other organizations, other projects, other target groups, and other social groups, and it works in much larger timeframes than a project can: while planned social change may be calculated in terms of decades, projects are usually firmly lodged within the budgeting constraints of a one to three-year timeframe (Schiefer/Döbel 2001, p. 12).

[10] Weaknesses corresponding to the blind spots as mentioned above do not result from a design flaw of PCM but rather of the way it has been put to use which often runs against the original intentions of its introduction as manifest in its first principle, that intervention has to produce a sustained benefit for the target population. (Cf. Eggers 2002).

[11] Cf. Elias (1984).

[12] Our studies in Mozambique showed clearly that implementing agencies had a very limited knowledge of their own experience which reached back only two or three years and even less knowledge of the experience of other agencies.

[13] A case is reported from a neighbourhood in a Portuguese town where a family posted a school time-table at their door to regulate the visits of social workers from different programmes. A note said: Please leave us alone on week-ends.

[14] This rather complex process which, on one level, includes the wide range of choices regarding how to handle frustration by project teams and bureaucrats can not be developed here.

[15] An example may illustrate this point. A multi-million dollar project to improve social and technical infrastructures funded by the World Bank was run by a semi-independent management unit in the "receiving" country, formally attached to a ministry. The international expert in the management unit kept office stationary from all important ministries and from the presidency in a drawer. Whenever a letter had to be written to Washington, in order to request more funding etc, he would draw a copy of the stationary with the official government letter head, write the letter, and then the national director would go at dinner time to the respective minister's home to get the signature. The project was quite successful…

[16] For a different view see also: Reineke/Sülzer (1995); von Oppen (1995).

[17] There seems to be a strong tendency from central governments in Europe to launch area-based intervention programmes. They often are not centrally coordinated and come on top of each other – but all of them eventually will have to be handled by local governments or administrations.

[18] Funding organizations try more and more to introduce evaluation of their programmes and projects by imposing monitoring and evaluation on the implementing agencies. The often detailed and exacting requirements and procedures pose a considerable problem for many implementing agencies receiving funds from various sources, as they have to master and produce often vastly different monitoring and evaluation reports for the respective interfaces with donor organisations.

[19] Some international funding organizations have lately started to pose not as funding organizations, but rather as partners of the organizations whose project they fund. This increases their influence over the

implementing organizations as these are not only subjected to a decision about the funding of their project proposals and a subsequent evaluation, but to a constant "dialogue" with their "funding partners". This approach seems to alleviate the self-imposed moral pressure on the representatives of some donor organizations which stems from the dilemma that they effectively control the funding. As they shy away from exercising this power, they often take refuge in this type of "partnership of the unequal".

[20] "Why do these people want to work only with women and not with men?" women in an African village asked me once, "don't they see that we do things together here?"

[21] Cf Temudo 1998, Schiefer 2002a).

[22] The commissioners of the evaluation usually don't seem to mind, as long as positive impacts are attributed to their programmes.

[23] Cf. Sun Tsu (1992); Jullien (1996) Elias (1976).

[24] Bloch (1973).

[25] Cf. Teixeira (2002, 2004b).

[26] As we are just trying to introduce the fully developed systems into some of the municipalities, it is still too early to say if the system will produce its desired outcomes. Only an evaluation a few years from now will be able to show its impact. Many parts of the system, however, have already been introduced in the implementing stage of the networks and proved to be quite useful.

[27] A full version, including operational and methodological practice, in Portuguese, will soon be available at www.periploi.org.

[28] Especially in very volatile environments where development programmes and projects often collapse and staff is forced to flee or to abandon their project.

[29] Our experience so far seems to suggest that in planning and evaluation a reduction to just two levels, one strategic, where organizations cooperate, and one operational, where people cooperate, may work in environments where the organizational landscape is not too complex and where we do not have much more than about 120 organizations active in related areas.

[30] The integrated evaluation and re-planning process can also be used to introduce innovation, such as quality management systems.

[31] Ray Rist outlined the tendency for evaluation as a process rather than as discrete studies at the First Euro-Conference on European Union Evaluation Policy. How Evaluation has been done in the past? Prospects for the future. Barcelona, 1-3 December 2002.

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