

# Evaluation

<http://evi.sagepub.com/>

---

## The Emergence of Evaluation in Switzerland

Werner Bussmann

*Evaluation* 2008 14: 499

DOI: 10.1177/1356389008095491

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://evi.sagepub.com/content/14/4/499>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

THE  
TAVISTOCK  
INSTITUTE®

The Tavistock Institute

**Additional services and information for *Evaluation* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://evi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://evi.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

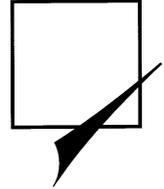
**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://evi.sagepub.com/content/14/4/499.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Sep 22, 2008

[What is This?](#)



# **The Emergence of Evaluation in Switzerland**

WERNER BUSSMANN

*Federal Office of Justice, Switzerland*

This contribution portrays the institutionalization and practice of evaluation in Switzerland. The main actors and patterns of evaluation development patterns differ from those presented so far in relation to other countries. This raises questions regarding the relevance of the theories previously advanced. The entry points of evaluation into the political process are described. As suggested by other authors, evaluation up to now has a rather limited role in strategic political decision-making.

**KEYWORDS:** governance; institutionalization of evaluation; legislation; policy formulation; political process; Switzerland

## **Institutionalization and (Relative) Maturity of Evaluation in Switzerland**

In Switzerland evaluation has developed steadily over the past two decades. It finds an anchor in a programmatic constitutional article (article 170 Federal Constitution). Evaluation has been integrated into the planning and management instruments at the federal level. Nowadays, around 40 larger evaluations are reported in the annual reports of the Federal Council, the Parliamentary Control of the Administration and, last but not least, the Swiss Federal Audit Office. The Parliament commissions around half of these evaluations; the executive carries out two-thirds of them. Parliament plays an important role in evaluation, which corresponds to its law-making function. Many more evaluations of smaller importance are undertaken each year. Around 90 legal acts (laws, ordinances, etc.) carry evaluation clauses (i.e. obligations to carry out an evaluation). All bills of the Federal Council to the Parliament substantiate the financial, economic, social, environmental and other effects of proposed laws. Switzerland has an active and dense network of evaluators and circles interested in evaluation in the civil service and in academia.

Taking data from 1999–2002, Balthasar (2007: 303) estimated that around 0.02 percent of federal expenditures were ‘invested’ into evaluation. The ratio for the European Union (0.09–0.14%) is considerably higher.

Two reports have examined evaluation in Switzerland from a comparative perspective. The 'Evaluation Atlas' (Furubo et al., 2002) examined the degree of maturity of evaluation practice and ranked Switzerland 14th out of 21 countries. The second study (Jacob and Varone, 2003) examined the institutionalization of evaluation and rated Switzerland first, with Australia, out of 25 countries. An update by one of the authors ranked Switzerland together with the UK, Australia, Canada, USA, France, Norway, Netherlands and Sweden in the group of countries with a high institutionalization of evaluation and high maturity of practice (Varone, 2007: 167).

In addition to these reports, in 2006 the OECD examined Swiss regulatory policy and published a report which shed some light on the quality of Swiss regulation and the role of evaluation in improving regulations. OECD (2006) describes regulatory governance in Switzerland in relatively positive terms, although it has one main reservation: a coordinated government policy on regulation is lacking. As far as retrospective evaluation is concerned, OECD notes that there is a wide variety of approaches ranging from self-evaluation to more independent evaluations.

In comparison with many other European countries, the evolution of evaluation in Switzerland has been practically endogenous. The European Commission has encouraged evaluation in various policy fields for EU member states, but such pressures have been absent in Switzerland. Switzerland does not fit the characteristics of either first- or second-wave evaluation countries (Derlien, 1990).

This article begins by considering the institutional features of the Swiss political system. It then follows more closely the chronological development of evaluation in Switzerland and demonstrates that it was first driven by bottom-up forces, but that since the beginning of the new century it has begun to be driven by top-down forces.

## **Institutional Features of Swiss Policies**

The role of evaluation in the Swiss political process can only be understood by taking into account the peculiarities of Swiss political institutions. First, as Switzerland is a multiethnic state, the lower levels of government (the cantons and municipalities) have important participative powers in constitution- and law-making. They have maintained a large share of autonomy in their own (limited) spheres of activity and in executing federal law. More than two-thirds of public servants work for the cantons and municipalities. Up to now, most of the evaluation activities have concentrated on the federal level. Several cantons, however, have set up institutions or provisions for evaluation (e.g. the canton of Geneva with its extra-parliamentary commission on evaluation). The small size of cantons raises questions of a critical mass for evaluation capacities. Due to small distances, part of these difficulties can be overcome by intensive networking activities.

Second, well-developed political rights (constitutional initiative, constitutional referendum, law referendum, etc.) allow political groups to provide inputs to the policy process (initiative) or to block decisions taken by the Parliament (referendum). Public policies are more widely debated by the public than in most other countries. Evaluations can thus become ammunition in fierce political debates.

However, there is little room for taking into account the results of evaluations, once decisions have been reached on specific questions.

Finally, the Swiss political system is characterized by power-sharing (*Konkordanz*). Resolution of conflicts and decision-making both occur through a process of negotiation. The government of Switzerland ('Federal Council') is made up of representatives from the four major parties. It operates on a collegial basis, with seven members who are simultaneously the respective heads of the seven ministries. Contrary to the views of others (Spinatsch, 2002: 390; Varone, 2007: 170), it is not argued here that a regime of power-sharing such as in Switzerland is a necessary handicap for evaluation. Adherence and opposition to specific bills operates on an ad hoc basis: Members of Parliament of the governing parties may well oppose projects approved by the majority of the Parliament. The fact that the Federal Council cannot be dismissed by a vote of no-confidence provides more scope for opposition than traditional parliamentary democracy. Thus, arguments put forward by evaluations may well have some resonance in the political process and contribute to allegiance or opposition to a certain policy.

In this political system, so heavily influenced by various political actors, evaluation cannot play a decisive role. It must serve as a resource for all partners (or rather opponents). Evaluation, at its best, can help to illuminate the stakes at hand and to improve the quality of argumentation within the legislative process. Often, it is used as ammunition in the political process by different interests involved. At its worst, it is distorted or completely ignored.

## **Entry Points of Evaluation into the Policy-Formulation and Policy-Implementation Process**

Evaluation has seven points of entry.

- (1) The process starts when a problem gets on the public agenda. There is some evidence that results of policy-related studies and of evaluations can be effective if available at the very early stages of the political process, i.e. before a problem is completely defined and before solutions are developed. However, evaluations play a rather subordinate role compared to scientific research in general.
- (2) The next stage is the preparation of a law draft. This is often prepared by the government service in the relevant policy field. Sometimes, drafts are elaborated by working parties composed of interest group representatives, cantons and political parties and supported by government officials. Increasingly, evaluations of the existing legislation are being carried out. Depending on the circumstances, their results are taken into account in preparing law drafts. Quite often however, evaluations cover only a small part of all questions that have to be answered at this stage of the legislative process. Evaluations may, however, sharpen the thinking of the lawmaker on the causal assumptions of law drafts (Mader, 2001).
- (3) The law draft then goes into a large and strongly formalized consultation process. Results of evaluations may sometimes be used as arguments

- voiced by the actors involved in the consultation process. A report is published summarizing opinions expressed during the consultation.
- (4) The draft will then be re-examined in the light of the results of the consultation process. The Federal Council will decide on the steps to be taken and then the final draft is worked out. The regulatory impact analysis is updated. A forecast of the consequences of the draft bill is undertaken ('prospective evaluation': Mader, 2006). The draft is then submitted to a double consultation process within the government in which first the lower administrative units ('offices') and then the ministries have an opportunity to comment. By decision of the Federal Council the draft is then submitted to the Parliament.
  - (5) At Parliament, both chambers (with equal powers) examine the proposal, modify it and try to find an agreement if they have adopted different legal texts. From time to time, evaluation results may be influential at this stage of the process. Experience shows that political arguments take precedence over scientific arguments.
  - (6) When a law has been adopted by the Parliament, it may then be submitted to referendum. If a political group (e.g. party, trade union, spontaneous political group) collects at least 50,000 signatures (0.96 percent of the electorate) the people have to cast a vote on the law adopted by the Parliament. It sometimes happens that newly published scientific studies or evaluations are publicized in the mass media and serve as ingredients in the political dispute. Once a political issue has entered into this hot or even explosive stage and is debated fiercely, evaluation results are not likely to change opinions of the main political protagonists.
  - (7) Finally, a bill is enacted and implemented. Many operational decisions have to be made. In Switzerland, implementation of federal programmes is mostly done by cantons and municipalities. At the national level, administration is not well staffed. The administration uses evaluations to gather information on the implementation process (especially on the attitudes and the behaviour of the beneficiaries of the programmes) and the results. Often evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of implementation are combined with studies aimed at finding ways to deal with the problems identified.

Up to now, no specific studies have been undertaken on the utilization of evaluation along these seven entry points into the legislative process. In a recent study by Balthasar (2007: 320) it was found that around 19–24 percent of the 278 evaluations examined in that study had Parliament as a beneficiary (entry points 1 and 5) compared to 53–60 and 81–85 percent where the beneficiary was the head of office or the programme manager. We can deduce from this that most of the evaluation activities concern entry point 7 (policy implementation). Balthasar found ample evidence of various forms of evaluation utilization. We must conclude, however, that they mostly concern the operational questions of implementation (entry point 7). Put the other way around: there is no evidence available at the moment that can show an influence of evaluation on the strategic legislative

choices (entry points 2, 3, 4, 5). I believe that this is not only true for Switzerland but for other countries as well (see Furubo, 2003: 72–6). I will now examine more closely the development of evaluation from a chronological perspective and look at its driving forces.

## **Two Important Players**

Two ‘players’ have, in the beginning, been responsible for the institutional development of evaluation in Switzerland. First, the secretariat of the audit commissions in 1987 demanded the creation of a specialized evaluation unit working for the Federal Council and for the Parliament. In 1990, the Parliamentary Control of the Administration was created. Since then, it has served as an evaluation unit for the Parliament. Second, the Federal Department of Justice and Police (Federal Office of Justice), in 1987, created a ‘Working Group on Legislative Evaluation’, which submitted a final report in 1991.

## **Capacity Building: A Research Programme and its Consequences**

The Federal Department of Justice and Police was also the driving force behind the National Research Programme ‘Effectiveness of Public Policies’. National Research Programmes are mandated by the Federal Council and administered by the Swiss National Science Foundation and serve policy-oriented purposes. The research programme ‘Effectiveness of Public Policies’ resulted in the following outcomes.

- By not limiting its work to scientific studies, but also by organizing seminars addressing public officials and politicians, the programme helped to create a favourable climate for evaluation and effectiveness concerns (see later on article 170 of the Federal Constitution).
- By establishing an informal network of persons concerned about the evaluation of public policies, the programme contributed to the creation of the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) in 1996. SEVAL now has more than 400 members from universities, consulting firms, public institutions and from politics – as many as evaluation societies of the larger EU member states. SEVAL has become a pillar of evaluation in Switzerland. It has been important in fostering the utilization and ensuring the quality of evaluation.
- Regarding the use of evaluation results, SEVAL (just like the ‘Effectiveness of Public Policies’ programme) not only addresses universities and consulting firms but also politicians and civil servants. It tries to sensitize public officials to the need for a thorough examination of the effectiveness and the efficiency of public policies and to pinpoint the potential use of evaluations for these purposes. SEVAL has deliberately extended its activities to new policy fields, especially education and public health.
- Regarding the technical quality of evaluations, SEVAL has encouraged universities to teach courses in evaluation methodology and include evaluation in their curricula. Three universities now offer such courses

(Bern, Lausanne and Zurich; for Bern see Beywl and Harich, 2007). Furthermore, in 2001 SEVAL adopted evaluation standards and encourages their use (Läubli Loud, 2004). The SEVAL standards are derived from the 'Programme Evaluation Standards' of the 'Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation'. Members of the SEVAL board have edited relevant teaching material in German. Various institutions, among them seven federal offices, have declared that they adhere to those standards. The SEVAL standards have been used to assess the quality of evaluations. They have also been incorporated into the curricula of evaluation courses and into manuals by the federal administration for planning and preparing evaluations.

- Another outcome of the National Research programme has been the creation of the network Evaluation in the Federal Administration, which facilitates exchange and learning.

Evaluation development in Switzerland has been marked by the interaction of various forces and actors: the Parliament (with its parliamentary services), the public administration, the academic community and – with SEVAL – private associations. Since the late 1990s, important new actors have entered the evaluation field, namely additional federal offices (such as the Federal Office of Health, the Swiss Development Agency, the National Audit Office).

## **Constitutional Provision for Evaluation**

In the 1990s, evaluation in Switzerland has become more mature. In the second half of the decade, developments took place that complemented the bottom-up efforts by an increased institutionalization and consequent top-down efforts. The Federal Parliaments decided to include a provision for evaluation in the completely revised Federal Constitution of 1999. Article 170 states: 'The Federal Parliament shall ensure that the efficacy of measures taken by the Confederation is evaluated.'

The assignments of article 170 of the Federal Constitution have been specified in parliamentary law. According to article 44, evaluation is a task not only of the audit committees but of all committees of Parliament including those preparing new legislation. Article 27 authorizes parliamentary commissions (a) to demand the Federal Council to carry out evaluations, (b) to examine evaluations commissioned by the Federal Council and (c) to commission evaluations themselves. The Federal Parliament has commissioned multiple evaluations (e.g. of the law on equality between the sexes and the divorce law).

## **Effects of the Constitutional Article on the Executive**

The Federal Council was originally opposed to article 170 of the Federal Constitution (as the revised constitution was intended to reword the existing constitution in a more systematic and comprehensible way). Furthermore it is not directly addressed by article 170 of the Federal Constitution. Yet it has not waited for the Parliament to act and has created a working group charged with submitting

proposals to implement article 170 within the executive branch. The proposals of the working group have been approved to a large extent and were adopted on 3 November 2004 by the Federal Council. Evaluation has been strengthened by defining tasks of offices, departments and supporting agencies in the field of evaluation. The quality of evaluations has become a subject of discussion, not only among universities and consulting firms, but also within the public administration. The Conference of the General Secretaries of the Swiss Federal Departments took note of the SEVAL standards but did not declare them compulsory for all Federal offices. Increasingly, it is acknowledged that quality issues play an important role in evaluation.

## **Patterns of Evaluation Development**

The development of Swiss evaluation is a somewhat awkward case. It does not fit any of the categories developed so far: the first wave of evaluation during the 'planning period', the second wave during the 'retrenchment period', the third wave during NPM-guided institutional reforms. Furthermore, different actors to those dominant in other countries (e.g. Audit Offices) have been, from the outset, important in Switzerland. This makes us sceptical of some of the theoretical explanations put forward for the emergence of evaluation. Could it be that evaluation is just an inevitable part of the modernization of the public sector? Could it be that it is very much related to the size of the public sector which, in turn, is very dependent on its relative share and on GNP per head? Could it be that the emergence of evaluation in each country, apart from these regularities, happens in a contingent manner, sometimes prompted by the political trends of the period, sometimes influenced by historical circumstances, sometimes by specific actors? Further research will be needed to give a clearer picture of the emergence of evaluation in modern societies.

## **Note**

This article is the significantly revised text of a presentation, 'Buone regole, democrazia e sviluppo: La valutazione normativa nella dialettica tra pubblico e privato', 15 September 2006, Camera dei Deputati, Rome.

## **References**

- Balthasar, A. (2007) *Institutionelle Verankerung und Verwendung von Evaluationen*. Zürich/Chur: Rüegger.
- Beywl, W. and K. Harich (2007) 'University-Based Continuing Education in Evaluation: The Baseline in Europe', *Evaluation* 13(1): 121–34.
- Derlien, H.-U. (1990) 'Genesis and Structure of Evaluation Efforts in Comparative Perspective', in R. C. Rist (ed.) *Program Evaluation and the Management of Government*, pp. 146–76. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Furubo, J.-E. (2003) 'The Role of Evaluations in Political and Administrative Learning and the Role of Learning in Evaluation Praxis'. *OECD Journal on Budgeting* 3(3): 67–85.

*Evaluation 14(4)*

- Furubo, J.-E., R. C. Rist and R. Sandahl, eds (2002) *International Atlas of Evaluation*. New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction.
- Jacob, S. and F. Varone (2003) *Évaluer l'action publique: Etat des lieux et perspective en Belgique*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Läubli Loud, M. M. (2004) 'Setting Standards and Providing Guidelines: The Means toward What End?', *Evaluation* 10(2): 237–45.
- Mader, L. (2001) 'Evaluating the Effects: A Contribution to the Quality of Legislation', *Statute Law Review* 22(2): 119–31.
- Mader, L. (2006) 'Prospective Evaluation and Regulatory Impact Analysis: Do they Make Laws Better?', *Legislação, Cadernos de Ciência de Legislação* 42/43 (Jan.–June): 171–85.
- OECD (2006) *OECD Reviews of Regulatory Reform: Switzerland, Seizing the Opportunities for Growth*. Paris: OECD.
- Spinatsch, M. (2002) 'Evaluation in Switzerland: Moving toward a Decentralized System', in J.-E. Furubo, R. C. Rist and R. Sandahl (eds) *International Atlas of Evaluation*, pp. 375–91. New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction.
- Varone, F. (2007) 'Développer les capacités d'évaluation', in S. Jacob, F. Varone and J.-L. Genard (eds) *L'évaluation des politiques au niveau régional*, pp. 157–77. Brussels: Lang.

WERNER BUSSMANN is senior adviser at the Swiss Federal Office of Justice. His main research interests are: institutionalization of evaluation, role of evaluation in policy-formulation and policy-implementation, evaluation of legislation, prospective evaluation and legislative procedures, and multi-level evaluation. Please address correspondence to: Bundesamt für Justiz, 3003 Bern, Switzerland. [email: werner.bussmann@bj.admin.ch]