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THE PRACTICE OF EVALUATION OF THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS' INTERVENTIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN POLAND

The Article presents the findings of the research on the development of evaluation practice and evaluation capacity in Polish administration (mainly regional and local). The main research question is whether the realization of the Structural Funds' interventions may contribute to the development of durable and mature evaluation culture in Polish public sector.

1. Introduction

The main objective of this Article is to present the results of the research which has been realized by the Author since 2008 concerning the impact of the system of evaluation of the Structural Funds on development of evaluation practice and evaluation culture in Polish administration.

The growing interest in the subject of evaluation in the Polish public sector is a result of realization of the Structural Funds' assistance, which requires for programs to be evaluated according to the European Union regulations. It was a great challenge for Polish public administration to cope with the EU requirements in situation of limited or even lack of previous experiences in evaluation. On the other hand, it was also a unique opportunity to develop evaluation capacity, which should encourage public administration to transmit evaluation practice to other areas of public policy. The research was concentrated on the way in which adopted rules and procedures for evaluation of the Structural Funds facilitated or hindered development of durable evaluation culture in the public administration in Poland so far.

This Article presents a summary of the findings of research conducted by the Author under two research projects. First project, realized in 2009-2011 in the framework of the grant financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (no NN114 184736), dealt with the process of evaluation capacity building in Polish regions. In 2015 the results of the research were reviewed and

updated in order to take into account the subsequent years of the Structural Funds realization. The second project, concerning the practice of evaluation of the EU projects in local administration was carried out in 2015 with the financial assistance of the Department of Organization and Management of the Lodz University of Technology (the Deans' grant).

2. Evaluation and its role in public sector

What is a rationale behind developing evaluation practice in public sector? Evaluation is defined as a process of determining the merit, worth and value of the subject of evaluation [14, p. 139]. The usual subject matter of evaluation is a public intervention: a policy, a programme or a project. Rossi and Freeman describe evaluation as a process of using „*social research methods to study, appraise, and help improve social programs, including the soundness of the programs' diagnoses of the social problems they address, the way the programs are conceptualized and implemented, the outcomes they achieve, and their efficiency*” [13, p. 3]. In other words, evaluation is used to better justify and plan interventions, to apprise their results and to draw conclusions for the future actions [9, p. 23; 13, p. 3; 7, p. 22]. Evaluation research involves an act of appraising, valuing and judging based on clearly defined criteria, allowing to formulate concrete recommendations for decision- and policy-makers. The overall aim of evaluation is to improve interventions in the future, rather than to draw responsibility for not achieving the intended results (which distinguishes evaluation from control or audit).

There are three general functions of evaluation in public sector [2, p. 10-24]. Evaluation allows for accountability of governments and public administrations to the society for realization of their tasks. This function of evaluation concerns demonstration of concrete results of public interventions by providing objective evidence, based on appropriate methodology. Evaluation assures the sound use of public money by measuring the results, effectiveness and efficiency of realised policies and programs. It also contributes to better transparency of the activities of public institutions, provided evaluation results are accessible for the public.

The second function of evaluation concerns the generation of knowledge. Evaluation research provides evidence and arguments about the results of different methods of resolving social and economic problems. It supports more rational and evidence-based decision-making. For contemporary governments, facing more complex problems in very unstable and unpredictable environment, this function of evaluation seems crucial. Some authors compare this role of evaluation for public sector to that of the market mechanism for private sector [12, p. 115].

The third general function of evaluation contributes to the organizational development and learning culture in public sector [7, p. 34-35]. Evaluation serves as a tool of improvement of planning and management of activities in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness of public organization.

To summarize the usefulness of evaluation for public sector performance, the words of Eleanor Chelimsky may be quoted: *„evaluation – not only for the purposes of accountability and good management, but also for knowledge building and sharing, for institutional learning and development, for governmental and democratic reform through the serious examination of public policies – has become a precious and unique tool as we prepare to deal with the new socio-economic, political, and infrastructure needs of the next century”* [2, p. 6]. Evaluation can therefore contribute to economic and social development and welfare. It also plays a more general role in promoting democratic ideals, involvement and participation of citizens, as well as social dialog [5, p.18].

3. Factors behind the development of evaluation practice and evaluation culture

What are the main factors that influence introduction of evaluation practice and development of evaluation culture in a given country? Furubo, Rist and Sandahl argued that, in general, the development of evaluation in different countries were either „internally” or „externally” driven [4, p. 1].

In case of the first group (the US, Canada, the UK, Sweden, Germany), evaluation practice was introduced in order to improve the performance of public sector as a part of administrative and public management reforms. The role of evaluation and way of its application were changing in response to subsequent reforms. Starting as an instrument of measurement of outcomes of interventions in a traditional public administration, evaluation gradually changed its role by explaining how different programs contributed to solving of economic and social problems in order to allocate public money more efficiently. In the reforms moving towards neoclassical public administration, evaluation gained judgmental and explanatory functions. The New Managerialist reforms, started initially in the US and the United Kingdom, introduced public management based on incorporation of approaches and methods used in private sector to the public administration (including management by objectives, result-orientation and performance management). The role of evaluation increased in improvement of public policies and programs. In more current reforms, based on the concepts of the New Public Management and the New Public Governance, evaluation played an important role as the instrument of assuring accountability, transparency and participation in public sector.

In many countries evaluation practice was developed in response to „external pressure”. International organizations, such as OECD or the World Bank, promoted the utilization of evaluation as one of important elements of improving effective use of financial assistance and public sector performance in assisted countries. Using evaluation was a condition for external financial support. It was also true for the development of evaluation practice in the European Union. The use of evaluation became an obligatory element of management of the economic and social programs co-financed by the Structural Funds (SF).

The results of the research made by Furubo, Rist and Sandahl suggested that countries which introduced evaluation as a consequence of internal reform usually developed more durable evaluation culture. In contrast, countries where evaluation practice was introduced as a result of external pressure, developed less mature evaluation culture.

The Author's research was based on the assumption that creation of durable evaluation practice and culture requires the development of evaluation capacity. Evaluation capacity can be understood as all necessary resources and capacities to conduct and use evaluation, i.e. adequate human, financial and material resources, organizational arrangements [1]. The evaluation capacity building/development can be then defined as all activities and arrangements which contribute to development of evaluation system. In the literature there is a consensus on the three key elements of evaluation capacity development (often called dimensions, pre-conditions): demand side, supply side and institutionalization [1].

A demand side of evaluation concerns the capacity of governments (public institutions) to commission or conduct evaluation research and to use its results. It includes the necessary resources and construction of evaluation system within organizations. The way the evaluation system is organised in public administration is an important factor influencing the evaluation practice and evaluation capacity development. It involves such aspects as location of evaluation functions in the organisation structures, the way evaluation activities are coordinated in a given organisation, as well as rules and procedures used in managing of evaluations. A choice of location of evaluation activities influences the functions played by evaluation. According to Mayne, Divorski and Lemaire, evaluation activities located at the executive branch of the governance contribute to the increase of efficiency in managing of the programmes and policies [6]. However, they cannot ensure a proper and objective appraisal of the results of public interventions or rational allocation of funds. The organisation of any evaluation system concerns also the dilemma whether evaluation activities should be centralised or decentralised in a given organisation. Both solutions have advantages and disadvantages. Evaluation unit situated at higher level of organisation contributes to better coordination of evaluation activities and more

efficient usage of evaluation recommendations in the whole organization. The main disadvantage is the limited access to detailed information concerning realization of interventions at lower level. Moreover, evaluation may be perceived as another controlling tool. The decentralised system of evaluation may hamper the coordination and cohesion of the evaluation efforts in a given organisation.

An important choice to be made in organisation is between internal and external evaluations. External evaluation is realised by independent experts usually selected in a public procurement procedure. It is considered to be more objective and of better quality than the internal evaluations. Internal evaluation is conducted by the staff of an independent body established within the organisation structures. The main advantage of the latter solution is a good understanding of the programme and evaluation needs, a good access to information and data. A lack of objectivism and dependence on the management of the organisation are considered to be the main risks. However, the internal evaluation units, which conduct their own evaluation research, may become a seed to grow the evaluation knowledge and skills within the organisation. It is recommended to establish internal evaluation as a method of evaluation capacity building, but the use of the external evaluation is also necessary.

A supply side of evaluation refers to the availability and quality of necessary resources in order to make evaluation research. Evaluation expertise and access to socio-economic data are among the most important issues.

Both dimensions, demand and supply sides, are believed to be equally important and should be stimulated simultaneously. The increase of the demand for evaluation by public administration usually increases the supply side. On the other hand existence of well-developed supply side of evaluation does not necessarily generate the demand for it [10]. However, strengthening of demand side is a good starting point of evaluation capacity building [8].

The last element is institutionalisation dimension, concerning introduction of evaluation practice in public policies and in wider political system. It is often understood as a goal and final result of development of evaluation culture.

It should be also stressed that by conducting evaluation research organizations increase their capacities, especially knowledge and skills. However the existence of evaluation practice is not sufficient condition in order to develop durable evaluation culture. In order to build evaluation capacity there have to be actions undertaken intentionally and systematically. What is even more important, they have to be adjusted to particular conditions of a given country, region or organization [16].

The research presented in this Article is focused on the analysis of the demand side of evaluation capacity and based on the analytical model which assumes three channels of evaluation capacity building in Polish administration:

- organization of evaluation system influenced by the EU/domestic rules and procedures,
- existing evaluation practice as a channel of capacity building,
- intentional actions of the administration to develop evaluation capacity.

4. Evaluation of the Structural Funds as the „external pressure” for development of evaluation practice in member states of the European Union

Since 1988 evaluation has been used on as an important instrument of management of economic and social programs co-financed by the Structural Funds in the European Uni. Its main aim is to „*improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes, as well as to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and impact*” [Art 54 Regulation no 1303/2013]. The requirement to evaluate the interventions of the Structural Funds had an important impact on development of evaluation practice in many member states. However, the results of this „external influence” varied between countries. In some member states it was considered as a part of the EU bureaucracy, so evaluation practice was rather abandoned or limited with termination of the EU assistance. In other countries it was used as an opportunity to build evaluation potential and culture and spread evaluation practice on other areas of national policy and at different levels of public administration. The interesting question is what are the factors driving to the latter approach.

It is worth analysing what kind of evaluation model is promoted in beneficiary countries by the EU. The „model” of evaluation is understood here as an overall approach to evaluation, the functions and purposes of evaluation, methods and standards it uses etc. Many member states that have not had earlier experiences in evaluation, use the official recommendations, guides and good practice examples of the European Commission in order to build national systems of evaluation of the SFs.

Under the Structural Policy of the EU evaluation is a shared responsibility of the European Commission and member states. It is organised in three stages: ex-ante evaluation, on-going evaluation and ex-post one. Member states are responsible for realisation of the first two types, while the Commission’s tasks are concentrated on ex-post evaluation. The Commission distinguishes between strategic evaluation (evaluation of strategic nature in order to examine the progress in the programmes’ achievements) and operational evaluation

(evaluation research in order to support monitoring and implementation of the programme). In addition the Commission recommends the rules of organization of the evaluation tasks such as planning, partnership, proportionality, independence and transparency.

There are two main functions of evaluation which have always been present in the SFs: accountability and improvement of planning and implementation of programmes. The first function of evaluation – accountability – has been the most important for the EU institutions. As the European Commission is accountable to the member states for EU money, and money is spent directly by member states, evaluation seems indispensable. The second function of evaluation is more problematic. The timing of evaluation research (especially ex-post evaluation) usually limits the possibility to use its findings to improve planning of succeeding programmes. Since the programming period of 2007-2013 the European Commission introduced more flexible approach to evaluation realised during the implementation of programmes, so called on-going evaluation. This gave more powers for national institutions to decide on the scope, design and timing of evaluation (according to current needs). In result there has been a shift in the main functions of the evaluation of the SFs to supporting of management of programmes and measuring of their results. This process continues in the current programming period, 2014-2020, with a strong emphasis on the capturing of the impact of the interventions (i.e. results that can be attributed to intervention), by using more advanced methodologies, such as counterfactual impact evaluations and theory-based impact evaluations.

5. The practice of evaluation of the Structural Funds and its influence on evaluation capacity building in Poland

In Poland, like in many other member states of the EU, the requirement to evaluate the programmes financed by the SFs gave the first stimulus to the development of evaluation practice. The EU rules influenced the way evaluation system was organized in administration, the scope of practice and the way evaluation capacity was developed. Since 2004 evaluation activities concerning the SF have increased considerably in national administration and after 2007 also in regional self-governmental administration (when the regional operational programmes were implemented for the first time) (refer to Fig. 1). The administration of local self-governments seemed to be engaged in this process in a very limited way.

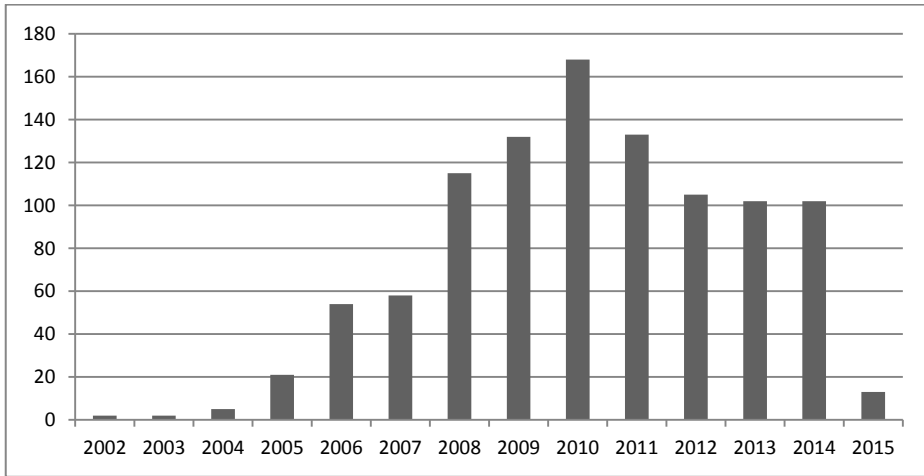


Fig. 1. Evaluation studies realized under the Structural Funds interventions (excluding evaluation of individual projects), 2002-2015 in Poland*

Source: „Register of evaluation studies”, 7th October 2015

(http://www.ewaluacja.gov.pl/Wyniki/Strony/Wyniki_badan.aspx).

* The degree of intensity of evaluation activities in individual years is mainly due to the specific cycle of evaluation process (ex-ante, on-going and ex-post).

5.1. The organization of evaluation of the Structural Funds in Poland

Evaluation of the SFs in Poland is conducted at three levels:

- at the level of the total EU structural assistance,
- at the level of individual operational programmes,
- at the level of individual projects.

The first two levels are parts of the evaluation system organized in the framework of the management of the Structural Funds. Evaluation of individual projects is not obligatory (in a sense that it is not legally required in order to settle the grant). It is rather a recommended tool in a process of realization of projects (co-financed by the European Social Fund in particular).

The responsibility for evaluation of all Structural Funds' interventions in Poland belongs to the National Evaluation Unit (NEU), established within the ministry responsible for regional development (currently the Ministry of Development). At the central administration level, there are also steering committees and bodies, which main aim is to coordinate of evaluation activities. They comprise of representatives of institutions involved in realization of the programmes.

The NEU is responsible for performing evaluation tasks at the national level. Until October 2015 it commissioned 122 evaluations concerning the horizontal and thematic issues relevant for all operational programmes [17]. Its main task is however overall coordination of evaluation activities: planning and monitoring the realization of evaluations. It also develops guidelines and ensures that evaluations are conducted according to the EU rules and standards. One of NEU's important tasks is evaluation capacity building covering all institutions involved in evaluation of the SFs. It performs this tasks in a very active way by publishing manuals and guidelines, organising seminars and conferences on evaluation issues (building the demand side of evaluation capacity). The NEU also supports the development of methodology of evaluation research by cooperating with national and international experts (the supply side).

Most evaluation activities are realized at the level of individual operational programmes. Evaluation is a responsibility of the managing authorities of the OPs located in different ministries (for sectoral programmes) and regional self-governmental administrations (for regional operational programmes). Although managing authorities are independent in realization of their evaluation tasks, they operate under strong guidance and coordination of the NEU (in forms of regulations and guidelines). The organization, rules and procedures for implementation of evaluation of operational programs have been clearly defined and standardized. These uniform rules concern: organization of evaluation functions in administration (establishment of evaluation units for each operational programme), scope and types of evaluation studies which should be carried out, main stages and rules of realization of evaluation process (including planning, the main criteria of commissioning evaluation, the way of implementation of recommendations and publication of evaluation reports). It should be emphasized that the national guidelines meet high standards and provide a good basis for building evaluation capacity in administration. On the other hand, evaluation system should be adapted to individual conditions and needs of organizations. It is an essential factor facilitating development of individual evaluation culture in any organization [3, p. 22]. It is worth considering the possibility of adopting a more flexible approach in the organization of evaluation in different administrations.

5.2. Evaluation of the SF interventions in regional self-governments

Since 2007 regional self-governments have been responsible for management of their individual regional operational programmes (ROPs). Evaluation of the ROPs is therefore one of the mandatory tasks in the management of the SFs performed by individual regional authorities. As it was already stressed, this task is realised in a rather uniform way in all regions, according to rules and procedures recommended by the NEU. According to those rules, evaluation units

for each ROP were established in the framework of organizational structures of the Marshall's Offices. As it is an executive branch of the regional self-government, the more important function of evaluation should be programme improvement rather than accountability. Although in practice the accountability to the EU (the European Commission) seems to be perceived as equally important function of evaluation. In order to ensure the objectivity of evaluation process, it was advised that the evaluation units should be established outside of the departments dealing directly with implementation of the ROPs (e.g. selection of individual projects to be financed). Most administrative units which perform tasks of „evaluation units” are situated in departments also responsible for other tasks connected with management of structural funds or regional development as such (e.g. monitoring of ROPs or programming of regional development). Only in few regions evaluation units are established as separate units in the organisational structure of the regional administration. There are usually individual posts dedicated only for implementation of evaluation tasks, however in practice, the personnel is often involved in realisation of other tasks and activities.

In most Polish regions evaluation units are situated at lower level of administrative structure (units of departments). Moreover, there were separate evaluation units for different operational programmes managed at regional level (they were supposed to cooperate and exchange the experiences). Organizational solutions, that would allow for greater coordination of various evaluation activities carried out in one organization, would contribute to the development of a sustainable evaluation culture [3, p. 19-20]

Following the recommendations of the European Commission, the NEU encouraged regional administration to appoint steering groups/committees for evaluation of the ROPs. They consist of representatives of administrative staff involved in managing the SFs and in particular in evaluation activities (sometimes evaluation experts and economic and social partners). The main task of such steering groups is to advise on the planning of evaluation and to monitor the evaluation process and results. From the point of view of the effectiveness of evaluation process and development of evaluation capacity it would be useful to engage representatives of different organizational units of the Marshall's office in the works of steering committees (not just those directly involved in the implementation of programs). It would contribute to a better understanding of the evaluation process in the whole organization. The level of officials involved in the activities of such bodies is also very important. Participation of senior officials increases a chance to give evaluation a higher priority in the organization and a chance of actual use of the results. Groups involving employees of a lower rank benefit from more functional cooperation (acquisition

of information, understanding of needs, implementation of recommendations). The advantageous solution is also continuous participation of experts in such working groups. Cooperation with regional academic centres is a good, but still rare practice.

The NEU recommended to use external evaluation as a way of ensuring objectivity and independence of the opinions of evaluators. Therefore, in practice, evaluation units in the Marshalls' Offices are responsible for commissioning of external evaluations. The internal evaluations are also permissible, but only as additional or complementary ones. Only in few regions evaluation units conducted internal evaluations, which mostly dealt with effectiveness of management procedures of the programme. Internal evaluations usually concerned issues which did not require to engage a lot of staff or money. Nonetheless, their realization met with difficulties resulting from lack of adequate resources (staff, knowledge, skills) and irrelevant internal administrative procedures. On the other hand, in the opinion of the personnel of the evaluation units, the internal evaluations were good opportunities to develop evaluation capacities and a very useful experience.

Despite the implementation of rather uniform system there are differences between regions in the scale and scope of evaluation of individual ROPs (refer to Fig. 2).

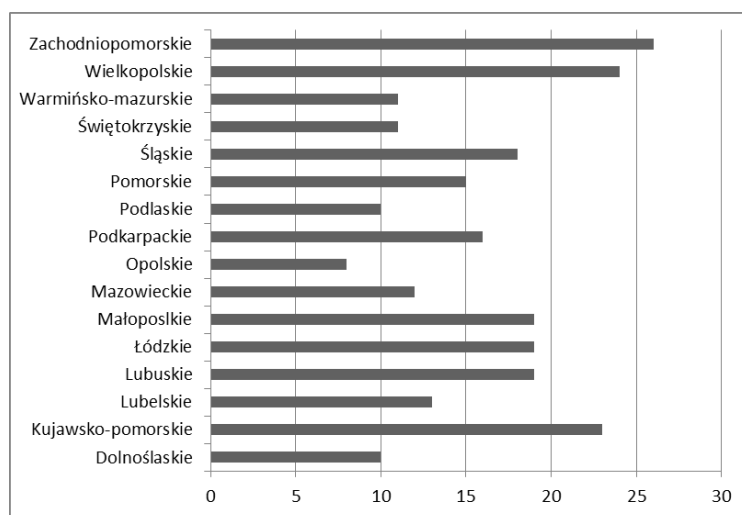


Fig. 2. Number of completed evaluations for Regional Operational Programmes in regions in 2007-2014

Source: „Register of evaluation studies”, 24th June 2014
(http://www.ewaluacja.gov.pl/Wyniki/Strony/Wyniki_badan.aspx).

The actions and initiatives undertaken by the regional administration in order to build the evaluation capacity can be grouped into three headings:

- building the human capital in the form of development of knowledge and skills of employees directly engaged in evaluation of ROPs, as well as other staff of the Marshall's Office (seminars, postgraduate studies, conferences),
- cooperation and networking with other organizations dealing with evaluation (the NEU, other regions, external experts),
- promotion and information activities, including the publishing of the evaluation reports (on paper and in the Internet).

5.3. The practice of evaluation at local levels of self-government

One of the biggest beneficiaries of the Structural Funds in Poland are the local self-governmental units – communes (gmina) and counties/districts (powiat). It is therefore interesting to analyse the impact of the Structural Funds' evaluation system on development of evaluation practice and evaluation capacities in local units of administration. In 2015 the Author conducted research, based on 150 telephone interviews (CATI) and 4 in-depth interviews with representatives of local administration. The results allowed to answer the research questions on the scale of evaluation practice concerning the projects assisted by the SF, aims and motives of undertaking evaluation of the EU projects, main functions of evaluation, as well as the level of evaluation capacity in local administration.

The results of the survey suggested a high level of practice in project evaluation in local administration units in Poland. The majority of respondents, 68.8% of communes and 76% of counties, confirmed conducting evaluation of the EU projects. More than 25% of them declared conducting evaluation of all projects and 34% of most projects. These results should be interpreted with caution, taking into account the different understanding of the notion of „evaluation” by the administrative staff. In-depth interviews revealed that respondents might differently understand activities that can be considered as evaluation. Some thought that only research conducted by an external expert, based on advanced methodology can be described as evaluation. Other respondents acknowledged conducting a survey among participants of the project as the evaluation (this concerned mainly projects assisted by the European Social Fund). Providing precise data on the scale of the practice of evaluation of local units (understood in line with definitions presented above) is difficult and requires a more in-depth research.

The dominant form of evaluation was internal evaluation. In most of the units, 83.8% of communes and 87.2% of counties, the evaluations were carried out by office's personnel or persons involved in the project's implementation (in units subordinated to administration, for example schools). In 44.8% of the surveyed units evaluation was also commissioned to external experts (in communes – 43%, in districts – 52.6%). The main barrier for realization of external evaluations was their cost.

Evaluations carried out in the local units had mainly accountability functions. The majority of respondents indicated such objectives of the evaluation as: an assessment of achieved results (88.6%) and settlement of the grant (59%). In most units (60%) the main reason to conduct evaluation was a requirement/recommendation under the terms of the grant. Only 5.7% of units declared that the main reason was to assess their own actions. The second function of evaluation was generation of knowledge. Over 25% of respondents indicated that the purpose of the evaluation was to verify the effectiveness of various solutions (25.7%), but only 6.7% of them wanted to better understand the problems of the area in which the project was implemented. Only 19% of respondents used evaluation to better manage the projects (developmental function).

Adoption of the accountability function of evaluations did not translate into increased transparency of local governments' activities. It should be emphasized that the majority of units (91.3%) provided public information about the effects of projects (it was associated with the EU's requirement of projects promotion). However the results of evaluation studies (reports, recommendations) were not publicly available (72.2% of units). This was confirmed by the analysis of documents available on the websites of local offices. In addition, the Author encountered a large barrier to access the documents relating to the evaluation realized in local units.

The assessment of evaluation capacity was limited to the examination of knowledge about evaluation among the staff. Employees who dealt directly with the implementation of the EU projects declared average level of knowledge on the evaluation issues on 3.4 on the scale of 1 to 5 (1 – lack of knowledge, 5 – a high level of knowledge). In in-depth interviews, respondents confirmed that their level of knowledge about evaluation was insufficient. In particular they pointed to the lack of experience in planning and implementing evaluations in practice. At the same time they stressed that the knowledge of the evaluation and its functions among other office workers, not involved in direct projects, and local authorities was very small.

Among the biggest barriers in development of evaluation practice were: deficiencies in organizational, human and financial resources. The majority of respondents (53.3%) pointed to the lack of time as one of the biggest barriers

(it should be understood as lack of personnel). Almost 30% of respondents drew attention to the cost of evaluation. For 19.3% of them the main reason was a low level of knowledge about evaluation in general and for 12.7% the low level of evaluation skills in practice. During in-depth interviews the lack of awareness about evaluation among decision-makers was mentioned as the most important barrier. According to the respondents the reason for this was an approach to treat evaluation as a „procedure” required by the terms of the grant, and not as an instrument that can be beneficial to the organization itself.

The factor supporting the development of evaluation practices was a positive approach of local governments to measure and apprise their own actions. Over 40% of respondents confirmed that their units carried out activities (other than evaluations) aiming at assessing the effectiveness of projects, programs or strategies.

6. Conclusions

Since 2004 development of evaluation practice in Polish administration concerned mainly institutions responsible for the implementation of the Structural Funds in Poland. The evaluation system was established under the strong influence of the EU model of evaluation. On one hand the EU/national guidelines facilitated the task of organizing the evaluation system, as many public institutions, especially regional ones, had no previous experience in this area. On the other hand, the unification of the evaluation system limited the individual approach and better adjustment to the individual needs. In fact individual solutions are rather exceptional. Imposing the rules from above, even if they are based on the examples of good practice and best standards, may be perceived as one of the bureaucratic requirements necessary to receive the external financial assistance and may limit the sense of ownership of the process of evaluation capacity development. In effect it may limit the development of evaluation practice and evaluation culture after the termination of the financial assistance.

The biggest advantage of the unified system of evaluation is the requirement to establish the evaluation units in the structures of administration. It is a good starting point to disseminate the knowledge about evaluation within the administration. It is worth considering the adaptation of more flexible and individual organizational system of evaluation in the future. Another advantage of the evaluation capacity building in Polish administration has been development of human resources. The NEU has played an important role in educating civil servants of about evaluation. In the course of numerous seminars and conferences the representatives of evaluation units created informal contacts, which facilitate the cooperation among them.

So far the process of implementation of the Structural Funds in Poland contributed to the development of evaluation practices at local level only to a limited extent. The low level of knowledge about evaluation, particularly among decision-makers, does not support development of evaluation capacities. Evaluation is treated primarily as a formal requirement associated with the settlement of grants.

The key factor seems to be the problem in encouraging local administration to use evaluation more effectively. One solution could be to impose a formal requirement for evaluation of the EU projects. The dynamic development of evaluation practices in the regions proved that imposing a formal requirement could be a good starting point to initiate this practice. However, imposing requirements may be considered to be an additional burden for the local administration. Instead a variety of incentives and sanctions may be used (eg. additional financial resources for the use of evaluation). Any requirement should be followed by funds guaranteed for the implementation of the evaluation (as part of the EU funds). The main aim should be convincing local decision-makers about the usefulness of the evaluation. Education, training and publicity regarding the evaluation should also include this group. Otherwise, the evaluation will remain one of the procedures for implementation of the EU projects.

The evaluation of the Structural Funds was a good opportunity to initiate evaluation practice. However, it is only a first step, which may help to get acquainted to evaluation aims, functions, methods. There must exist internal forces that allow for development of a mature and durable evaluation culture integrated with political and administrative system. It seems that a key factor to facilitate the induction of such forces is connected to convincing the public officials, public administration and society in general about the benefits coming from the evaluation.

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PRAKTYKA EWALUACJI FUNDUSZY STRUKTURALNYCH W ADMINISTRACJI PUBLICZNEJ W POLSCE

Streszczenie

Celem Artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badań dotyczących rozwoju praktyki i zdolności ewaluacyjnych w administracji (regionalnej i lokalnej) w Polsce. Artykuł podejmuje próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie badawcze: czy realizacja interwencji funduszy strukturalnych przyczynić się może do rozwoju trwałej kultury ewaluacyjnej w polskim sektorze publicznym?