European Evaluation Society (EES)
The 15th European Evaluation Biennal Conference
Better Together: collaborative thought and action for better evaluation

Evaluation impact: Challenges and Emerging Trends

Evaluation use, either referred to as findings use or process use (instrumental, conceptual, symbolic) in line with Alkin and Taut's conceptualization (2003), is at the core of evaluation theory and practice, nevertheless close linkage between good evaluation and good policy making is often undermined.

The likelihood of evaluation being used depend on several interrelated internal and external factors, at the crossroads of the organizational and political environment into which an evaluation intervenes and the design of the evaluation itself (Saunders, 2012).

The aim of this session is to advance knowledge about organisational and institutional factors that may affect evaluation use from a systemic lens (Dahler-Larsen, 2012). We aim at discussing why evaluation use can shift over time or differ across organizational contexts and policy domains, even when they operate under seemingly stable external conditions (Kupiec, Celińska-Janowicz, & Pattyn 2023). Thus, we focus on the Italian case as testbed.

Italy can be regarded as a late comer in the institutionalization of evaluation: this first wave of evaluation (from 90' on) was pushed thanks to two main factors: a political agenda inspired by the NPM, and the requirements of the European Union (EU) in terms of evaluation of public investments (Melloni 2020; Marra 2021). Today, evaluation is a practice formally introduced into our political and administrative system (Regonini 2021), and it is probably a long way toward building a complete and deep-seated institutional framework. The diffusion of evaluation is scattered and it has not always turned into a widespread evaluative culture, as a source of learning and improvement for policymaking (Gentili 2017; Melloni 2020; Marra 2021; Regonini 2021).

Objectives sought

Through a sparking discussion, the session aims at:

- identifying the systemic forces that support the status quo and those that will allow change to happen; providing key insights for a critical and reflexive relationship between the evaluator and the stakeholders across different institutional and political contexts.
- discussing explanatory factors (as external pressure and the propensity to evaluate) of the adoption of evaluation practices.

- providing key insights for practice that help orient and inform professionals to make evaluation more relevant and useful to inform strategy and decision making

The case studies presented will offer a kaleidoscope of different patterns of evaluation use, across policy domains and organizational contexts characterized by different degree of institutionalization of evaluative practice.

Based on the cases presented, the discussion will focus on two questions:
1. Which internal and external factors currently influence the evaluation use?
2. Under which conditions evaluations can fulfil their respective intentions (from contributing to the knowledge base, to policy learning, etc..)?

Titles and brief description of each case study

1. *Advocacy and pluralist dialog among stakeholders: the case of the Tornasole project,* Veronica Lo Presti* and Veronica Salvi. This contribution aims to highlight, through a theoretical reflection with concrete empirical implications, the capacity for advocacy and the possibility of initiating a concrete dialogue with stakeholders starting from the case of a complex and multi-voiced project to combat educational poverty

2. *Using quali-quantitative data for case management and evaluation of social marginality interventions: a case study of a innovative public-private project in the Somma Lombardo district,* Walter Antonio Canu*, Giuseppina De Angelis, Fabrizio Tenna. This contribution aims to share a collaborative evaluative experience based on the integrated twofold use of primary quali-quantitative data, which were utilized either for case management and for evaluative purposes, enhancing the efficiency and the effectiveness of the field work practices and contributing to a more synergic collaboration between private operators and public social workers.

3. *Enabling conditions in promoting evaluation impact and influence: the Evaluation exercise on the Collaborative Research in the NOP EC 2014–2020* - Virgilio Buscemi*, Dario Quatrini, Francesca Catapano, Alessandra Luisa Parisi. Starting from the "Evaluation exercise on the role of Collaborative Research for the enhancement of innovative capacity, development economy and territorial rebalancing", this contribution led to the elaboration of a first definition of "Collaborative Research", through an in-depth study of the existing scientific literature, programmatic documentation, and regulations.

4. *ANVUR's guidelines in Italian higher education institutions toward assessment of KEC activities* - Daniela Robasto, Lucrezia Bano*. The proposal aims to tackle the impact of the guidelines by which ANVUR moderates the theme of knowledge exchange and collaboration toward universities' strategic choices and goals of action on the subject of evaluating KEC activities, and to highlight peculiarities and points of interest for the purposes of the session.

5. *Is feminist inclusive evaluation more impactful? and if so, how?*, Gaia Del Negro*; Giulia De Bernardi; Silvia Solinas Mulder. In the framework of feminist and transformative evaluation, this case study focuses on the importance of caring for the *relationship* with the client, and all research actors, for looking into the future in a critical and hopeful way, by *giving value* to the change already in place - resource based approach not deficit based.

6. *An integrated Peer Review at provider level: results of a national experimentation and its evaluation,* Concetta Fonzo*, Laura Evangelista. This contribution discusses an innovative integrated methodology

ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA DI VALUTAZIONE
c/o Studio Associato Tora VinciGuerra
Via Garibaldi 99 00047 Marino (RM)
C.F. 0533109100

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Website: https://valutazioneitaliana.eu/
Email: segreteria@valutazioneitaliana.eu

elaborated by merging the European Peer Review instruments with the National Evaluation System tools, highlighting their opportunities and the strengths and also their ability to succeed in bringing around the table people who act in different regulatory and institutional contexts but who speak the same language and who move within the same horizon of understanding.

7. *Assessing transformative community engagement. Open issues and challenges*, Emanuela Reale*; Andrea Vargiu; Andrea Maurilio De Bortoli. This paper focuses on some crucial open issues related to the evaluation of a specific form of Community Engagement (CE) within a institutional and organizational context. caracterizeb by an high degree of istituzionalization.

*presenting author

Chairs

. Cinzia Lombardo, PtsClas spa - AIV board
. Rosaria Lumino, University of Naples – AIV board

Concise biographies of all members of the session team

Lucrezia Bano is a PhD Candidate in Psychological, Anthropological and Educational Sciences at the Department of Philosophy and Education Sciences, University of Turin. The doctoral research theme focuses on KEC activities and impact evaluation in the context of higher education. lucrezia.bano@unito.it

Virgilio Buscemi[1] is a Partner at Lattanzio KIBS and has almost 30 years of experience in the evaluation issues. He managed over 70 evaluation projects of ISF programmes. He has extensive experience in moderating conferences and in speaking at international events. buscemi@lattanziokibs.com

Walter Antonio Canu in an evaluation specialist and applied social researcher experienced in mixed-methods. He is a IAF Certified™ Professional Facilitator (CPF). He works work for public and private entities, in Italy and abroad, to promote the usefulness of evaluative thinking and practice in complex contexts aimed at decision-making and learning. walterantoniocanu@gmail.com

Gaia Del Negro is an adult educator and researcher in professional development using participative and transformative methodologies. M&E specialist in international development. Mid-career consultants, interested in evaluation for social justice. gaia.delnegro@valutare.org

Concetta Fonzo is Deputy Coordinator of ReferNet Italy and the EQAVET NRP. Member of INAPP's research group "Accreditation and Quality for training" and NOP projects funded by the ESF. Member of scientific and technical Committees and Boards for initiatives and networks promoted by EU Institutions. Expert in EU project management, contributing to national and international seminars, conferences and publications. c.fonzo@inapp.gov.it

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c/o Studio Associato Tora VinciGuerra
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C.F. 0533109100

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Website: https://valutazioneitaliana.eu/
Email: segreteria@valutazioneitaliana.eu

Veronica Lo Presti is Associate Professor in Sociology in the Department of Communication and Social Research – La Sapienza University of Rome. She is an active member of the Italian Evaluation Association - *AIV* (National Secretary until 2017). Member of *A Colorni Hirschman Institute* and founding member of the spin off *Digizen* - Quality in the research and training of the digital citizen. veronica.lopresti@uniroma1.it

Emanuela Reale is Associate Research Director at CNR-IRCRES Research Institute on Sustainable Economic Growth-Unit of Roma dealing with higher education studies and research evaluation. emanuela.reale@ircres.cnr.it

Chairs
Cinzia Lombardo is a policy and programme evaluator, with 25 years of experience referring to EU Cohesion policy. Current areas of interest: migration policies, evaluation use. She has over 15 years of experience as manager of evaluation researches. Associate Partner of PTSCLAS SpA and member of AIV Board.
Rosaria Lumino is researcher at Department of Social Sciences of University Federico II. She has almost 15 years of experience as Policy and programme evaluator, especially in the field of social and educational policies. Current areas of interest: theory-based approaches, outcome evaluation and evaluation use. She is member of AIV Board.

How the session corresponds to the theme
The session emphasizes collaboration between evaluators and stakeholders to ensure evaluations are used effectively. This aligns with the conference's focus on working together for better outcomes. The discussion will focus on the relationships amongst professionals, policy makers and stakeholders of evaluation, each of them dealing with the issue of evaluation impact from a different perspective.

Key words
Impact, Utilization, Capacity building, Advocacy, Transformative evaluation, Collaborative Research, Evidence based policy making.

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Via Garibaldi 99 00047 Marino (RM)
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Website: https://valutazioneitaliana.eu/
Email: segreteria@valutazioneitaliana.eu

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