

Learning document

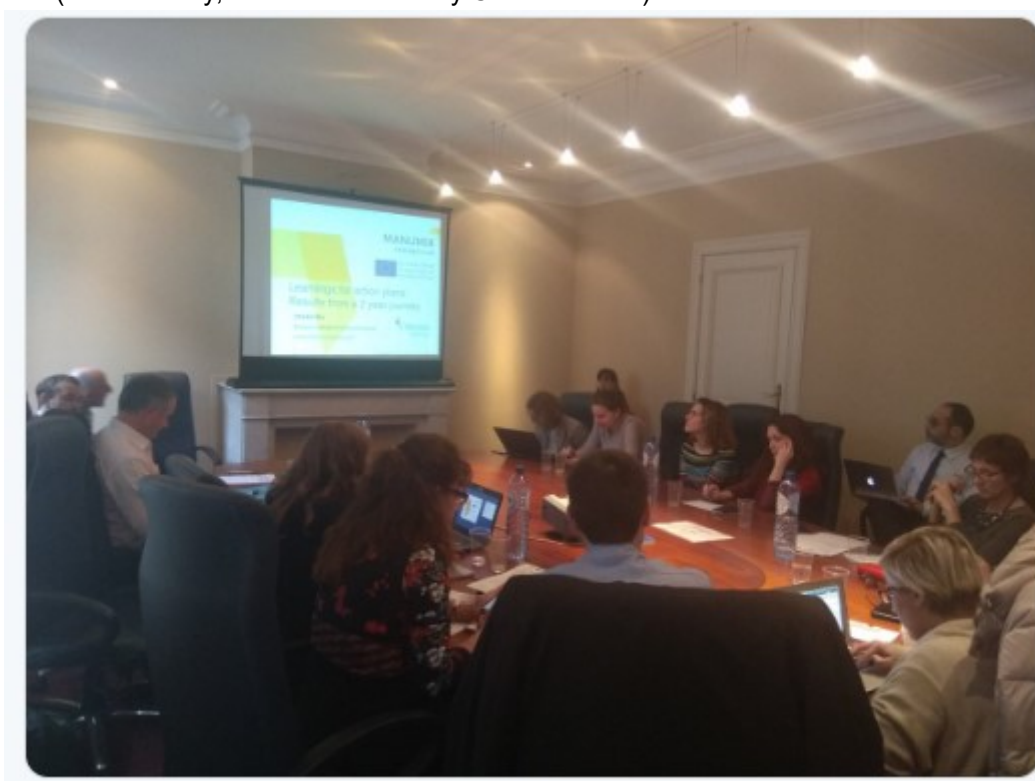
Fifth learning pillar: Evaluation management

Introduction

This document highlights the learnings from the fifth learning journey held in Brussels in November 2018 around the fifth MANUMIX pillar: **Evaluation management**. The ideas reflected in this document come from different sources. First, the presentation of the different topics made by MANUMIX partners during the learning journey constitute the basis for the learnings. In addition, the discussions that took place during those days and comments from all the MANUMIX partners and stakeholders that participated in the learning journey have fed this document.

A key value of groups like this is that it helps understanding where and in what condition a best practice is transferable for your region. You have to be reflective and don't assume that it will work.

(David Notley, Innovation Advisory Council Wales)



Learnings about evaluation management

For establishing an evaluation management system, it is relevant, among others, to define the focus of evaluation (are we going to evaluate individual programmes or a mix?), resources that will be devoted, the time-frame, the methodological approach, and what is going to be the role of each actor involved in the evaluation process. Among the many factors which are relevant for managing evaluations, some critical issues were highlighted by partners at their presentation and during the discussion:

The need to embed evaluation (and its management) in the policy cycle and always keeping in mind that it needs to be useful for concrete purposes.

Evaluation can have different purposes (as was more thoughtfully discussed in the 1st Learning Pillar) which range from mere accountability purposes to institutional strengthening and empowerment. While usually the purpose of the evaluation is set by programme commissioners or managers, due to the diverse actors involved in evaluation, it is very relevant to clarify the expectation of all of them. Actors include the 'evalualand' (those being evaluated), 'the evaluator' (those performing the evaluation) and the audience of the evaluation.

Evaluation and therefore its management should be adapted to the purpose, which is usually also very linked to policy objectives and priorities. For example, in Piedmont the RIS regional strategy will be in the future more focused on horizontal themes, and thus, the evaluation body – IRES Piedmont- is accordingly building a monitoring system that is adapted to the strategy in order to meet the needs of the adoption of the new approach.

The RIS3 may have been a driver for improving the evaluations management systems and the overall evaluation approach (also with a mix perspective) in the Manumix partner regions, or at least in some of them. The Basque partners asserted that the RIS3 has been a big step forward because it is compulsory to develop some types of evaluation and once one has the obligation to do it, one wants it to do it better and to make it a useful tool. Moreover, it makes it more urgent to adopt a mix perspective in evaluation. In the Basque Country the evaluation and its management is primarily focused on individual programmes and on the RIS3 strategy. However, in the view of Basque partners, the RIS3 strengthens the need to adopt a mix approach to assess how the combinations of different innovation instruments influence the RIS3 and each of the priorities. In fact, they have already carried out a pilot study that tries to precisely assess this and at the same time identify data gaps. Information about this study has been included in the Benchmarking document developed by Orkestra in the project. Partners from Piedmont also informed that whereas until recently evaluation has been approached as a compulsory exercise for accountability purposes, currently the idea is to integrate it in the overall analysis and research system of/for the region.

Regardless of the different overall purposes, all the partners agree that evaluation should always provide results and be useful for making policy decisions. Usefulness was a very much underlined idea. As stated by one of the partners:

The better is not always the best, but useful (Catalina Chamorro, Basque Government).

A relevant factor for the usefulness of results is timing. With this regard, Orkestra's presentation noted that there is compromise between the ideal evaluation and the usefulness of results, and 'imperfect is better than useful evaluations. Lithuanian partners also asserted that sometimes evaluation is so sophisticated that it needs a lot of resources and results are not on time for informing decision making. Both Lithuanian and Welsh partners underlined an interesting insight, that of the need to look not only

at the past when doing evaluation for contributing to policy-making, but also at the future.

The future of evaluation is looking at the future, not the past (Ieva Penelyte, Mosta)

In fact, Welsh government has developed a dashboard that mixes lagging indicators and forward-looking indicators. In their own words, this is so 'to also understand where you are going', not only what you have done. The benchmarking report developed in the project includes also a case in which evaluation is used with this view.

Closely linked to the use of evaluation for informing policy-makers is the next element discussed and highlighted by partners: dissemination of results.

Evaluation management must consider the dissemination of results

Dissemination of evaluation results was highlighted as extremely relevant by all partners. This includes not only dissemination to wider society, but also and specially - in this context of using evaluation for helping policy-makers- how to make results available to those who make decisions.

Welsh partners pointed out that dissemination is one of the challenges in their region. Evaluation is very much an internal exercise, but they are not sure how much results are then used. Likewise, Lithuanian partners stated that this constitutes a challenge for them too. Orkestra noted that it is very difficult to engage the strategic level of governments in evaluation if they are not convinced of the purpose of the evaluation, but it is necessary.

Despite it is not always clear how much evaluation results are used by policy-makers, all partners have some type of bodies and mechanisms that ensure that evaluation results are shared with decision-makers. Such is the case of the Coordination group and the Strategic R&D&I council in Lithuania, or the Steering Committee in Piedmont. In the Basque Country there also exist a Committee that meets every six months and uses data to analyse the programmes. Further, Basque partners asserted that changes in programmes have been made based on evaluation results. Changes are incremental and slow, since as a member of the Basque Government noted 'if you change a lot, companies don't know what to expect the next year' and thus, uncertainty that could be negative for companies could be created.

Internal or external evaluators?

The benefits and downsides of using internal and external evaluation were discussed. Orkestra partners summarised some of the said advantages and disadvantages of using types of evaluators that are found in academic literature.

Type of evaluators	Advantages	Disadvantages
Internal evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarity with the organization. Facilitates program improvement. Credibility. Develops institutional memory. Monitor and follow up recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of independence. Perceived organizational bias. Ethical dilemmas. Burden of additional tasks. Possible lack of power.
External evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills. New perspectives. Independence and objectivity. Facilitates program accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack knowledge of organization. Limited access to information and people. Expensive. Lack of follow up.
Centralized units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops degree of independence. Develops institutional memory. Develops superior skills. Facilitates program accountability. Enables strategic planning of evaluations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May appear threatening. Can be perceived as tool of agency. Remoteness from front line.
Decentralized units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater program knowledge. Less resistance from managers. Facilitates participatory evaluations. Facilitates program improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May lack independence. May lack methodological skills. Possible lack of power.

Source: Magro (2012)

Partner regions have different types of approaches to evaluation: through specialized government but independent bodies devoted to evaluation, like Mosta in Lithuania and IRES in Piedmont, and through a mix of internal program evaluation and specific evaluations carried out by other government or government-related bodies like in Wales and the Basque Country.

All partners agreed on the idea that accounting with an external vision which provides more independence is needed. Partners discussed that when evaluation is carried out by someone who is linked to the programme it is almost inavoidable that they will tend to find confirmatory results. Even more so, it was also noted that politicians many times want evaluation not to find gaps and improvement areas but for legitimizing their decisions. However, it was also noted that with external evaluation a challenge is to have reports that will be helpful on decision-making and the critical position of external evaluators might be biased when they depend on public funding. Thus, a mix of internal and external evaluation could be the way to take benefit of both approaches.

The relevance of data collection mechanisms

The relevance of having appropriate data for evaluation purposes has been a recurrent issue highlighted through all different learning journeys. Systematic data collection was identified as one of the challenges by Lithuanian partners, a challenge that can be extended to other partner regions too.

One of the elements linked to data collection highlighted during presentations and discussions is the relevance of having strong statistical offices that can provide data and adapt to the data needs for regional governments evaluation. Welsh and Piedmontese partners noted that it is difficult to convince statistical offices to adopt new indicators, to widen sample size, and other types of improvements. However, a

member of the Welsh delegation also noted that new ways to collect data should be explored (for example, using data for available public sources such as LinkedIn through bid data methods, etc) and governments need to be creative on data collection and analysis. As he stated:

Old ways [of collecting data] have a still a place, but they are not the only solution (David Notley, Innovation Advisory Council Wales)

Data sources are different of the ones available 10 years before and thus governments should take advantage of it. Exploring new technologies may also save costs in evaluation. Indeed, as an Orkestra member noted, this is a very hot topic currently for the European Union, who has interest in exploring the use of big data to inform policy-making. However, a challenge in this regard is to match the evidence needs of policymakers with the interest of the experts who develop these types of technologies and sophisticated methodologies.

Another element highlighted by Lithuanian partners was having meaningful data aggregation at RIS3 priority level. This was also a challenge identified by partners from Piedmont, an issue that was also discussed in the previous learning journey.

All in all, it is extremely relevant to identify data gaps in order to address them appropriately and identify possible solutions. The Basque Country carried out a pilot evaluation exercise of the contribution of innovation policy instruments to the Basque Science and Technology Plan (a summary has been included in the Benchmarking report), which also tries to identify data gaps. This was an inspiring exercise for partners from Piedmont, who stated that they could also try to do a similar exercise with the same purposes. This can be an important step to start improving the evaluation systems of regions.

However, parallel to that work, it can also be important to find ways to carry out evaluation despite the existence of data gaps. This was also taken into account in the Benchmarking report developed to help partner regions. The report includes cases in which different ways to address this challenge have been used (e.g. academic literature, previous empirical studies).



Other highlighted issues

Lastly, some other highlights include:

- A challenge for the Basque Country is to align the programmes monitoring system with the overall monitoring system of the strategy. This action has been included in the Basque action plan.
- In order to improve the quality of the evaluation, Piedmonte has created a Scientific Advisory. Equally, the responsible body for evaluation (IRES) is developing several contacts with national and European authorities, in order to engage in exchange and dissemination of learning. This can be a way of learning and thus improving evaluation systems and management of partner regions.
- A challenge highlighted by Welsh partners is to take into account that projects are not isolated but are developed in -and thus affected by- the real world. Thus, there are many factors not easy to capture and the challenge is how to take them into account in evaluation. An Orchestra member said that many factors cannot be isolated but assumptions can be made in order to conduct evaluation. For example, we can assume that economic crisis has affected equally companies of a specific sector of a region.
- Lithuanian partners identified the inclusion of stakeholders in the evaluation process as one of their challenges.