

Some reflections on the 5th Vienna R&I policy evaluation conference

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Looking back at the structure of Vienna Evaluation Conferences

- This is the fifth conference on R&I policy evaluation
- They have been all driven by new issues of the time – here COVID, crisis resilience, and Transformative Innovation Policies
- But de facto the conference is about new developments in the last 2/3 years
- And we observe a quite similar structure between them around 4 dimensions
 - New methods /new processes / new data sources / and always some new theorising attempts
 - Evaluations issues of specific ‘subsystems’ – this year: regional innovation policies, environmental policies, higher education, large research infrastructures, firm innovation supports
 - Evaluations of Policy mixes and of synergies between policies (quasi absent this year)
 - New issues: and our of the 3 mentioned, clearly here the winner is **The evaluation of Transformative Innovation Policies**



The conference in 19 points & 8 slides

- Reflecting on 4 aspects of policy processes that have extensively been discussed
- 4 “new” aspects that captured my attention
- 2 comments on transformative innovation policies
- 3 ‘quasi’ forgotten issues
- Ways forward: How to take up the 2 quasi orphan themes of this conference: COVID and resilience
- Ways forward: 4 issues that will face us

Evaluations of aspects of policy processes (1)

- **Anticipation capabilities:**

- in a way a new phrasing for ex-ante evaluation or ex-ante impact assessment
- largely associated to our knowledge on foresight
- but more inclusive, with mostly 'non experts', civil society representatives - still, in my view with unanswered questions about who they are, how they are brought in the process (see classical STS debates on 'hybrid forums', their closure and Callon's issues on framing and overflowing)
- and with a central difference: not a one-off activity for initial policy shaping, but a periodic process at each stage of the policy process, with important formative/ learning and reflexive dimensions

Evaluations of aspects of policy processes (2)

- **Co-creation and participatory processes:** An interesting session dedicated to tools about designing co-creation processes. But evaluation issues remain open especially on their learning dimensions and on the variety of modes of engagement (beyond classical aspects: initial stages, frames & priorities; or testing).
- Linked to **experimentation** as a new form/ dimension of innovation processes: a long standing issue in STS – see Latour – but not that considered in R&I policies beyond policy or living labs: a whole agenda still, with an open question for me (but visibly not reflected in the conference) : what does it tell us about the growing role of **cities** as R&I policy actors.
- **Impact assessments:** a focus on impact pathways moving from ex-post to ‘on-going’ or ‘in itinere’ to serve strategic intelligence

New aspects that captured my attention (very partial view of course!)

- “New” objects to evaluate:
 - Social innovation
 - Societal dimensions of R&I policies / programmes / instruments
 - Impact of RRI policies
- “New” types of programmes & evaluation issues : art-based / programmes to support exiled, threatened or displaced researchers
- “New” data requirements:
 - New sources (e.g. SIPER)
 - New approaches for characterising the knowledge bases of SDG / missions
- In the previous conference, we discussed the interactions between R&I policies and other policies (see also EUSPRI agenda). We see a modest emerging movement with 3 papers on energy and 3 papers on agriculture and food policies
 - Should we more active and in the next conference have dedicated sessions on health, mobility, energy or food /consumption.
- We should also be careful about being more inclusive at EU level – why not to enlarge to all ERDF evaluation activities and evaluators?

About Transformative Innovation policies

I focus here only on two points that puzzle me*

- Can we really speak of a move from “knowledge that informs” to “knowledge that transforms”? – do we aim, as professionals, at becoming ‘jacks of all trades’?
 - The return of ‘real time evaluations’
 - covering all stages of a policy / transformation process
 - being mostly formative, i.e. focusing on the learning and reflexive capacities of actor networks
 - not only considering past action but also taking in consideration shifting environments, values & political expressions of priorities
- If so, should we look back – and for instance learn from one of the most famous real time evaluation: the UK Alvey Programme?

* Many aspects discussion in the TIP sessions have already been presented

Strangely quasi-forgotten evaluation issues

- **R&I Policy mixes and instrument portfolios:** important aspects a few years ago but no longer a major source of discussion this year
- **Implementation processes:** clearly a strategic issue for TIP and for missions – But I remain rather surprised by the very limited ‘heterodox’ thinking about whether or not TIP require different types of **implementation structures** or are simply a new ‘activity’ for existing ones, with more need of coordination – between R&I structures, and between R&I structures and the existing structures of other policies involved in the SDG or mission considered
- Key operators of R&I priorities
 - nothing on **PROs**, while it has often been said that, in TIP, they might play a critical role as knowledge ‘integrators’
 - not much on **Universities**, only one session, and this even though we asked Luke Georghiou to reflect on the impact of SDG on their structures and activities

Elements for the future: (1) taking-up quasi orphan themes of this conference

- Reflect on **resilience**, not only as an issue for SDG and our societies, but also for Higher education, research and innovation systems
- Following the sole session and very rich panel discussion, deepen what might be **the consequences of COVID**
 - on the ways we evaluate careers ('one does not fit all' up to 'personalised' processes),
 - on the key role of organisations, as shown by the Manchester case and on new forms of funding (as the Vienna city initiative)
 - on the ways we organise faster ways of circulation between new knowledge and innovation (beyond transfer and translational approaches)

Elements for the future (2)/ 4 issues that will face us

1. The political push towards **more health R&I** - but how?
 - What coverage (e.g. organisational & institutional dimensions)?
 - What distributional issues?
 - What balance between types (anticipation, prevention, curative)?
2. The return of the **Cold War**: We should anticipate a strong push on military aspects.
 - What research efforts
 - and how (specialised organisations vs an overall presence, e.g. a return of the notion of dual technologies)? ...

Both warrant **strong implications on R&I systems and budgets**

- What implications for other priorities, for other SDG?
- Will it drive to a new balance between European, National, Regional and Metropolitan authorities?



Elements for the future (3)/ 4 issues that will face us

1. A
2. A

3. The growing digitalisation and the complete rethinking of how to work and the relations between working and non working life, between work and place (see the new decision of Airbnb)
4. The sovereignty agenda
 - What implications of the new approach to strategic manufacturing
 - What implications on S&T priorities (and the way they combine with SDG)
 - What ways for managing such a new strategic dimension in our R&I systems

To conclude

- A rich conference,
 - Many new developments
 - And a rich agenda for the future with
 - Of course Transformative innovative policies
 - But also much more.
- Research on Strategic Intelligence for R&I Policies should be very active in the coming years
- We shall see this in 2 years time at the next conference!

And before closing, It is the time for thanks
starting with Isabella Wagner



Isabella the
floor is Yours