Fluctuations in the Development of Evaluation Research:  
Do "Regime Shifts" Matter?  

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Summary

In recent years the interest that political actors have shown in social science analyses of policies has been decreasing significantly in various countries. This decline of political interest in policy research appeared to be related to an erosion of consensus among the political majorities in these countries on the issue of creating and maintaining the welfare-state, which was based on policy interventions in a large number of policy fields. In this context the subject of the present paper is whether and how the development of evaluation research is related to policy shifts, particularly to "regime shifts", by which is meant the change in the political party dominance and ideological complex of the central or federal government. Drawing on a comparative analysis of the development of problem-oriented social science research in a number of European countries and the USA, it is argued that the level and type of political demand for evaluation research is largely dependent on rather stable institutional characteristics of the political system and on specific features of the socioeconomic situation of a country. In such a context, however, the varying orientations of political majorities towards the social sciences also effect the development of evaluation research.

Zusammenfassung

1. Introduction

In recent years the interest that political actors have shown in social science analyses of policies has been decreasing significantly in various countries. This decline of political interest in policy research appeared to be related to an erosion of consensus among the political majorities in these countries on the issue of creating and maintaining the welfare state, which was based on policy interventions in a large number of policy fields. In this context the subject of the present paper is whether and how the development of evaluation research is related to policy shifts, particularly to "regime shifts", by which is meant the change in the political party dominance and ideological complexion of the central or federal government. In asking this question, we find ourselves confronted with the more general issue of whether and how the agenda and orientation of policy research is influenced and shaped by the socio-political context and changes therein.

Evaluation research is understood to be that subdiscipline of policy research in which social science methodology is employed for assessing the effects of public policies and programmes designed to identify the causal relations between policy and programme elements on the one hand and their intended as well as unintended consequences on the other. As a rule, evaluation research is initiated, commissioned, and funded by political or administrative agencies.

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The question of whether if and how the development of evaluation research is influenced by "regime shifts" is tied to the more general political science issue of whether certain events or developments (such as welfare-state spending) are causally related to political variables ("Does politics matter?") rather than to socioeconomic or historical and institutional variables ("Does structure matter?"). Drawing on this debate, the following considerations will be guided by two hypotheses that may well be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

In the politics hypothesis the specific "political regime" (a government whose intentions and actions are shaped by a dominant political party and its political, ideological and other goals) is taken to be a relevant "independent variable", the argument being that the emergence of evaluation research has much to do with the political majority and government constellation in existence at the time. This hypothesis would be based on a number of observations ranging from the view of most practitioners that policy analysis has an "implicit social democratic orientation" to the severe cuts in funds for social science research as announced by the two most anti-interventionist, conservative governments in the United States and the United Kingdom immediately after coming into office.

Contrarily, the structure hypothesis assumes that the factors determining the development of evaluation research are to be found in relatively stable givens lying beyond the short-term influence and manipulation of political actors in changing "regimes". This is obviously a complex set of interrelated factors, and it seems appropriate to distinguish between two major dimensions.

For a comprehensive discussion of this conceptual and methodological controversy with regard to welfare state policies, see M. Schmidt, Wohlfahrtsstaatliche Politik unter bürgerlichen und sozialdemokratischen Regierungen, Frankfurt (Campus) 1982.

First, it can be argued that evaluation research became a "functional requisite" in the state's endeavor to remain capable to ensuring the viability of the socioeconomic system in advanced capitalist society. After World War II a crucial stage was reached in which the development of adequate analytical and informational capacities became necessary for the state apparatus, which increasingly intervened in economic and social processes to cope with ever more complex steering tasks. Evaluation research may be seen as an instrument needed to fulfill these analytical and informational needs.

Second, the national politico-administrative systems also have a number of historical and institutional givens, like the constitutional framework and administrative recruitment patterns that are beyond the short-term grip of regimes and their political elites. Depending on such "policy style" and "administrative style", as these factors have been dubbed, national political systems may be more or less open to the introduction of evaluation procedures and evaluation research.\(^6\)

To discuss the value of both hypotheses as explanations for the emergence and evolution of evaluation research, we shall try to explore - whether (in terms of volume, for example) evaluation research has come into existence, and - what kinds of substantive issues and conceptual orientations it deals with.

We shall differentiate between the stage of emergence of evaluation research (see section 2) and the stage of consolidation (see section 3).

The discussion of this argument in the terms of the two hypotheses is analytically possible because a number of the countries under review in our project experienced the swinging of the political pendulum from conservative to social democratic/liberal majorities in governments in

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\(^6\) For a more detailed elaboration of this approach with regard to the emergence of problem-oriented social science research in cross-national comparison, see P. Wagner/H. Wollmann, Determinants, Restrictions, and Patterns of the Engagement of Social Scientists in Policy-Consulting - a cross-national analysis, paper presented at the XIIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association in Paris, 15-20 July 1985. (Mimeographed)
one period and from social democratic/liberal regimes back to conservative in another. A close relation between these "regime shifts" and the development of evaluation research would be required to confirm the "politics hypothesis". We shall thus begin by remembering these shifts between political majorities in those countries that are of particular interest for the following considerations.

Changes from conservative to liberal/social democratic majorities and (central or federal) governments took place in
- the United States, from a Republican administration (Eisenhower) to Democratic one (Kennedy) in 1960 and (Johnson) 1963;
- the United Kingdom, from the Conservative Party (Macmillan) to the Labour Party (Wilson) in 1964 and again from Conservative (Heath) to Labour (Callaghan) in 1974;
- West Germany, from a federal government led by a Christian Democrat (Erhard) to an interim "Great Coalition" (Kiesinger, 1966-1969) to a government led by a Social Democrat (Brandt) in 1969;
- France, from a post-Gaulist regime (Giscard) to a Socialist one (Mitterrand) in 1981 (in some respect the beginning of the Gaullist regime in 1958 may also be considered as a shift-- to an activist, reform-oriented government, a point to which we shall return;
- Italy, to some extent, with the "opening to the left" in 1962, when the Socialists joined the Christian Democratic-led majority, and again in the beginning of the 1980's, when first a Republican (Spadolini) and later a Socialist (Craxi) became head of government;
- Spain, from the Franco dictatorship, through a "transitional" government (1976-1982), to the Socialist government (Gonzales) since 1982; and in
- Austria from the traditional Great Coalition government to a Social Democratic, one-party majority in 1970.

Contrarily, changes from liberal/social democratic regimes to conservative ones occurred in
- the United States, from a Democratic administration (Johnson) to a Republican (Nixon) in 1968 and--after a Democratic intermezzo (Carter)--to the Reagan administration in 1980;
- the United Kingdom, from Labourite rule (Callaghan) to Conservative (Thatcher) in 1979;
- West Germany, from a federal government led by a Social Democrat (Schmidt) to one led by a Christian Democrat (Kohl) in 1982;
- Sweden, from a long Social Democrat rule to a bourgeois coalition from 1976 to 1982; and in
- Italy, with the Socialists' loss of influence and their temporary withdrawal from the government majority, which brought the reformist mood of the early 1960's to an end.

2. Emergence of Evaluation Research

Keeping in mind these hypotheses on "political" and "structural" determinants for the development of evaluation research, we shall now report and interpret a number of findings from our comparative research project.

A number of countries, particularly the United States, West Germany, France, and in some ways Italy, stand out as nations in which the emergence of evaluation research appears to be closely connected with what might be termed a "period of intended rapid change". In these countries, grosso modo, the following constellation seems to have prevailed in the respective periods:

- An incoming "progressive" government (liberal/social democrat/socialist, or even conservative-reformist as in France) was determined to bring about rapid social change on a sectoral or even larger scale by expanding public intervention and welfare-state policies and programmes.

- The intention of that government was to improve the policy-making ability of the governmental apparatus by developing analytical capacities, including an emphasis on evaluation research in terms of a strategy for monitoring and assessing the impacts of public policies and programmes. At first glance the emergence of evaluation research seems to be closely linked particularly with the Democrats under Johnson in the United States with the Social Democrats under Brandt in
West Germany, and, in the broader terms of policy-oriented research, with the Centre-Left coalition in Italy and early Gaullism in France. A detailed analysis provides a more balanced picture, however.

True there was an enormous upsurge in evaluation research in the United States during the 1960's, when Johnson's reformist policies (the War on Poverty and the Great Society Program) rapidly expanded federal policies and programmes, particularly in the fields of social, educational, and urban affairs, while Congress, pursuing its claim of congressional oversight regarding the President and the federal bureaucracy, proceeded to make evaluation research mandatory in an increasing proportion of the enabling legislation. Yet evaluation research cannot be regarded as a newcomer to the American scene. Instead, it may be viewed as an offspring of an "experimentalist policy style" in which American policy-makers tend to tackle new problems in an ad hoc, trial and error fashion by first formulating new programmes and setting up new organizations and then checking and evaluating the outcomes of such measures. The New Deal, with its incipient social science research and similar operations such as the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in the 1930's, may be interpreted in this way. Other examples can be seen in psychological experiments carried out as part of the country's efforts in World War II. So "by the 1950's large-scale evaluation programmes were commonplace" in the United States.

Undoubtedly, however, the rapid expansion of social action programmes under the Johnson administration since 1963, accompanied by the congressional insistence on evaluation, gave a tremendous push to the further development of evaluation research. This was supported and accelerated even more by the massive efforts both of the federal government and of Congress to build up better analytical capacities of their own. In the mid-1960's, attempts were made at the federal level to introduce Planning, Programming, and Budgeting Systems (PPBS) also

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8 For an instructive example, see Rossi et al., pp. 22 ff.

9 Ibid., p. 24.
into civilian departments. Although they failed, they "left behind a good policy analysis in strong analytical groups"\(^{10}\), constituting "bridgeheads" and advocating the evaluation of policies and programmes. Similarly, Congress tried to strengthen its analytical "muscles", both by encouraging the General Accounting Office (GAO) to use evaluation-type controls and by establishing or strengthening congressional supporting agencies.\(^{11}\) The political and ideological underpinning of this development is to be seen in a "reform coalition" between researchers, and reformist politicians and bureaucrats that formed in the mid-1960's. The most striking example of the way in which this "reform coalition" functioned is the Office of Economic Opportunities (OEO), which operated as a federal "reform bureaucracy" par excellence, also playing a key role in initiating and monitoring evaluation research in the field of anti-poverty policies. As a result of these manifold impulses, which stemmed from the institutional and policy innovations of the Johnson reform policies and which tied into earlier lines of development, evaluation research, "in the words of Wall Street, had become a 'growth industry'" by the late 1960's.\(^{12}\)

In West Germany, it is true that the press for evaluation research came with the heyday of reform policies in the early 1970's, but there were some earlier developmental lines as well. Particularly in the field of educational reform, the necessity of which was increasingly debated in the course of the 1960's, the concepts of large-scale social experimentation and evaluation designs were introduced in quasi-governmental bodies, thus transferring the relevant ongoing U.S. research to the German discussion. It was especially the economic recession of 1966/1967 that was widely interpreted to be a menetekel portending the end of the postwar "economic miracle" and prompting a reappraisal of public intervention. Under the so-called "Great


\(^{12}\)Rossi et al., p. 24.
Coalition" that was formed in 1966 by the ruling Christian Democrats and the hitherto opposition Social Democrats, there was a clear change to neo-Keynesian economic policies, accompanied by the view that the policy-making apparatus of government should be "modernized" altogether by improving its analytical and informational capacities. The unfolding reform drive came into full bloom when the 1969 federal elections resulted in a Social-Liberal Coalition which declared the "Policies of Domestic Reforms" to be its key programme. In brief, a number of factors contributed to the expansion of evaluation research. First, attempts similar to those in the United States were made to introduce advanced planning and information techniques into the operation of federal ministries, particularly the Chancellor's Office. Although most of these efforts failed, they had the important side effect of establishing analytical units (albeit comparatively minor ones) in some federal agencies and, through appointments of social scientists to reform commissions, bringing a host of social scientists into contact and interaction with the real world of politics and administration. In this way there originated an "informal analytical community" advocating policy analysis and evaluation research. Second, there was a rapidly expanding set of federal matching-grant programmes, particularly in the infrastructural policy areas (such as urban mass transit and urban renewal) marking federal intervention in areas where there was uncertainty about the implementation processes and effects. Third, reflecting that increasing "curiosity" of federal agencies to find out about the effectiveness and efficiency of federal policies and programmes, funds earmarked in federal ministries' budgets for evaluation research increased throughout the early 1970's.

In France, the Gaullist reformism of the 1960's, which aimed at a profound technological, economic, and social modernization of the country, attempted for the first time to draw systematically on sociological knowledge for designing and evaluating reform policies. Social scientists witnessed drastic increases in governmental funds given in the form of research contracts, a considerable number of which

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13 Levine, Program Evaluation, p. 48

were directed at evaluating the impact of policies, particularly in the fields of urban and educational reforms. Shaped by the American model, analytical instruments, partly of the PPBS type, were introduced in the budgetary process as means to evaluate decisions on public expenditure. Another focus of government-funded research was on the evaluation of administrative behaviour, a fact which supported the emergence of a French school in the sociology of organizations.\textsuperscript{15} But under the liberalism of the 1970's, personified by Prime Minister Barre, who adhered to the tenets of low intervention and austerity, these earlier stimuli faded away again, leading into what has been called the dark age for science in France.\textsuperscript{16} It was the socialist/communist government that, in 1981, changed the scene dramatically again, starting a new drive in science policy. In doing so, it strengthened the role of science and research in creating a new society and in finding a "way out of the crisis".\textsuperscript{17} The National Colloquium on research and technology held in January 1982 was a symbol for a new start, but the tight fiscal situation and the all but petrified institutional and personnel structure in the scientific system left little scope for change. With a recent colloquium on the "evaluation of public policies"\textsuperscript{18} the Ministry of Finance, up to then an almost totally closed "bureaucratic fortress" within the state apparatus, has started opening up for social science evaluation research. In addition, the research department of the Commissariat Général du Plan has made policy evaluation one of its major objectives, with a broader perspective on evaluating societal impacts of policy. Furthermore, there are indicators that parliament is about to strengthen its analytical capacities. As was the case in West Germany and the United States, the incumbent reform-minded government could pick up on prior developments.

\textsuperscript{15} On this period see E. Friedberg/P. Gremion, La recherche administrative et le réformisme politique, Paris (CSO) 1974. (Mimeographed)


\textsuperscript{17} R. Fossaert, L'apport culturel de la recherche scientifique et technologique, in: Colloque national: Recherche et technologie, Paris 1982. (Mimeographed)

in policy research, but the change in political majorities seems to have produced a favourable climate inside the political institutions towards the demand for policy evaluation.

In Italy, the "opening to the left" in the early 1960's occurred under conditions similar to those that prevailed in Germany some years later, when the fears heightened that the "economic miracle" might fade away. This regime shift clearly brought about an increased demand for social science information, as can be seen from the establishment of a number of policy-oriented research institutions tied to ministerial administrations in the mid-1960's. The reform drive of the early Centre-Left government faded quickly, however, and these institutions did not acquire important functions in policy evaluation. Interestingly, there was recently a new, slight move towards the monitoring of policies when the first non-Christian Democratic Prime Minister, the Republican Spadolini, established a unit for policy evaluation linked to the Prime Minister's office. A close relation between a reformist political orientation and the demand for evaluation research also existed in Austria during the early 1970's, when the Socialist government tried to introduce an active social science policy with the goal of orienting the research work more towards policy needs.

Trying to summarize and systematize the findings on the five countries that can, at least partly in this respect, be classified under what we called the "model of intended rapid change", we should point out one factor common to their experiences: The "lift off" of evaluation research conspicuously coincided with a "regime shift" in which a "progressive" political party resumes governmental power, replacing a conservative one. Whereas the United States and West Germany represent the most significant cases, this observation also holds true for Italy, where the "progressive" party joined the conservative party, and for France where the modernization-oriented, though conservative, Gaullists replaced the weak coalition governments of the Fourth Republic. So, at first sight, the "politics hypothesis" appears to explain a great deal, taking the readiness of the new political elites to foster reform policies and linking it with their belief that policy-making...
ever more complex world of intervention and welfare-state politics can be improved and assisted by social science research, not in the least by evaluation research.

But the country analyses, however sketchy they are bound to be presented here, also suggest that such an explanation covers only part of the story. There are important other factors that should be considered for explaining specific accelerations, retardations, and deviations in the development of evaluation research in the respective countries. The most important "structural" factor, in the sense discussed above, may be seen in socioeconomic development. Increasing world economic competition and an increasing need to deal with hitherto neglected socio-political constellations of problems such as spatial and sectoral disparities, environmental degradation, poverty, and inadequacies in the education system made "modernization" one of the favourite topics of political debate in the 1960's, and it was a widely shared conviction that "modernization policy" was to be based on social science analysis.

Other "structural" dimensions may be seen in the political and the administrative system and in traditions of science. For example, one of the factors clearly shaping the development of evaluation research in the United States is the "policy style" of "experimentism" that is part of the American "policy-making culture". Another factor is the constitutional rivalry between President and Congress, making Congress press for instruments of congressional supervision. The third is the experience that university-based social science has traditionally had in applied social science, enabling it to respond to the public demand for evaluation research more readily. On the other hand, the belatedness with which evaluation research became part of the political agenda in France and the difficulties into which earlier Gaullist overtures ran may be well explained partly by the "self-sufficiency" orientation that marked the traditional French administrative elites and their ways of running the country. Coming from elite training schools, administrators are confident that they can act on the basis of their own knowledge. This practice of maintaining a separate, elite school system also came to affect the system of science, for the university eventually drifted into a position rather remote from
practical political affairs, and university sociologists acquired no experience with policy research. Similarly, the early failure in Italy to develop a strong community for policy research may be related to structural weaknesses in both the political system, which caused reform policies to be abandoned quickly, and in the administrative system, which combines a legalist tradition and clientelist practice, two features that do not enhance the demand for social science analyses dealing with policy issues.

The first conclusion one might draw about the two hypotheses is that regime shifts have some influence in bringing about a demand for evaluation research but that certain structural conditions define a specific "corridor of action" within which reform-minded policy-makers act and that these structural conditions also prestructure the range of possible long-term outcomes in the science policy of policy research. To discuss this finding further, we now turn to those countries that deviate in some respect from the "model of intended rapid change" that has been sketched thus far.

Voted into power in Spain in 1982, the Socialists are determined to bring about far-ranging social, economic and political change, so the stage would appear to be set for reform policies, analytical guidance and support for which might be sought in social science research, not least in evaluation research. Although many of the leading Socialist politicians and bureaucrats in Spain were academics before entering government and administration (Maravall, for instance, was a prominent sociologist before becoming Minister of Education), such a link between reformist policy-making and social science research has been conspicuously absent. A number of reasons may briefly be surmised. First, the government's neglect of social science's role in guiding policy is probably rooted in the political calculation that the present Socialist government, having gained a clear majority on all political levels but being uncertain about the duration of such an electoral mandate, prefers instead to act with swiftness and determination, and not upon prior analyses that threaten delay and additional controversy. Second, the traditional administrative pattern of "introverted" and "self-sufficient" bureaucratic rule that has been thriving on the
highly fragmented corps ("Cuerpos") system of public administration has survived the "regime shift", making administration reluctant to turn to outside information.

Sweden differs from the afore-mentioned "model of intended rapid change" pattern on various scores. First, Sweden can be termed a "gradual reform country" in which social-democratic types of policies designed to bring about social progress by developing a welfare-state go back to the 1920's and earlier. Second, Sweden is characterized by what has been termed a "consensual" policy style instead of a adversarial one. This has, quite obviously, influenced the conceptual orientation in which social scientists have traditionally become involved in policy-consulting functions, that is, it has made them contribute anticipatory knowledge to the decision-making process rather than ex-post research findings. By the mid-1960's, however, Sweden, too, experienced a kind of rationalistic drive, as most governments in that period. On an institutional level, new bodies for policy analysis, research, evaluation, and assessment were created in the central ministries and a large number of government agencies, often with the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of government activities. This expansion conspicuously coincided with a period of particularly strong showings by the ruling Social Democrats at the polls, reflecting the electorate's perception of the needs for reform policies. But even after this period during which analytical functions were further institutionalized, the analytical achievements and performance concentrated on "policy formulation and formal decision-making procedures ... (and not so much on) implementation, evaluation, and feedback processes in government".

19 B.-C. Ysander, L'évaluation des politiques publiques en Suède, in: Nioche/Poinsard, p. 68.


21 Ibid., p. 82. Harold Wilensky has recently advanced the hypothesis that such consensus-oriented, corporatist political systems foster research of high political impact touching on a wide range of issues, whereas fragmented political economies further isolate single-issue research, which is rather irrelevant for practical policy-making purposes: "Larger contexts for bargaining mean larger contexts for evaluation research" (H. Wilensky, Political Legitimacy and Consensus:
With its long tradition on problem-oriented social research closely linked to attempts for political reform (in particular in the field of social policy), and with the practice of forging consensus on gradual reforms, (an approach that seemed to hold until the present Conservative government took office), the case of the United Kingdom resembles that of Sweden in some respects. There is a slight argument in favour of the "politics hypothesis" when we take a look at the first postwar government formed by the Labour party and at the Wilson government (in office from 1964-1970). Both were more oriented to reform and research than the Conservative government in the intervening period. But the emergence of a demand for policy evaluation has especially been overshadowed by a "structural" factor, namely, the tradition of a strong and politically neutral civil service that long acted on the assumption that the analytical skills and knowledge needed could be provided by the competence and intuition of the traditional civil service. Analyses and evaluation were to be conducted "in the operation departments whose evaluation is done mostly by the civil servants within the departments"²², and further improvements in analysis were made not through a drive for social reforms but through a "managerial" attempt to modernize the government apparatus by the "progressively conservative" government under Heath. Most importantly,

Missing Variables in the Assessment of Social Policy, in: Spiro/Yuchtman-Yaar, p. 62). See also H. Wilensky/G.M. Luebbert/S.R. Hahn/A.M. Jamieson, Comparative Social Policy: Theories, Methods, Findings, in: M. Dierkes/H. Weiler/A. B.Antal (eds.), Comparative Policy Research: Lessons from the Past and Perspectives for the Future, Aldershot (Gower) (forthcoming). While it might be true that the degree of corporatism enhances continuity in the demand for policy research (because the political actors need analytical information in the bargaining process), there seems to be no positive link between corporatism, the time-horizon, and scope of evaluation research. Corporatist democracies are not inclined to have a long-term, conceptually broader political perspective and do not encourage their policy researchers to adopt one. On the contrary, experiences with the Swedish and, to a lesser extent, German sectoralised science policy show that the social sciences tended to become rather strictly subordinated to the political demand for directly relevant knowledge and to lose their ability to reflect and analyse critically the state and long-term development of the society. About the same holds true for the French science policy of contractualisation in the 1960's and for the Austrian way of incorporating social science advice into the institutionalized processes of interest mediation.

²²Levine, Program Evaluation, p. 41
a Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) was established, following a recommendation of the 1970's White Paper entitled "Reorganization of Central Government". It consisted of a group of some 20 persons drawn from both within and outside of the civil service and reporting to the cabinet as a whole. While the evaluation function was thus increased within the governmental realm, reflecting the towering civil service orientation, the growth has remained meager as far as external evaluation research is concerned.

Having so far sketched briefly the emergence of evaluation research in a number of countries, we shall conclude this section with a glance at the substantive issues and conceptual orientations in policy evaluation. Since the what of evaluation research is largely determined by research contracts from public agencies, it is small wonder that evaluation research is strongly influenced by these public demands and by the perception that politicoadministrative actors have of what is urgent.

Therefore, questions of educational reform high on the political agenda were also on the agenda of incipient evaluation research in several countries such as the United States, West Germany, and France. Reflecting the emphasis of the Johnson administration's reformist thrust on social action programmes, the research agenda was similarly accentuated. In West Germany, reform policies that were intended to equalize life chances socially and regionally had a focus on infrastructural investments, thus giving high priority to evaluation research on policies of urban renewal, for example. A similar focus may be observed in early French evaluation research.

In this early period, in which evaluation researchers worked in constellations of "reform coalitions", this context also shaped their conceptual orientations in two ways. "Over several decades of rapid social reform, the main aim of policy analysis has been to develop and refine the tools of government intervention in the economy and to produce master plans for new fields of public services."23 In this mood, first, researchers took for granted that the goals of the reform

23 Tarschys, p. 382
policies were normatively and politically to be considered as "good" and did not question and analyse programme formulation in the societal context. Secondly, with their minds set on "improving" policy delivery, researchers tended to be interested in "output-optimising", typically advocating the gradual expansion of certain measures, a stance that seemed to be no problem in a period of sustained economic growth.

3. Consolidation of Evaluation Research: Going On Or Phasing Out?

For the regime shift from a liberal/social democrat to a conservative government, the "politics hypothesis" may have two variations: a "radical conservative" and a "moderately conservative" one.

The "radical conservative" version might reject evaluation research on two grounds. First, evaluation research might be rejected as being an instrumental part of a "rationalist" approach to decision-making while a conservative government may prefer to base its decisions on "common sense" and intuition. Second, it might be refused on the assumption that evaluation researchers in their role as social scientists are regarded as belonging to the political opponent's camp. This attitude was reinforced by the experience of social scientists who join reform coalitions with the political adversaries of the conservatives. In contrast, the "moderately conservative" version might hold it advisable to continue to use evaluation research as a decision-making tool, yet resetting its substantive issues and conceptual orientation. This position may be the result of a political learning process through which the introduction of evaluation research is a step towards "analytically founded controversy"—an irrevocable achievement of the most recent political stage from the view-point of conservatives, too. Within this context, evaluation research may be valued by conservatives as an instrument for analytical delegitimization of intervention and welfare-state operations and policies.24

24 For some examples from the German case, see P. Wagner, De la "scientification" de la politique à la pluralisation de l'expertise, in: Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Sociologiques Appliquées de la Loire (CRESAL) (eds.), Situations d'expertise et socialisation des savoirs, St. Etienne (Dumas) 1985.
Again, the countries under review represent cases useful for discussion of these hypotheses.

The "regime shift" from the progressive Johnson period to the moderately conservative Nixon administration in 1968 is provocative in that it was during the incoming Nixon administration that evaluation research reached its climax both in terms of methodological sophistication and volume, for large-scale social experimentation was then started. This is not at all as paradoxical as it may initially seem. First, by the late 1960's, evaluation research was well entrenched in the "iron triangle" of funding agencies, client groups benefitting from the programmes, and researchers interested in conducting the research on them. Second, the intellectual attraction of social experimentation and of the role of sophisticated evaluation methodology in it reached its peak.25 Third, the policy questions that were to be "tested" by the large-scale social experiments (housing allowance, income maintenance, and health insurance) suited conservative convictions, for they were based on the idea of replacing traditional welfare-state instruments (such as direct subsidies for public housing) by "market-like incentives"26 (such as housing allowances). In the eyes of conservatives, then, these experiments and the accompanying evaluation research could help redirect and reformulate welfare-state policies.27

When another "regime shift" took place in 1980--this time from the Democrat Carter administration to the conservativism of the Reagan complexion evaluation research was faced with some dramatic changes in the political environment and context. As the Reagan administration seriously went about dismantling federal programmes of the welfare-state inherited from the despised Democrat era (e.g., legal assistance service, social services, health benefits), both federal funding of the

25 See Donald Campbell's famous article "Reforms as experiments" (American Psychologist, Vol. 24, 1969, pp. 403ff.).


corresponding evaluation research and social science research at large were ideologically stigmatized by the Reagan administration, which evidently suspected the social sciences, particularly the noneconomic sort, of siding with the welfare-state and the political opponent's cause, if not with socialism. The determination with which the Reagan administration, in its first year, proceeded to reshape and redirect the social science funding of the National Science Foundation (NSF) is telling. But when the battle smoke dissipated, it became apparent that the real changes were smaller than the political rhetoric and intentions might have suggested. The reason for this remarkable stability of evaluation research (as well as social science research in general) seems to lie in the pluralism of interest and power in the political and social system of the United States. First, the "iron triangle", consisting of public agencies as programme funders, clientele groups as programme beneficiaries, and research institutes as contractual researchers, still operates, with public agencies (such as the National Health Institute) being powerful enough to ride out sudden political winds from top-level government. Second, Congress proves to be a powerful actor when it comes to watering down high-flying plans of the administration to discontinue welfare-state programmes and related research. When the Reagan administration went about cutting back NSF social science funding, the social scientists, for the first time, managed to undertake collective action. They founded a lobbyist organization, the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), unleashed a public debate, and lobbied for their cause on Capitol Hill. As a result of such classical interest-group politics, some of the NSF funds that had been cut were restored two years later. Third, even when federal funding of evaluation research is actually cut back, the multitude of nongovernmental funding sources make it likely that a private foundation will step in. The "regime change" thus brought about a sharp change in the political context but had only limited impact on the existence of evaluation research. The impact on substantive issues and conceptual orientations was stronger, though.

See, for example S.A. Kirkpatrick, Social Science Research under Siege, Social Science Quarterly, Vol. 64, 1984, No.4.
In the United Kingdom the "regime change" from Labour to Mrs. Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979 brought an onrush of conservative thinking and ideology that was even more distinct than in the United States under Reagan. Likewise, social science was ideologically stigmatized as belonging to the political opponent's camp and as devoid of socially and politically meaningful analytical potential (though doubts about the relevance of social science's contributions to policy-making had already been expressed under the prior Labour government). Given the centralized decision-making structures of Great Britain's unitary system and given the means to implement and enforce decisions arrived at centrally, some of the decisions to cut back led to some institutes being closed (for instance, the Centre of Environmental Studies) and the curtailing of funds for others (such as the Home Office Criminal Research Department). The restructuring of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and other like examples, which fell short of the initial, more radical, intentions, however, show that the political grip on the science system also has its limits. Because of the country's powerful civil service tradition, the analytical capacities of research, including evaluation research, had been developed mainly within the ministries, so it is small wonder that the ideological disdain Thatcher conservatism has for evaluation research was directed at these intragovernmental units and approaches. The dismantling of the CPRS also gives a revealing insight into conceptual reorientations to be dealt with below.

In West Germany, the 1982 "regime shift" from the federal government led by the Social Democrats to that led by the Christian Democrats has brought about a change in the political context that is considerably less sharp than in the United States and the United Kingdom. The incoming conservative government of the Federal Republic has questioned the key elements of the welfare-state system far less than was the case in those two countries. After all, the governments by the Christian Democrats had essentially contributed to its development during the 1950's and 1960's. The attitude of the incoming government towards social science research and the analytical function of evaluation research also proved to follow moderate views. Whereas funding in some areas was cut, notably in peace research, the thrust towards improving the analytical capacities of the political system has been even
stronger than before in other areas, like technology assessment. As far as federal funding of evaluation research is concerned, it is to be noted that the reduction in these research budgets had already begun in the late 1970's under the politically ailing Schmidt government. The cuts were made primarily for fiscal reasons and as a strategy of the least political resistance, but they also mirrored the deepening disillusionment with the policy-relevance of evaluation research. Having thus started at the end of the decade, this development was not initiated by the "regime shift" ("Wende") but was certainly accentuated by it, a fact that reflects both the shrinking volume of evaluation research and a shift in substantive issues and conceptual orientation (see below).

In France and Italy, it seems that the lack of demand for evaluation research in the 1970's allowed for a consolidation of a policy-analysis community only on a lower level. Social science research, where it had found an institutional basis, was reoriented more to basic research or to non-administrative actors and thus reflected the political system's disinterest.

In Sweden, an exception to the "rule", demand for evaluation research has increased considerably in the second half of the 1970's. With our conceptual framework in mind, one might be tempted to relate this to the change in political majorities in 1976, which brought a non-social-democratic government to power for the first time in more than forty years. But it would be more adequate to regard both phenomena—the increasing interest in policy evaluation and the temporary decline of the social democracy—as consequences of the end of a long period of economic growth and steady expansion of the welfare-state. Growing budgetary deficits, "the scissors' crisis in public finance"29, greatly enhanced the need for policy evaluation for the simple reason that previous policy concepts could not be continued. The title of the report of the recent government commission on policy planning and public administration, "Policy Innovation Through Policy Reappraisal",

has turned into a label for all subsequent attempts to restructure the welfare-state through evaluation of the impacts that previous policies have had.

These observations lead to the conclusion that it is more important to look at the what, the substantive issues and conceptual orientations of policy evaluations, when examining the period of consolidation of evaluation research. That way, one can grasp changes, be they influenced by "regime shifts" or by longer-term "structural" factors.

To begin with the Swedish case, one might compare the volume of the political demand for evaluation research in the 1980's to the "boom" in planning research in the 1960's\(^\text{30}\), but the shift in substantive emphasis must be stressed. Whereas the expansion of social welfare policies had priority on the research agenda in the 1960's, economic aspects are the topics of the current period.\(^\text{31}\)

Under the Reagan administration in the United States research refocusing on the cost-efficiency and management dimensions of policy-making and administration has gained high currency, thus also increasingly stressing the question of whether, under which conditions, and how existing policies and programmes are to be "terminated".\(^\text{32}\) The welfare-state interventionist policies appear to have lost normative backing within the social science community as well, making the fundamental wisdom of such policies and the study of their "termination" become plausible issues.

There is a similar tendency in both West Germany, where "deregulation" and "debureaucratization" now rank high as research topics along with technology-related issues, and the United Kingdom, where the weak inner-governmental basis for evaluation has been further weakened and more oriented towards short-term management problems.

\(^{30}\)Premfors, p. 76.

\(^{31}\)See Tarschys, Fluctuations....

Across countries it is possible to state that the viability of a nation's economy and its capacity to cope with challenges of technological innovation and international competition have become priority issues in policy-oriented research. In research orientation, the political context of the fiscal crisis and of the financial cut-back strategies have led evaluation research to center more on efficiency and effectiveness, a perspective that is prone to "minimize inputs" in order to make public intervention as cost-effective as possible.

The evidence in the countries under consideration does not appear to support the hypothesis of a clear-cut link between "regime shifts" and the development of evaluation research, however. In fact, the causal connections seem to be much more diffuse; the socioeconomic context in general and a country's fiscal and economic situation in particular appear to have much more explanatory power. An interesting illustration of this "causal mix" is presented by Mitterrand's France, where evaluation research has been ascending since 1982 with major foci on technology and public management efficiency (thereby reflecting the socioeconomic context). However, the research is also pervaded by a socialist government's vision of embedding such orientations in an overarching concept of societal guidance and compatibility, of expanding reform policies, and of extending citizen and minority rights.

4. Conclusions

It may be stated that the "politics hypothesis" has some value in explaining the emergence and consolidation of evaluation research. "Reformist" governments oriented towards harmonizing and politically furthering economic development and to expanding the welfare-state stimulated demand for policy evaluations on a broad scale; it was the attempts of conservative governments to abolish this analytical tool that have generally been able to reorient evaluation research to new conceptions and topics. But, all this happened in a "corridor of action" that is defined through socioeconomic developments on one hand
and limited by structural characteristics of the politicoadministrative system on the other. On this basis, the recent trends in evaluation research may be summarized as follows:

First, there is a general trend towards increased evaluation of state activities. This seems primarily related to the rethinking of the role of the state after a long period of steadily expanding public intervention in economic and social processes whose effects tend to be regarded, if not extremely negatively, then more critically than two decades ago. The mode in which this debate is led is significantly shaped by the relations of political forces in each nation. Some conservative parties have almost returned to a liberalist attitude typical of the nineteenth century, and where these parties have gained an electoral majority, as in the United States and the United Kingdom, the emphasis is laid on deregulation and privatization with a view to giving absolute priority to economizing or re-economizing social relations. More moderate conservative parties, various centre parties, and large parts of the social democratic parties are inclined to join this debate on dismantling the level of state activity, but they tend to stress the aspect of debureaucratization admitting that useful state activities have in the past been accompanied by an unnecessary degree of inefficient bureaucratic behaviour. More on the left of the political spectrum, the restructuring of political interventionism is discussed in terms of democratization and participation as well, (still) favourite notions of the incumbent French socialist government. The main interest that the respective government parties have in the debate on the state significantly influences the orientation of evaluation research.

Second, in the face of a worsening fiscal crisis, no government or parliament could help but discuss state action more and more specifically in terms of efficiency and effectiveness and direct the attention of evaluation research to these aspects. In particular, the core areas of public intervention, which were the essence of welfare policies and which accounted for the lion's share of public expenditures, were submitted to evaluation. Conservative governments showed an inclination to view these policies more in terms of cost-benefit analysis, whereas leftist majorities tried to evaluate the
degrees of goal achievement more in the substantive terms of welfare gains. A more accurate line of distinction might, however, be drawn between those conservatives who are ready to dismantle a good many welfare policies--like the Republicans in the United States, the Tories in the United Kingdom, and minority parties on the right in France and Sweden—and other conservative groupings, often with a Christian Democratic orientation, who share the commitment to the welfare-state-like large parts of the German and Italian Christian Democrats and important segments of the right in Sweden and France.

These two tendencies are linked with a more economics-based approach to evaluation on the one hand and a perspective on policy implementation, outputs, and impacts that is broadened by concepts from sociology and political science on the other hand. The neglect of the latter type of social science knowledge applies perfectly to a more "intuitionist" understanding of politics and policy-making, which seems to be characteristic of some conservative governments.

In addition, the concern with efficiency included a second look—after the "wave" of attempts at administrative reform in the 1960's—at the working of the administrative apparatus, a look that, in turn, was influenced by different viewpoints. More conservative majorities tended to get rid of "superfluous" institutionalized functions that in their view, only inflated the administrative body, whereas socialist governments made new attempts at rationalization that were, however, less technically and more politically conceived than in the 1960's.

Third, the thematic focus of evaluation research varies with the complexion of government majorities. Though no government presently dares to neglect the importance of a well designed and efficient industrial and technology policy, the orientation of research in countries governed by Conservatives shows a rather one-sided concern with these issues, which are often conceived only in terms of international competitiveness. Socialist majorities, on the other hand, try to include aspects of societal compatibility in the research on industrial and technological modernization and are still engaged in introducing or improving social policies.
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