

A Conceptual Overview of How and Why to Evaluate Partnership

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1. Introduction

Partnership is understood as a cooperation among relevant stakeholders, including public, public-private, private, and civil society organizations (for example, nonprofit organizations, associations). Such a cooperation aims at improving the relevance of projects, programs, and policies, and the sustainability of their outputs (Audit Commission 1998, p. 43; OECD 2001). A sense of co-responsibility and co-ownership by all partners stands behind the increased relevance and sustainability (Iftikhar 2012). Another added value of partnership relates to enabling partners to share a pool of resources and its better use (Audit Commission 1998, pp. 44–46). The presence of partnership as the goal 17 among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underlines its importance for sustainable development.

SDGs are well covered by sub-goals (targets) and indicators to monitor their performance. This also concerns the Sustainable Development Goal No. 17 (hereafter SDG17), to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (UN 2016), which is of our consideration. There are 19 targets and 25 monitoring indicators under the SDG17. These targets and indicators cover finance, technology, capacity-building, trade, and systemic issues (UN 2015, 2016). From this perspective, it is not a methodologically difficult task to monitor the progress in achieving the targets, but it still does not say anything about the efficiency, effectiveness, or impact of SDG17, as this is a task for evaluators.

There is a difference in the use of monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring is a managerial continuous activity, with the aim to keep projects on track and check progress according to pre-defined objectives and indicators, as is also the case of the SDG17. Moreover, it helps to make corrections if the implementation is not heading towards the pre-defined objectives. An evaluation makes a judgement about the projects and policies and assesses their success or failure in relation to relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability (Morra Imas and Rist 2009, p. 108). Evaluation is used more for learning purposes than monitoring. A project that has not achieved its goals can be used for learning purposes, and evaluations can provide managers and policymakers with information on how to perform better. From this

perspective, we see that the practice is oriented towards the monitoring of SDG17, while evaluations are rare.

Even though there exist evaluations of partnerships, they concern mainly processes of establishing and managing of partnerships. This points out several aspects of high relevance for constituting successful partnerships and their impacts on the success of the policies implemented in partnerships. These aspects include transparency, shared goals, and values (Demidov 2015; Gazley 2010; Potluka and Liddle 2014), long-term cooperation (Gazley 2010; Milio 2014), and trust and equality among partners (Adshead 2014; Demidov 2015; Valerie Wildridge et al. 2004). Successes and failures of partnerships are affected by the processes, including communication, variability of opinions, and timing (Potluka et al. 2017; Valerie Wildridge et al. 2004). For the success of public-private partnership projects, Węgrzyn (2016) also adds personnel and management capacities, and the capability to solve unexpected problems.

This raises questions on whether the SDG17 targets contribute to the intended sustainable development. For example, the goal to encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships (goal 17.17), is measured by the amount of money spent. Thus, it is easy to monitor performance. However, it neither says anything about the quality of partnerships established and implemented nor about their achievements. Does this mean that partnership is a nice wording, but only a formal issue among the SDGs? How can the partnership contribute to SDGs fulfillment? These are the crucial questions, but they are methodologically challenging to answer.

The principle of partnership and its implementation into the formation and decision-making processes within the development policies has been strongly accentuated. Still, in international development policies, a systematic evaluation of the actual implementation of partnership has been rather exceptional (Brinkerhoff 2002). This chapter reacts to this research gap, and focuses on several cases where the partnership principle has been evaluated. While there is a lack of evaluations under the SDG17, other policies provide some evaluation cases, which we utilize to set up an evaluation framework in the contribution. Together with the literature on evaluations, the chapter provides a framework to answer why and how to evaluate the partnership.

Our contribution aims to answer the above-stated questions, and tries to fill the gap in our understanding of the evaluation of partnerships. The novelty of the contribution is in the building of an evaluation framework, combined approach of seven purposes to conduct evaluations, with standard evaluation criteria, and criteria

for the implementation of optimal partnerships. We do that by an overview of partnership evaluation experience from various countries, respecting their differences in state traditions, diverse policy styles, and distinct local contexts (Sweco and Nordregio 2016).

The chapter is organized as follows: in Section 2, we discuss the theme of partnership implementation in various countries. We do that to answer the question “why” while documenting variability and dependence of partnership on indigenous practices and cultural differences in ways of partnership implementation. In Section 3, we discuss the evaluation framework to answer “what” to evaluate within the partnership and what criteria define optimal partnerships. Section 4 introduces general evaluation criteria—relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impacts, and sustainability when evaluating partnerships. The final Section 5 concludes.

2. Uneasy Implementation of Partnership—Why to Evaluate Partnership

Implementation of partnership relates to various aspects of publicly funded policies and programs. The game theory theoretically explains the added-value of partnerships in better outcomes achieved by the collaboration in comparison to competitive approaches (see, for example, the prisoner’s dilemma game) (McQuaid 2000). Usually, among the most credited positive effects of a partnership are the better relevance of policies, the exchange of knowledge and learning among partners, rising awareness about policies, and the transparency of political decisions (Bache 2010; Leonardi 2006; Lowndes and Skelcher 1998; Stadtler 2015; Sweco and Nordregio 2016). The participation of stakeholders helps to redress democratic deficits (Lane 2010) and improves the relevance of policies and programs (OECD 2001), as well as their effectiveness, by sharing resources (Mairate 2006) and avoiding duplicate activities (Valerie Wildridge et al. 2004). On the other side, it is necessary to keep in mind that the different capacities, interests and agendas of stakeholders in a partnership can prevent successful implementation (Chang et al. 2015), and can cause disillusionment among partners (Potluka et al. 2017). Moreover, interest groups can influence the decisions by rent-seeking (Milio 2014), which in turn can harm other stakeholders, especially those with insufficient skills. Thus, it can lead to low accountability and pointing out democratic deficit (Geissel 2009; Perron 2014; Peters and Pierre 2004; Scharpf 2007). Another problem relates to the principal–agent relationship in EU cohesion policy (Blom-hansen 2007). Partnerships often do not achieve the intended goals, because the agent provides the principal, with the information on the ground that is specific to his or her own serve interests, but do not really serve the mutually agreed

goal. Such a situation leads to low financial compliance and financial corrections (Mendez and Bachtler 2017). The inconclusiveness of views on partnership calls for partnership to be evaluated more rigorously, to know what effects partnership achieves and how to improve its implementation.

Among the 19 of the SGD17 targets, 12 quote “developing countries” or “Global South”, but the potential pitfalls of partnerships are also a concern in developed countries. Hodge and Greve (2017) point out the inconclusiveness of evaluations of public-private partnerships. Another case concerns partnership belonging to one of the fundamental and long-term horizontal principles in the European Union (Piattoni 2009), specifically in the EU cohesion policy (European Commission 2014b). The need for partnerships in shaping and implementing policies and measures is grounded, among others, in The European Code of Conduct on Partnership (European Commission 2014b). This document intends to help the implementation of partnerships by including a list of groups of partners potentially relevant for partnership with the public sector in implementing EU cohesion policy funded programs. Partners should be the relevant stakeholders, with competences and capacities to participate actively and effectively. The broad definition covers all relevant stakeholders from the public sector, economic and social partners, the business sector, and civil society. The document (European Commission 2014b) describes not only who could be the partners, but also key factors for their effective involvement. The Code of Conduct keeps attention on the accessibility of relevant information, sufficient time for commenting on the investment programs and proposing communication channels.

Though the Code of Conduct on Partnership provides guidelines, its implementation is not legally binding (Sweco and Nordregio 2016, p. XVII). It leaves space for the EU member states to respect their national specificities when implementing it. The document defines principles, but it is not a technical guide on implementation. Thus, the partnership principle applied in the framework of EU cohesion policy is not only a tool at the level of projects’ implementation, but also a political tool enabling the relevant social partners like nonprofit sector to participate in political decision-making (Bache 2010). This flexible application enables national governments to implement it according to national specifics, and avoid it when there is a lack of willingness among the participating parties.

In Europe, the intensity and quality of partnership principle applications vary, especially between the public and nonprofit sectors. While the partnership is well documented and implemented in some countries (for example, in Austria or the Netherlands, see in (Sweco and Nordregio 2016)), in others, an extension

of the partnership principle beyond the national habits was promoted with the implementation of EU cohesion policy. This concerns especially countries in Central and Eastern Europe, due to a strong central government from the times of socialism (until the end of the 1980s). Political systems in these countries use a minimal scale of participatory methods in political decision-making (Batory and Cartwright 2011; Baun and Marek 2008; Cartwright and Batory 2012; Potluka and Liddle 2014). Similar situations also appear in Greece, Portugal, and Spain (Polverari and Michie 2009). Non-participatory approach of the public sector often resulted in non-functional, often even artificial partnerships being established at the project level, just to have a partnership in a project. The capacity to successfully manage the PPP projects and political willingness to promote them is low in these countries (Mysiorski 2013). For example, Węgrzyn (2016) points out that, in Poland, about 75% of PPP projects fail. At the policy level, the situation was similar, due to low knowledge of the civil society, and other stakeholders among the public sector servants, and unclear representativeness of the delegates invited to take part in partnership (Potluka et al. 2017). In some cases, stakeholders from the public sector set up nonprofit organizations to have a partner formally meet the requirement of the funding schemes (Potluka and Fanta 2020). These organizations were not real partners, as they were politically dependent on their founding fathers.

In this relation, Kovách and Kučerová (2006) describe the emergence of the “Project Class” in connection with the implementation of EU cohesion policy in Central Europe. It is an entirely new social class, strongly linked to the implementation of the funding from EU cohesion policy. This class’ main activity is the preparation, consultancy, or implementation of projects financed from European funds. Consultants belong to a typical example. Many consultancy companies were set up solely to provide consultancy, with preparation of application for and managing EU funding. These companies would not exist without EU funding appearance. Their experience is hardly applicable beyond the system of EU funding.

Distinguishing traditional organizations from those that exist primarily through the implementation of EU cohesion policy could provide better information on the true nature of partnerships. In particular, for the quality of partnership, it is crucial to know whether the organizations do their activities primarily because of their target groups or they are rather organizations from project classes, i.e., existing solely due to the funding. Moreover, the aspect of a potential conflict of interest has not been monitored by evaluation. A typical example is a situation in which partners are members in working groups or monitoring committees of programs, and at the same time they are applicants for support.

Results of partnership implementation differ according to political culture, political decision making styles, and institutions (Dąbrowski et al. 2014). This long-term situation is also confirmed by the study of Polverari and Michie (2009), who point at two sets of factors influencing the extent of partnership. First, formal administrative practices constitute the major factor with an impact on how the partnership is implemented. Second, traditions and the experience of regional and socio-economic partners make the difference in the success and failure of partnerships. The differences in the implementation of the partnership principle relate not only to national levels, but they also differ at regional and local levels (Rinaldi 2016). These differences underline the importance of institutional factors, territorial specificities, local contexts, and individual decision-makers in making partnerships a success (Sweco and Nordregio 2016, pp. 2–3).

Often, the capacities of partners play a crucial role. Usually, stakeholders with the highest need of assistance are the stakeholders with the weakest capacities, which undermines the effectiveness of the programs (Turrent and Oketch 2009). Moreover, the lack of resources impacts the acceptance of the form of mutual collaboration. For example, if some stakeholders do not get reimbursement for the costs incurred by the meetings (travel costs and time spent on meetings), they will prefer doing their primary work and not taking part on partnership. As Polverari and Michie (2009) and Allen et al. (2017) point out, the low capacity of partners harms their ability to take part in the programming processes efficiently. Usually, such partners suffer from a lack of expertise, and they cannot systematically engage with programs.

Another frequent problem in creating partnerships relates to insufficient partners' relationships. Especially, where societies are in a transition period, the relationships are still not set up. In such a case, it often happens that the collaboration is rather short-term, the partners leave and new ones enter the partnership. In this relation, the evaluations often discussed whether the selected representatives of the civil society were the ones representing that sector as a whole (see, for example, the changing composition of working groups in (Potluka et al. 2017)).

Evaluation serves various objectives. Owen (2004) sees the purpose of evaluation in the following benefits: synthesis, clarification, improvement, rescheduling and checking, and learning/accountability. Based on this classification, Batterbury (2006) goes further, and defines the following seven evaluation objectives using the example of EU cohesion policy, which can be used as evaluation criteria, including recommended methods.

- (A) *Accountability and legitimacy* of policy cover evaluating whether a policy achieved desired outcomes and impacts and is oriented towards effectiveness. It usually applies a summative approach. Among the methods, Batterbury (2006) recommends impact assessment, theories of change, realist evaluation, econometric modeling of outcomes, and performance indicators.
- (B) *Improved quality and performance* cover questions of achieving performance targets and aims to help the evaluated policy improve its performance. Evaluators apply performance assessment or formative approaches. This objective is evaluated by performance indicators or a realist evaluation approach.
- (C) *Better planning and program design* are aimed at evaluating and improving the theory of change and the logic staying behind the policy. Together with ex-ante evaluation, the methods used are similar, as in the case of accountability and legitimacy (Batterbury 2006).
- (D) *Enhanced capacity* covers criteria for assessing success, what to do to achieve better results, and how to understand the policy better. Formative and learning-focused approaches are used. Synthesis, meta-evaluations, and realist evaluation belong to methods applied.
- (E) *Learning* has an explanatory role in understanding why the policy has the observed effects, what can be taken for other policies and what unintended effects appeared. By learning, evaluators use formative approaches, by similar methods, as in the case of evaluation of enhanced capacities.
- (F) *Increased ownership of the program and/or of the evaluation*—participants play a crucial role, as they define criteria to assess the success of the policy and needs of change. Thus, they get control over the policy. Participatory evaluation belongs to approaches on how to evaluate programs within this objective.
- (G) *Empowerment of stakeholders* is a further step in the involvement of participants, as evaluators evaluate whether the goals of participants change during the lifetime of the policy and how the participants evaluate success. Participatory and democratic evaluations belong to approaches on how to evaluate this objective.

The objectives A–C are the most common use of evaluations in EU cohesion policy, while F–G belong among the rare objectives of evaluations in this policy.

To conclude on the question of why to evaluate the partnership, variations in partnership implementation, and problems that partners face are strong arguments for differentiating of effects, outputs, and outcomes of partnership. It comprises also a strong need for conducting evaluations to learn how to perform better partnerships. We see many positive attributes of partnership, but also problems, at the same time,

depending on whether the economic or political performance is evaluated (Hodge and Greve 2017). The partnership has a great potential to positively contribute to policymaking and policy implementation, but at the same time, it is not easy to implement. Several conditions should be met to achieve a long-term sustainable partnership with positive effects. We will discuss them in the following section.

3. Evaluation Framework—What Criteria to Apply to Evaluate Quality of Partnership?

Although many papers discussed evaluations of SDGs generally, the overview of studies contributing to evaluations and SDGs shows that these evaluations usually avoid evaluating SDG17 (Avtar et al. 2019; Jing et al. 2018). For example, Jing et al. (2018) used indicators to evaluate several SDGs, but in the case of SDG17, they concluded that, for China, the evaluation of SDG17 is not relevant. Another paper (Avtar et al. 2019) simply skipped the evaluations of SDG16 and 17, without a clear explanation.

Of the whole sample of papers collected for the purpose of this contribution, only a limited number concerned the evaluation of SDG17 directly (Allen et al. 2017; Khan et al. 2018). Even when SDG17 is part of an evaluation, the study is limited to an overview of the fulfillment of the indicators (Allen et al. 2017) or using a descriptive methodology (Khan et al. 2018). On the other side, we understand why the authors chose their approach. In contrast to SDG1-15, the actual outputs of SDG17 are not a tangible investment, but relationships; therefore, their evaluation is methodologically more challenging.

In order to facilitate the solving of the methodological obstacle of evaluation of partnerships, EU cohesion policy helps to define an evaluation framework. This policy commands a budget of 351.8 billion EUR for the period 2013—2020 (European Commission 2015). This large investment aims at the core development objectives, like economic growth, job creation, competitiveness of companies, sustainable development, and quality of life (European Commission 2014a). The advantage of EU cohesion policy is that it covers all EU member states, and thus there are many options to evaluate it. Moreover, the EU cohesion policy share on public investment plays a crucial role in many countries (all Central and Eastern European countries, but also Portugal), where it makes half of all public investment (European Commission 2017, p. xxii). Such funding provides an opportunity for various evaluation exercises.

From the perspective of evaluations, EU cohesion policy belongs to evaluation-leading policies in Europe (Ferry 2009, p. 14). Some studies even argue that the evaluation culture in Europe has grown up around this policy (Højlund 2014).

Because partnership is defined and recommended at all political decision-making levels in this policy (European Commission 2014b), and some evaluations already exist, we take the evaluation experience from this policy and build the conceptual framework based on it.

The previous section explained the importance of partnership and why to evaluate it. Still, we need to respond to what aspects of partnership to evaluate and how to evaluate them. Based on studies by Gazley (2010); Milio (2014); Potluka and Liddle (2014), who evaluated partnership implemented within EU cohesion policy, we take the following seven characteristics of partnership to point out the core aspects defining optimal partnership. Hodge and Greve (2017) apply a similar approach when evaluating public-private partnerships based on risk sharing, innovation, working together, commonness of the collaboration, and length of the collaboration. These aspects can be used as criteria to evaluate the quality of partnership, implemented when evaluating processes in partnerships generally.

- (1) *Declared and shared common goals of the partners:* The objectives of the partnership are clearly defined, and all partners understand them the same way. The goals are published, and thus available to all relevant stakeholders. Usually, the most time-consuming and challenging part of partnership concerns setting up and the discussion on goals and their understanding. Moreover, goals can change in time according to circumstances. In such a case, the partnership needs to re-assess them again.
- (2) *Mutual benefits of the cooperation:* Each partner gets added value out of their taking part in a partnership. It seems to be a natural requirement, but if any partner gets no added value, this requirement is violated, even if all other requirements are met, and other partners get at least some added value (and the overall added value is positive).
- (3) *Long-term relationship:* The partnership was not set up only for a short-term goal (for example, to apply for funding due to a formal requirement of a call for proposals and ends with the end of a project). It is difficult to evaluate a newly established partnership, though the sustainability of partnership is still a relevant factor. This factor covers also trust among partners, which is pointed out by some authors as another distinct characteristic (Valerie Wildridge et al. 2004). Without trust, a partnership will be only of short-term duration.
- (4) *Full acceptance of the content and form of cooperation by all partners:* Each partner accepts the style of work of the partnership. Thus, the format of cooperation does not provide any advantage to any partner above the others. The same also applies to a disadvantage.

- (5) *Each partner contributes to what is missing, without which results cannot be achieved.* Each partner provides added value to the partnership. Otherwise, its membership is questionable.
- (6) *The synergistic effect ensures that the overall positive effect is greater than the sum of each participant's effects.* Not only does each partner obtain an added value (as defined in point two), but the results would not exist if the cooperation among the partners was missing. Measuring of the synergistic effect belongs among the most challenging task and relates to the question of what gets each partner in the sense of input and output.
- (7) *Joint decision-making by which decisions comprise all opinions and are unanimous:* Achieving consent is a very timely and consuming process. Pressure on quick decisions can easily harm the whole partnership. Moreover, the responsibilities for political decision-making are given to politicians by the political system. Thus, it makes this condition difficult to fulfill, and needs to define the partners' responsibilities and the willingness of politicians to hear the voices of others.

To the literature set relating to evaluations of SDG17, we also added papers evaluating partnerships in EU cohesion policy. We have added reports from evaluations of partnership, of which four were conducted at the national level (IREAS centrum et al. 2011; Navreme Boheme 2008; Potluka et al. 2017; Tima Liberec et al. 2008), two scientific articles using comparative international studies (Batory and Cartwright 2011; Dąbrowski 2014), and three meta-evaluations at the European level (Polverari and Michie 2009; Spatial Foresight 2015; Sweco and Nordregio 2016).

Table 1 summarizes the aforementioned evaluations of the partnership principle carried out. The table shows that individual evaluations of the partnership in EU cohesion policy cover various objectives according to the above typology. Over time, growing experience has emerged on how many objectives the evaluations serve.

Based on a critical analysis, these evaluations were assessed according to which of the seven evaluation objectives they cover. From the comparison, it is evident that accountability and legitimacy are the fundamental objectives of all evaluations. The evaluators simply compared the planned and required processes and results with the actual ones, through interviews, surveys, and desk research, including investigating datasets. This evaluation objective was present in all studied cases, while the more demanding objectives like ownership and empowerment appeared only in five cases, and simultaneously only in two of them. In the cases of participatory evaluation approaches (evaluation objectives ownership and empowerment), evaluations were done, at least partially, by interested participants or staff of the program.

Table 1. Objectives of realized evaluations of the partnership principle.

	Accountability and Legitimacy	Improving Quality and Performance	Improving Planning	Capacity Building	Learning	Ownership among Participants	Empowerment
Tima Liberec et al. (2008)	✓						
Navreme Boheme (2008)	✓	✓		✓	✓		
IREAS centrum et al. (2011)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Allen et al. (2017)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Sweco and Nordregio (2016)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Allen et al. (2017)	✓						
Khan et al. (2018)	✓						
Spatial Foresight (2015)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Batory and Cartwright (2011)	✓						✓
Dąbrowski (2014)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Polverari and Michie (2009)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Own elaboration based on Batterbury (2006).

The comparison of the studies shows that in the same period, but in various programs, the partnership was evaluated differently. See, for example, a Czech evaluation done by Tima Liberec et al. (2008), an evaluation primarily focused on describing how partnerships were formed, and thus whether the partnerships are legitimate. The evaluation was predominantly of a qualitative (descriptive) nature, without evaluating quantitative data.

On the contrary, during the same period in the Czech Republic, Navreme Boheme (2008) pursued several evaluation objectives. In addition to assessing the fulfillment and identification of the benefits of international partnerships, the aim of the evaluation was, among other things, to identify the added value of the Community

Initiative Program EQUAL to existing instruments and policies in the labor market, identify and examine appropriate practices in implementing to create expert capacities or to enable the use of acquired knowledge in the following programming period. At the same time, at the international level in a meta-evaluation, Polverari and Michie (2009) applied the whole scale of evaluation objectives to the evaluation of partnership. However, in the case of ownership, empowerment, and building capacities, the evaluation touched these evaluation objectives only partially.

The studies of Polverari and Michie (2009), Allen et al. (2017), Sweco and Nordregio (2016), Spatial Foresight (2015) and Dąbrowski (2014) belong to the most complex studies in the sample. These evaluations also touched on the topics of the legislative and institutional framework for fulfilling the partnership principle. These evaluations study the legal framework, institutional settings (both by desk research), and behavior of partners (observations, interviews, surveys, and desk research again). The evaluation studies conclude that partnership helps the feasibility and benefits of projects, better meeting the needs of target groups. Moreover, they found out that partnership helps to build the capacity of beneficiaries and partners, increasing the effectiveness of financed projects based on partnership.

A comparison of the evaluations shows that evaluators' experience with evaluating partnerships develops over time. It also relates to the experience of partners with the implementation of the partnership. Thus, they can provide more relevant information on partnership implementation. For example, Allen et al. (2017) compared the experience with the partnership of both the public sector and the civil society organizations between two programming periods. The authors conclude that both sides of the partnership learned how to collaborate and develop a functioning partnership, even with some prevailing obstacles. The knowledge of previous evaluations also provides evaluators and the partners with some experience on which they can build their capacities.

4. General Evaluation Criteria—How to Evaluate Partnership?

Evaluators do their evaluations in a complex environment. Not only factors influencing partnership, but also factors supporting or obstructing evaluations play a role. It concerns factors like for whom, when, with what resources do the evaluators conduct their task, and in what political processes, and politics (King and Alkin 2018). Although it might seem that evaluation would be an easy task when there is a set of monitoring indicators for the SDGs in place, the actual situation is different. It relates especially to the case of SDG17.

Generally, evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impacts are applied. Their relationship to socio-economic needs, programs and policies can be seen on Figure 1.

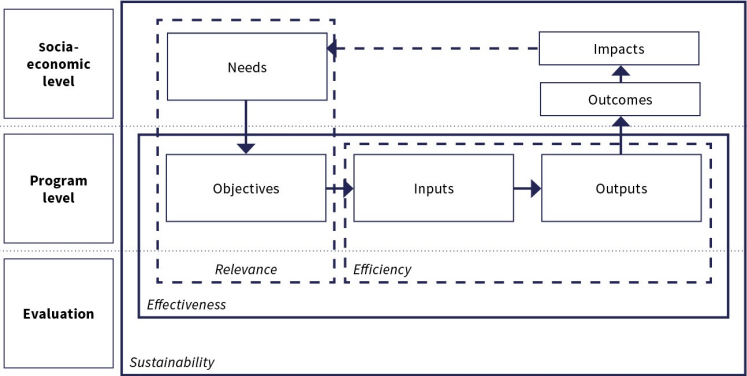


Figure 1. Evaluation criteria in relation to socio-economic needs and programs. Based on European Commission (2004, p. 7) and Potluka (2010, p. 91).

From the point of view of the evaluation of relevance, it is possible to use the definition criteria of the optimal partnership according to the previous studies (Gazley 2010; Milio 2014; Potluka and Liddle 2014), as mentioned above. By evaluating the application of these criteria, evaluators can also conduct a scale of relevance of policies and programs achieved, according to the relationships between social needs and objectives of policies and programs. Not all of the criteria have the same weight for the relevance of the final scope of the policies. Criteria related to shared objectives (1) in the above-mentioned list); mutual benefits of cooperation (2); acceptance of the format of cooperation between the partners (4); the necessity of each of the partners (5) and the contribution of the partners to what would not otherwise be achieved (6) are particularly important for evaluating relevance. Less important criteria include a long-term relationship between the partners (3), especially in situations where long-term relationships are still being formed, and the unanimity of decisions (7). Unanimous decision-making needs a long-term culture with high social capital, and in many countries, this requires a long process for which there is not enough time. Therefore, taking into account local habits, the criteria 3 and 7 can be used with a lower weight than the others.

The evaluation of effectiveness focuses on whether the planned objectives have been achieved. In the case of SDG17, it might seem that monitoring indicators can

be used, but fulfilling the indicators is not an objective in itself for SDGs, but a means. The long-term goal of SDG17 is to increase the capacity of target groups through partnerships, especially in countries in need of assistance. The evaluation of effectiveness clearly shows how important the relevance of goals and their link to social needs is (achieving poorly defined goals will not help). An evaluation of effectiveness can be conducted based on SMART criteria known from management theories. If the objectives were not achieved (or achieved too easily), they must be checked according to their (i) specificity (whether they are simple, sensible, and significant); (ii) measurability (whether they are meaningful and motivating enough); (iii) achievability (whether the objectives were agreed by stakeholders and whether they are attainable); (iv) relevancy (reasonability, whether they are realistic and covered by resources, and results-based; evaluation of relevance is part of this task); and (v) time-bound.

The evaluation of efficiency works with what is invested in the program or policy as inputs and what outputs were achieved by these inputs. It is like the efficiency of a combustion engine, where a ratio of useful work done to the heat provided is defined as efficiency. In the case of this evaluation criterion, it is appropriate to do more tests, so that the evaluators have comparisons between different ways of fulfilling the partnership. For example, it can be done by comparisons of different methods of communication and negotiation between partners, or different ways of implementing policies and programs (like grant-making or direct investment in development assistance).

When evaluating impacts, the evaluators apply experimental and quasi-experimental methods. Such a type of evaluation is demanding on pre-intervention and post-intervention data (Khandker et al. 2010). Thus, they must be planned already when designing the evaluated policy, or depend on secondary data available independently on the evaluated policy or programs. For example, Potluka and Fanta (2020) used the propensity score matching method to assess the impacts of various composition of partnerships on how attractive rural communities are for migrants.

On the one hand, the planned impacts are evaluated as the situation when the social problem, or need, is solved. In addition, unintended effects, both positive and negative, may also appear during implementation. For the positive ones, no one usually mentions their benefits, but the negative ones are not desirable. In such cases, impact evaluation can help redefine the actual needs and, consequently, the objectives of policies and programs.

Sustainability belongs among the most important evaluation criteria. If the implemented program or policy is not sustainable, it will only lead to the problem appearing again and again, or solutions will raise other problems that will require further efforts. When evaluating sustainability, usually three criteria are assessed (European Commission 2004, p. 49): (i) self-sufficiency in financing to avoid persistent funding requirements. This type of sustainability can be also evaluated against the target groups' willingness to pay, where the private sector knows better what the actual needs are than pure public sector projects (including those implemented with the nonprofit organizations); (ii) systemic sustainability (sometimes referred to as political sustainability), which assesses whether changes in the system and policy system will not lead to the closure of activities, (iii) environmental sustainability, which assesses whether the implemented program and policies do not burden the environment, (iv) appropriate technology to sustain the outputs also technically, and (v) capacity to manage the outcomes.

The question on how to evaluate partnership relates to the evaluation objectives applied. The chapter does not go much into details on evaluation methods explicitly. We assume that evaluators apply a standard set of evaluation methods and techniques on how to collect data and how to analyze them. The methods applied strongly depend on the type of evaluation and data availability. Such a description would be applicable elsewhere when discussing evaluations. From this perspective, evaluation criteria specific for evaluations of partnership are crucial. Interviews of all kinds, focus groups, phone and internet-based surveys, as well as secondary data analysis belong to them. We expect that the evaluators dispose of them and can apply them appropriately according to the evaluation tasks and evaluation objectives.

A comparison of the evaluations in the above-mentioned studies shows that it is important to evaluate partnerships from all the evaluation objectives, and to apply all evaluation criteria. While this entails a complexity of problems and stakeholders' perspectives, it also allows one to give a complete picture of how the partnership works and what effects it brings. It follows the thoughts of Hodge and Greve (2017) on the economic and political performance of partnership projects. Moreover, the current evaluation effort in partnership aims usually at the procedural aspects of creating partnerships between the public and other stakeholders in the preparation of programs and policies. These evaluations examine and describe the experience from the perspective of the various actors involved.

5. Conclusions

The contribution in this chapter tries to add to the knowledge of why and how to evaluate partnerships in SDG17. By taking examples from EU cohesion policy, we present necessary conditions for a successful implementation of partnership and various objectives for conducting evaluations, together with standard evaluation criteria. Partnership has a great potential to positively contribute to policymaking and policy implementation when it is implemented with respecting all partners and their contribution to a partnership. On the other hand, implementing a partnership requires respect for local and national habits, while a model “one size fits all” does not apply. To the question on why to evaluate a partnership, we conclude that it can maintain partnerships with positive effects and reduce negative impacts.

Concerning the question on how to evaluate partnership under the SDG17 in the future, the quality of the evaluations would benefit from the inclusion of a broader scale of evaluation objectives, including ownership and empowerment, and evaluating them by participatory approaches. Moreover, evaluations could not concentrate only on processes of establishing partnerships, but also on partnerships’ efficiency, effectiveness, impacts, and sustainability. By including these aspects in the future evaluations of the partnership principle, it is possible to improve the quality of the studies, and make a substantial contribution to the implementation of the SDG17.

When evaluating partnerships, evaluators should always verify the fulfillment of the seven defining characteristics of the partnership (common goals, mutual benefits; long-term relationship; acceptance of cooperation; the contribution of each partner; synergistic effects, and joint decision-making). In addition to the common objectives of evaluation, which are mostly focused on evaluation studies (accountability and legitimacy, improvement of quality and performance, better planning and capacity building), the studies also progressed in time, to strengthen the coherence and motivation of individual actors and target groups with interventions, and started evaluating ownership and empowerment.

Changes and achievements cannot be attributed to the partnership without a proper and rigorous evaluation design. If an evaluation is more or less a monitoring exercise, we cannot confirm the positive attribution of partnerships to achieving SDGs. Moreover, from the perspective of evaluations, the monitoring indicators under the SDG17 should be redefined, to better reflect the local cultural differences and partnerships’ practices. Otherwise, SDG17 and partnership remain only a formal issue among SDGs.

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