

Olivia HOUSSAIS

L'ASPECT POLITIQUE DES EVALUATIONS PORTANT SUR LES PROGRAMMES DE LA COOPERATION TERRITORIALE EUROPEENE

Science Po Grenoble

Année 2018-2019

Master Gouvernance européenne

Sous la direction d'Irène LAURENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thanks to the strong growth of the Union budget allocated to the cohesion policy in the past years, the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) occupies a more prominent place in the European scene. Therefore, its objectives and results are regularly questioned. In this context, evaluations of ETC programmes can provide responses. Indeed, mandatory since the 1988 regulation, evaluations are fully integrated into the life cycle of the ETC programmes. An evaluation is considered as an instrument dedicated to the analysis of results achieved by a public policy programme. Furthermore, it allows the elaboration of a judgement on the effectiveness of a given programme in order to improve it. Yet, the evaluation is not a totally neutral instrument: its characteristics make it inherently political.

This dissertation then aims to analyse the evaluations of the ETC programmes for the 2014-2020 period, through the prism of its political dimensions. Starting from this statement, several hypotheses have been formulated.

The first part raises the question about the political role of the evaluation. Indeed, if an evaluation is a political object, it could be reduced to an instrument used for the sole purpose of legitimizing the EU policies. Nevertheless, in analysing the historical integration of the evaluation in the EU regulations; the progressive creation of a European culture of the evaluation; and the several documents that frame the evaluation practice for the ETC programmes; it is possible to realize that, while evaluation can sound like an object of legitimation, it is not its only role. On the contrary, the evaluation of ETC programmes is considered as being a “good practice” whose main objective

remains to improve or at least to guide these same programmes in their implementation and management.

The second part of this dissertation follows the idea according which, if evaluations are primarily political and an object of legitimation for the EU, then what is the real impact of the evaluation of ETC programmes? Indeed, several difficulties linked to the specificity of the ETC programmes can limit the effectiveness of its evaluations and, as a consequence, its direct impacts on the evaluated programmes. This dissertation analyses the complexity and relative obstacles of the ETC programmes, the calendar of the evaluations and the various cultures of evaluation among the Member States, as three factors that can limit the impacts of an evaluation on a given programme. Nevertheless, the case study elaborated on the ex-ante and implementation report evaluations of the Italy-France Marittimo Programme 2014-2020, proves that impacts actually occur, especially in the ex-ante phase. Therefore, the critics often elaborated in the existing literature on this thematic have to be modulated: yes the complexity of the ETC programmes can limit the impacts of an evaluation on a programme; but the scope of these impacts also depends on the way stakeholders apprehend evaluation as an opportunity (that is for the evaluated programme and the evaluator).

Finally, the last part of this dissertation hypothesizes that evaluator lack of independency. It is therefore important to understand his role in the whole evaluation process. In order to understand this fact, this paragraph demonstrates that there is a versatility of the way programmes apprehend the role of evaluators in comparison to the way evaluators identify themselves. Moreover, this part reveals the existence of a conflict of interests since the programme is simultaneously, the client (and therefore the one that pay the evaluator) and the object of the evaluation. Nevertheless, it is not these elements that condition the level of independency of the evaluator. The determinant factor is rather the way the evaluator engages himself in his role and how successful he is in making the programme accepting his evaluation.

In other words, the political aspect is intrinsically linked to the evaluation and its actors. However, it does determine neither their roles, nor their impacts. Indeed, in a context such as the ETC one, the willingness of the actors is the major element to assure the efficiency and usefulness of an instrument such as the evaluation. Moreover, the growing recognition of the evaluation as a good practice and the growing development of the European culture of evaluation are further factors that reinforce the practice of the evaluation per se, especially in the frame of the ETC.