

Evaluation and Society

Policy Document of the DeGEval – Evaluation Society

1. What relevance and function does evaluation have in society?

Evaluation contributes substantially to the assessment of projects, programmes, and organisations. One of evaluation's central fields of application is that of public and state programmes initiated through political legislation. Thus, the assessment of 'public' action is very much at the forefront in evaluation. Beginning with programmes in the education, social and health sector, evaluation's field of application has now grown to encompass all areas of public action. Due to the increasing autonomy and self-monitoring of political subsystems and organisations (e.g. universities) the obligation has grown accordingly to legitimise programmes vis-à-vis political decision makers and the public. It is the task of evaluation in this context to examine the consequences of political and administrative decisions and to provide public and political debates with sound and factual information. In this sense, evaluation takes on an informative dimension providing a decision basis founded in factual knowledge and it serves, moreover, the legitimisation and transparency of processes within organisations. It supports processes of quality assurance and development and should encourage learning process in organisations.

2. How much evaluation does society need?

In comparison to its lengthy history in the USA evaluation in Europe is a relatively new development. However, in today's Europe evaluation proce-

dures are regularly used in various fields of socio-political action. Unfortunately, these procedures often are only in limited accordance with professional standards or are frequently under funded. If, however, evaluations are supposed to provide well-informed consultation for the direction of future policies, it is imperative that they are carried out professionally and are adequately funded. It is of especial importance that the findings of past evaluations are more actively taken into consideration and that the focus of future evaluations is shifted more towards the lasting impact of measures and programmes on society. It is not the quantity of evaluations, but their relevance with regard to and their contribution towards the deepening of insight that are of central importance.

3. Should evaluation take a socio-political position?

Evaluation is not just mere measuring and quantification, but inherently also an assessment. Therefore, evaluations should take diverse and contrary positions into account and make clear the evaluation criteria used. An evaluative practice conceived in this way can enlighten, support, and create trust. Consequently, evaluation does not take a socio-political position itself, but sheds light on diverse positions.

4. How can evaluation findings make their way into societal practice?

Evaluation contributes to making societal processes more transparent and, thus, promotes a fruitful dialogue. The participation of stakeholders in the evaluation process and clarity in the presentation of evaluation findings increase the utility of evaluations. This decidedly does not only apply to positive findings. The 'failure' of a programme is equally as informative and as beneficial to further societal development. To what extent evaluation results actually are taken onboard in political processes depends mostly on the respective client and the political decision makers. It requires that politics and practice are open to learning from evaluation results. At the same time, the public should have a vested interest in demanding evaluation as a tool of political and public accountability.

The DeGEval – *Evaluation Society* has published standards for evaluation, recommendations for clients, and recommendations for education and training in evaluation in order to support and further professional evaluation in relevant fields of application. For further information please visit: <http://www.degeval.de>.