

*Spring Conference 2019 of the Working Group “Methods in Evaluation”
DeGEval – Evaluation Society*

**Causality and Plausibility – Evaluation between
Science and Practice**

Today more than ever, evaluators are faced with the task of meeting the scientific and methodological demands of evaluations. By definition, evaluations have to meet the requirements of scientific excellence and are thus ‘applied science’. The question of adequate method application is thus inherent in evaluations and has therefore been the subject of intense discussions from the outset. A central and recurrent topic was the use of adequate methods for causality analysis, as a result of which various approaches were pointed out: In addition to the supposed gold standard of experimental approaches and quasi-experimental designs, there are now also scientific theoretical alternatives available with theory-based evaluation approaches that are not based on the investigation of a counterfactual.

However, in particular causality analyses in the context of evaluations in practice are sometimes very different from scientific studies: Restrictions in the implementation of recognized methods are often seen as unavoidable with reference to a difference between science and practice and reference is made to ‘plausibility’ or ‘plausibility considerations’. Plausibility is described here as a kind of ‘alternative method’ to the methods and designs used in science or as an acceptable alternative to common scientific quality criteria. By referring to plausibility, the reliability and validity of evaluation results should be preserved. However, plausibility is not defined in more detail and accordingly used differently and depending on the evaluator. Ultimately, it is unclear what is meant by ‘plausibility’. It is also unclear what concrete difference exists between science and (evaluation) practice, which might require plausibility, and to what extent this goes hand in hand with a lower methodological quality of evaluations.

The Spring Conference 2019 of the Working Group on Methods is intended to make a contribution to closing this definition gap. Before the overarching question of whether and how evaluations differ from scientific studies in methodological terms, the concept of plausibility will be examined from different perspectives and discussed as to the extent to which plausibility can correspond to scientific quality and which minimum standards must be met. At the same time, a discussion about potential boundaries between science and evaluation and how to overcome them should be conducted.

The Spring Conference 2019 will be hosted by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and the Department of Development Studies (IE) of the University of Vienna.

Programme

Friday, 21.06.2019

- from 11:00 Registration and small snack
- 12:30 - 13:00 *Welcome & administrative information for the conference*
Prof. Dr. Alexandra Caspari & Dr. Jan Tobias Polak, Working Group on Methods
Welcoming speech by host organisation
Prof. Dr. Antje Daniel & Dr. Cornelia Staritz, Department of Development Studies (IE),
University of Vienna
- Principal topic of the conference**
- 13:00 - 14:00 Kick-off discussion: »*Science and Practice: Views on and requirements of evaluations*«
Fishbowl-discussion with Sophie Zimm & Erwin Künzi, Austrian Development Agency
(ADA), Prof. Dr. Antje Daniel & Alexandra Heis, IE University of Vienna.
Moderation: Karin Küblböck, Austrian Foundation for Development Research (ÖFSE)
- 14:00 - 15:00 »*Causality and plausibility in experimental and quasi-experimental
evaluations/studies*«
Prof. Dr. Conny Wunsch, University of Basel, Switzerland
- 15:00 - 15:15 Questions
- 15:15 - 15:45 Pause, Coffee
- 15:45 - 16:45 »*Plausibility and causal claims in theory-based studies and evaluation*«
Prof. Dr. Derek Beach, University of Aarhus, Denmark
- 16:45 - 17:00 Questions
- 17:00 - 18:15 Working groups
- from 19:00 Dinner: Restaurant Gangl (at one's own expense)

Saturday, 22.06.2019

- 9:00 - 9:15 *Welcome*
- 9:15 - 10:15 »*Evaluation design: a balancing act between feasibility, utility and
scientific rigor*«
Dr. Jos Vaessen, IEG Methods Advisor, World Bank Group
- 10:15 - 10:30 Questions
- 10:30 - 11:00 Pause, Coffee
- 11:00 - 12:00 Panel discussion: »*Causality and Plausibility: Distinguishing factor between evalua-
tions and science?*«
with all speakers and representatives of the working groups
- 12:00 - 12:15 Summary of the conference
- Administration – Meeting of the Working Group on Methods**
- 12:45 - 13:45 Discussion of further activities and preparation of the annual DeGEval-conference in
Dresden
All participants are welcome!
- 13:45 - 14:45 Small snack

Registration Information

Deadline for registration: 11.06.2019

Registration: Electronic registration via: <https://www.conftool.net/ak-methoden-2019/>

Conference fee: The conference fee is **40€** for members of DeGEval and **60€** for non-members (please refer to <http://www.degeval.de/ueber-uns/mitgliedschaft/> for more information on membership).
The conference fee for students is **20€**.

Payment information: To be able to finalise the registration process, the conference fee is to be transferred in advance. Please refer to the registration tool for more information.

Venue: *The conference will take place in the*
campus of the University of Vienna (Altes AKH)
Assembly Hall of the campus, court 1, room 1.11
Spitalgasse 2
1090 Vienna
Tel: +43-1-4277-298 20 (Concierge of the Campus)



Dinner: 21st June 2019 (at one's own expense)

Restaurant Gangl

Alserstraße 4

1090 Vienna

<http://www.gangl.at/>

How to get to the venue:

By public transport from the main railway station::

- Divers possibilities, please refer to the App WienMobil ([Android](#), [iOS](#)) for further information
- Exemplary route: Subway U1 in direction Leopoldau, change at Karlsplatz to the tram 1 or 71, change at Schottentor to tram 43 until Lange Gasse

By public transport from the western railway station:

- Tram 5 in direction Praterstern until Lange Gasse

By public transport from Vienna Airport:

- Train S7, change at Partnerstern to tram 5 in direction Westbahnhof until Lange Gasse
- Bus Vienna Airport Lines 1 to Partnerstern, change into tram 5 in direction Westbahnhof until Lange Gasse
- Train City Airport Train until Wien Mitte/Landstraße, change to subway U4 until Friedensbrücke, change to tram 33 in direction Josefstädter Straße until Lange Gasse

By car:

Parking in the proximity of the campus is restricted by a short-term parking zone. Tickets have to be bought in advance.

Hotels:

The following list of hotels is a non-commercial, selected suggestion of hotels not too far from the venue. The prices stated in this list are based on an internet search and cannot be guaranteed.

Hotel	Approx. Price	Conference	Distance
Hotels ohne Zimmerkontingente			
Hotel Boltzmann	ca. 80 €	http://www.hotelboltzmann.at/	ca. 500m
Pension Residenz	ca. 100 €	https://residenz.com/	ca. 700m
Hotel-Pension Bleckmann -	ca. 90 €	http://www.hotelbleckmann.at/de/	ca. 550m
Hotel Baronesse	ca. 100 €	https://private-hotels.at/hotel-baronesse/	ca. 400m
Hotel Pension Excellence	65-125 €	https://www.pension-excellence.com/	ca. 300m
Hotel Regina	ca. 150 €	https://www.kremslehnerhotels.at/de/hotel-regina-wien/	ca. 600m
Pension Liechtenstein	ca. 43-€	http://www.pensionliechtenstein.at	ca. 900m

The speaker-team *Alexandra Caspari* (Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences) and *Tobias Polak* (German Institute for Development Evaluation) in close collaboration with the *Department of Development Studies* of the University of Vienna and the *Austrian Development Agency*.