

EVALUATION CULTURE AND CAPACITY IN ROMANIAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AT REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

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Abstract

This paper presents a research study conducted in 97 Romanian public institutions at regional and local level. Two dimensions are analysed: evaluation culture and evaluation capacity, the first one being at the core of the second. Based on our own observations and on some other assessments, the existing evaluation capacity cannot be improved without real commitment towards learning from evaluation. Even if a strong evaluation culture and capacity cannot be perceived, Romanian public institutions at regional and local level show specific features in order to be optimistic about a development of a strong evaluation culture in the future.



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Introduction

Program evaluation is connected in Romanian public institutions at regional and local level mainly to the programs and projects financed from pre-accession funds (which have had well-established monitoring and evaluation systems). This led to an initial development of the reporting activities towards monitoring and evaluation. The legal basis for evaluation has been analysed by Local Short Term expert Victor Canghizer¹. The main conclusion of the research has been that by comparison with EU evaluation regulations, Romanian legislation has specific provisions that explicitly require evaluation only for the co-financing budgets for EU and other donor funding and for research programs. As the other types of activities are concerned, requirements to conduct evaluations are either not clear enough or not enforced properly.

Evaluation culture is considered to be “the institutional commitment to learning from evaluation”². In practice, evaluation culture expresses itself through systematically assessing how well programs and projects are working, what changes need to be done in the design and implementation techniques. The evaluation capacity involves, beside a strong evaluation culture, other elements such as: monitoring systems, analytic expertise and good communication networks³. Evaluation culture is sometimes seen as a pre-condition to having a well developed evaluation capacity.

In a recent study, „*Assessment of the Evaluation Culture in Romania*”⁴ Hilary Curley and Eugen Perianu tried to figure out the evaluation culture in Romania, from a different perspective. It is not necessarily seen as a key element in the constitution of evaluation capacity at country level.

To analyze the culture of evaluation and the capacity of evaluation on Romanian public institutions at regional and local level, we implemented a research.

Research objectives

The purpose of the research is to find out whether we can talk about a capacity of evaluation and about a culture of evaluation at a regional and local level.

Research methodology

The research was preceded by a pilot study. The research method was the sociological survey and the research instrument was the questionnaire. During the pilot study the questionnaire was applied to five public institutions, and during the research the sample was made of 97 public institutions from the whole country, most of them being town halls, prefectures and district councils. The sampling and applying the

¹ Victor Canghizer (2006)- *Report on the existing legal framework for evaluation*

² United States General Accounting Office, Report to Congressional Committees, *Program Evaluation- An Evaluation Culture and Collaborative Partnerships Help Building Agency Capacity*, 2003, p.3

³ ibidem

⁴ Hilary Curley, Eugen Perianu (2006)-*Assessment of the Evaluation Culture in Romania*

questionnaire was made in cooperation with The Ministry of Administrative Reform and Internal Affairs. The selected sample was an exhaustive one, the questionnaire had been sent to all town halls from the country. Beside this, the questionnaire was applied to other smaller town halls as well, considered significant from the perspective of the inhabitants number.

The institutions investigated in the pilot study are: The Prefect's Office Cluj, Satu Mare Town Hall, Babes-Bolyai University and the Teritorial Inspectorate of Labour from Cluj.

The institution's managers were asked to select the most adequate employee of the institution that can provide or collect needed information. Later, the designated person collects information and fills the questionnaire on behalf of the institution.

The pilot study was realized on March 3rd-March 6th, 2007 and the research was on April-May 2007. After the pilot study we decided that the research should focus on town halls, prefectures and district councils following to make another research with different instruments for decentralized and deconcentrated institutions because of their specificities. The questionnaires were sent electronically and the answer rate was 85% (97 answers from 117 questioned institutions – thanks to The Ministry of Administrative Reform and Internal Affairs support represented by the State Secretary, Professor Liviu Radu).

Results

Asked if there is a person or a department responsible for program design and implementation, institutions' officials give conclusive answers. 63.9% of the respondents declare that in their institution there is a person responsible with project design and implementation, while 73.2% declare that there is a department responsible for project design and implementation. This nearly 10 percent difference shows confusion regarding the dissemination of responsibility in project design and implementation. 10% declare they have such a department, but not a person responsible with project and program implementing.

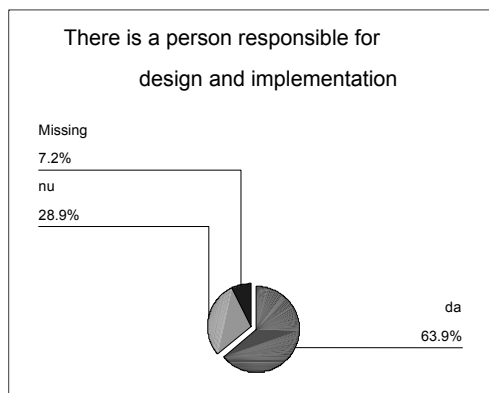


Fig. 1. The existence of a person responsible for design and implementation

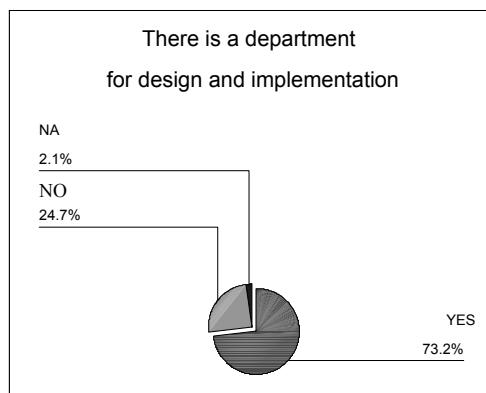


Fig. 2. The existence of a department responsible for design and implementation

10% means a quite big proportion of public institutions that are not yet obviously oriented to a program budgeting system, even if efforts are made for more than 10 years⁵. However, from the received answers to this question, we can tell that 90% of investigated institutions have this tendency and that represents a begin for developing a solid capacity of evaluation and an equally evaluation culture.

Evaluation culture was operationalized by 12 variables:

- 1) the existence, at institutional level of detailed plans for interventions implementation
- 2) the measure in which the institution tries to find the best ways to perform program implementations
- 3) the measure in which the objectives of their actions and interventions are concrete and measurable
- 4) the measure in which for every intervention they systematically collect data
- 5) the measure in which the information they collect is perceived to help them to figure out how things work
- 6) the measure in which the information is accessible for all those interested in
- 7) the measure in which the degree of accomplishment of the objectives is known all across the intervention
- 8) activities specific to an intervention are permanently monitored
- 9) the measure in which the expenses of an intervention are known every moment of the intervention
- 10) the measure in which at institutional level there are solid preoccupations to see the way things work
- 11) the measure in which performance analysis are systematically accomplished
- 12) the measure in which the results of the assessments are subject of the debates

Each of these variables were measured from 1 to 4 (1 means “at a low level” and 4 means “at a high level”). After that we created a new variable by adding scores from the previous 12 variables. The maximum score is 48 points, meaning that the respondent selected the maximum score at all 12 characteristics. Later, we realised a scale on which we can represent exactly the level of culture evaluation in regional and local romanian administrative institutions. In this way, between 0 and 10 points it’s situated the culture “zero stage”; in that case the respondent gets the minimum score for each of the 12 characteristics and he is indecised regarding some variables. “*Zero stage*” culture suppose not only the absence of specific elements of an evaluation culture, but also the absence of some elements that prefigure or prepare the evaluation culture. Between 11 and 20 points we can talk about a *pre-culture of evaluation*; in that case we can not talk about an evaluation culture, but some characteristics are present or slightly developed, and that announces a possibility of developing a culture like that in the future. A *weak culture* supposes scores between 21 and 30 points. We can identify here specific elements of culture evaluation, but not

⁵ Law 189/1998 regarding the local public finances

enough consolidated. We will meet fragmented monitorizations of activities and even incipient forms, predominantly formal of evaluation. *The developed culture* (between 31 and 40 points) distinguishes in program budgeting system oriented institutions in which there are monitoring activity systems, evaluation costs can be identified, there are evaluators and trained personnel in the research methodology specific to social sciences. *The expert culture* (between 41 and 48 points) is characteristic to institutions that not only works on program budgeting system and have well organized informational management systems, but the results of evaluation are used to improve future activities and are shown as examples of training for others.

As far as evaluation culture is concerned, we registered 85 valid answers from 97 investigated institutions.

Table 1. Evaluation culture. Central tendency

		Evaluation culture (absolut scores)	Evaluation culture (grouped values)
N	Valid	85	85
	Missing	12	12
Mean		22.33	2.65
Median		22.00	3.00
Mode		26	3
Sum		1898	225

From these institutions, many of them present a weak evaluation culture. 46 institutions accumulated between 21 and 30 points at the multi-criterial analysis that have been realised. It means that Romania's public administration passed the pre-culture stage of evaluation and it already registered some progress in developing an evaluation culture.

Table 2. Evaluation culture. Distribution of frequencies

Evaluation Culture					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2 pre culture (11p-20p)	35	36.1	41.2	41.2
	3 weak culture (21p-30p)	46	47.4	54.1	95.3
	4 developed culture (31p-40p)	3	3.1	3.5	98.8
	5 very developed culture (41p-48p)	1	1.0	1.2	100.0
	Total	85	87.6	100.0	
Missing	System	12	12.4		
Total		97	100.0		

However, as it results from the table, it exists a quite big proportion (41.2%) from investigated institutions that are situated on the pre-culture zone of evaluation. These still have to make progresses on data management systems, using previous

experiences in improving general activities and even in organising their activities based on programs.

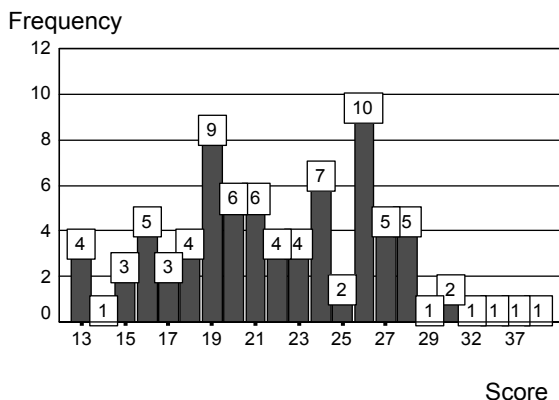


Fig. 3. Evaluation culture

The figure represents the repartition of investigated public institutions on the scale used to measure evaluation culture. We notice that modal value is score 26 (10 cases), but very near situates the score 19 (9 cases), that means rather a pre-culture tendency than a developed culture tendency.

The evaluation capacity involves, beside evaluation culture specific characteristics, 6 more variables:

- 1) the existence of at least an employee trained in evaluation
- 2) the existence of a person/a department responsible for strategies, policies, programs and projects design and implementation
- 3) the degree of difficulty to collect information from other institutions
- 4) the measure in which there are constant preoccupations to improve assessment capacity

At his turn, the evaluation capacity can be appreciated on a scale from 1 to 4, based on scores obtained at all 16 characteristics. At 1st level situates “zero stage” capacity (0-15 points). Institutions included in this category don’t have evaluation capacity, do not organize their labour based on program budgeting principles, do not have data management systems, monitorizing and evaluation systems, do not have specialists trained in socio-human sciences methods and technics, neither evaluation specialised staff, they can not identify costs supposed by an evaluation, benefits resulted after monitorising and evaluating programs and they never took part in evaluating activities. *Very low capacity* of evaluation suppose the presence of the 16 characteristics in a very small measure: 16 to 30 points. *Low capacity* is recorded by scores between 31 and 45 points. Between 46 and 55 points we have a *high capacity* of evaluation and between 56 and 64 points we identify the *expert capacity*.

Table 3. Evaluation capacity. Central tendency

		Evaluation capacity absolute values)	Evaluation capacity (grouped absolute values)
N	Valid	82	82
	Missing	15	15
Mean		31.88	2.57
Median		31.00	3.00
Mode		26	3
Suma		2614	211

We can observe that regarding the capacity of evaluation, there are 82 valid answers and the mean of the absolute values is about 31 points (31.88), which represents the middle part of the scale, but with a slow tendency to the lower part of the scale (closer to 0 p than to 64p).

The following table of results shows that 45.1% of the respondents, which are public institutions, have a very low capacity of evaluation, while 52.4% have a low capacity. We have to remark that they are not any cases in which the capacity is at the 0 level.

Although, we can meet high capacity values in two cases.

Table 4. The capacity of evaluation. Frequencies' distribution.

capacity of evaluation_grouped values (alt_4.7 + con_4.13 + ext_4.14 + cap_4.15 + cultev)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2 very low capacity (16p-30p)	37	38.1	45.1	45.1
	3 low capacity (31p-45p)	43	44.3	52.4	97.6
	4 high capacity (46p-55p)	2	2.1	2.4	100.0
	Total	82	84.5	100.0	
Missing	System	15	15.5		
Total		97	100.0		

By watching the graphics of the absolute values which are not grouped together, we can clearly see that the mode value is 26 (Table 3), which is similar to the mode value discovered at the culture of evaluation. Still, we can observe that the capacity of evaluation mode value is located more left, under the median, while the mode value of the culture of evaluation is situated above the median. This is a positive aspect, because the culture is an basic ingredient of the capacity of evaluation.

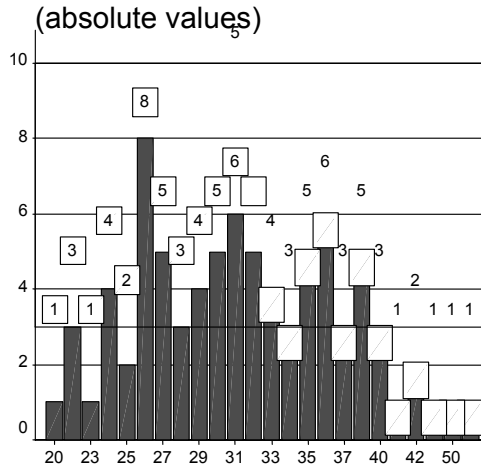


Fig. 4. The capacity of evaluation

For having a complete image of the capacity of evaluation in regional and local administration in Romania, we included in the questionnaire some questions regarding their expertise in evaluation, but also regarding the human resources who received training in this domain, or have practical experience in programs' evaluation.

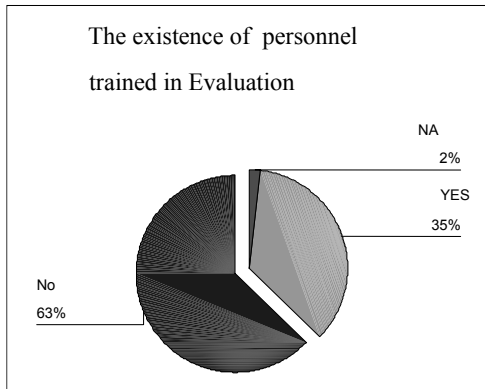


Fig. 5. The existence of personnel trained in Evaluation

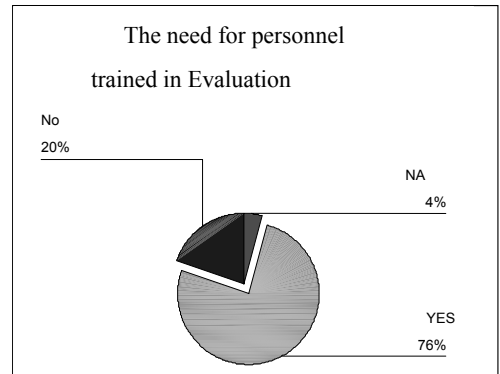


Fig. 6. The need for personnel trained in Evaluation

The fact that 63% of the public institutions which were questioned don't have in their structures specialized personnel in evaluation field and 76% are aware of the existence of this need, indicates that 13%, even if they have specialists in evaluation, are conscious of the fact that the need for evaluation specialized personnel is even bigger. This fact shows the tendency to development of the capacity of evaluation and the unquestionable existence of the evaluation culture in Romanian public institutions.

The capacity of evaluation doesn't require only human resources specialized in valuation, but also personnel which is specialized in social sciences' research methods and techniques and in statistics. Starting from this premise, we included in the questionnaire some items with reference at the existence of specialists in these fields in the Romanian public institutions.

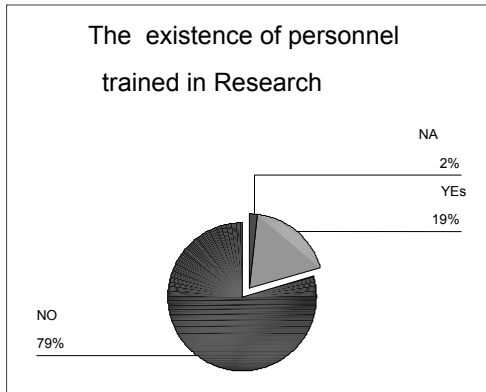


Fig. 7. The existence in the institutions of the personnel trained in Research

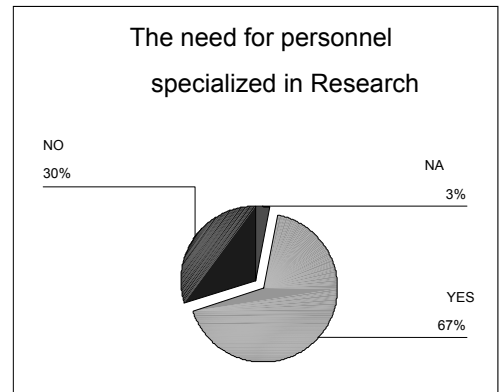


Fig. 8. The need for personnel trained in Research

Regarding Research 79% declared that they don't have employees trained in Research Methodology, but only 67% are aware of the need for this type of personnel, fact which reveal that the programs' evaluation domain is not known in his essence and here from it comes the need for programs which have the role to inform the institutions that there is no way to make evaluation unless the personnel knows very well the research methods, this aspect being even more important in the public sector where the social impact must be considered a reference point.

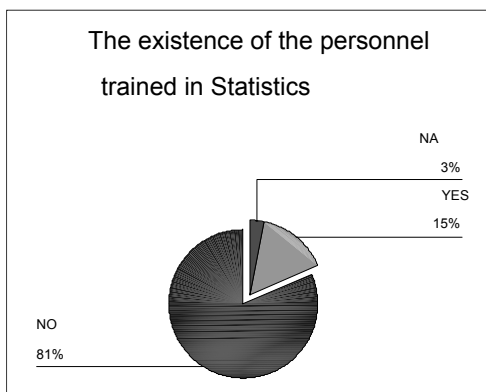


Fig. 9. The existence of the personnel trained in Statistics

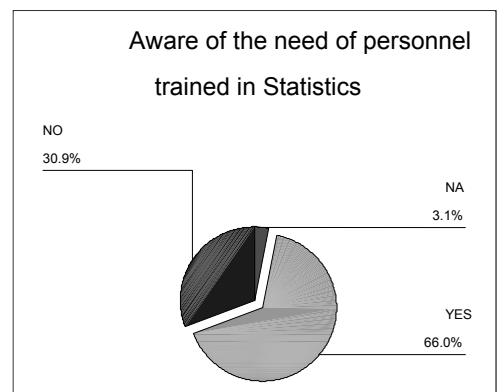


Fig. 10. Aware of the need for personnel trained in Statistics

This situation is even more visible in statistics case. 81% of the institutions realize the lack of trained personnel, but only 66% are aware of the real need for this type of personnel. Or it is known that evaluation of programs cannot be done without statistics, especially when we talk about complex programs.

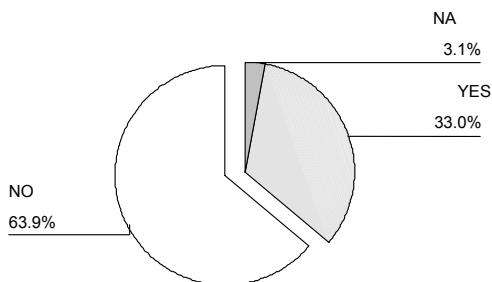


Fig. 11. The capacity to estimate the resources

The evaluation capacity is also given by the capacity to estimate of the necessary resources, which, as the present study indicates, is very low, only one third of the respondents being able to estimate the costs of an evaluation.

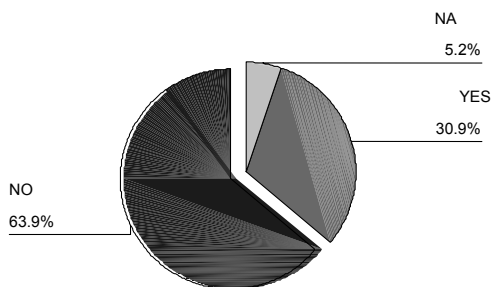


Fig. 12. The involvement in the programs/projects valuation

The study's results also reveal that the institutions' involvement in valuations of projects and programs is extremely low (only 30.9%), even though the most of the respondents have participated in such evaluations and have evaluated themselves when it came to projects which required European financing.

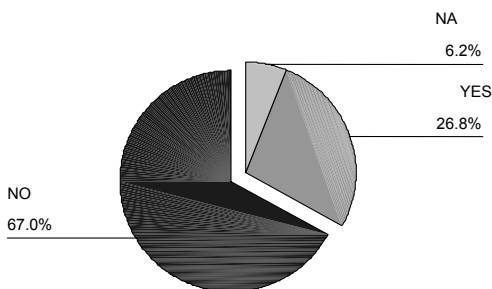


Fig. 13. The expertise gained through training/practical activities

If we choose to talk about the expertise gained through training and/or practical activities, the situation is even more dramatic. Here from it comes the need for training in evaluation and research methods fields, and the emphatic need for research projects which aim at projects and programs evaluation with the implications of the public sector employers.

The existence of some periodic analyses of the performances is dependent on the existence of concrete and measurably objectives, on collecting regularly data for each intervention and on finding the proper utility of this data for discovering how the things are in the institution. This assumption was confirmed. These variables can be integrated in a regression model.

Table 5. The regression model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.531 ^a	.282	.257	.60

a. Predictors: (Constant), UTIL_4.5 the collected data is Used for finding out how the things are
 OB_4.3 the objectives are very concrete and measurably
 INFO_4.4 for each individual intervention there is a regularly data update

This regression model is significant from a statistical point of view (model significance is: 0.000), but it has not a very important explanatory role (R-square is 0.282). Only 28,2% from the dependent variable's variation, *the existence of some periodic analyses of the performances*, is explained by the variation of the independent variables *the existence of concrete and measurable objectives, collecting data regularly for each intervention and finding the proper utility of this data for discovering how the things are in the institution*.

Table 6. Anova

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.519	3	4.173	11.495	.000 ^a
	Residual	31.948	88	.363		
	Total	44.467	91			

a. Predictors: (Constant), UTIL_4.5 the collected information is used
 In order to realize how things are, OB_4.3 the objectives of the interventions are very concrete and measurable, INFO_4.4 for each intervention there are information collected regularly

b. Dependent Variable: AN_4.12 there are systematic analysis of the registered performances

The independent variable with the strongest explicative power is *utilizarea informatiilor colectate pentru a vedea cum stau lucrurile* (using collected information to realize how things are) (with standardized beta coefficient of 0.414), and the variable with the weakest explicative power is *colectarea informatiilor in mod regulat pentru fiecare interventie efectuată* (systematically collected information for each intervention) (with standardized beta coefficient of -0.013)

Table 7. Coefficients

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.788	.219		3.601	.001
	OB_4.3 the objectives of the intervention are very concrete and measurable	.210	.114	.198	1.846	.068
	INFO_4.4 for each intervention we have information collected systematically	-1.185E-02	.117	-.013	-.102	.919
	UTIL_4.5 collected information is used to realize how things are	.442	.132	.414	3.352	.001

a. Dependent Variable: AN_4.12 there are systematic analysis of the registered performances

So, in order to develop a strong evaluation capacity, we need a system for collecting information, and once collected this information must be used in a constructive way.

Conclusions

The results, after analyzing the evaluation capacity shows that the hypothesis confirms. The public institutions from Romania don't beneficiate yet of a developed evaluation capacity, but there certainly exists a promise about this matter.

After the analysis of the evaluation culture in Romanian public institutions at regional and local level it becomes obvious that the measurement and assessment of projects results and impact is something new. The poor expertise in program evaluation in Romania is a cause of a limited understanding of the benefits of the evaluation among public clerks. Those who manage and supervise the implementation of the programs are the first individuals that need to learn about the need of evaluation and about the facts that the benefits of an evaluation should always outweigh the costs.

The Ministry of Public Administration Reform and Interior consulted the Finance Ministry and it has appreciated the opportunities that structural funds give for developing a strong evaluation culture, as a final step in the process of implementing projects and programs.

The interest in evaluation, as an academic research, is growing and it distinguishes itself as an academic discipline on different levels. The language that is currently used to describe evaluation is confusing, which leads to perception of the evaluation as being different depending on different decision levels. Some of those problems are caused by the interchangeability of terms like "măsurare", ("assessment"), "audit" ("audit") and "evaluare" ("evaluation"), from Romanian language. Also there's

insufficient literature to define the dimensions of evaluation: a control instrument or a management instrument, internal vs. external, different types of evaluation. Evaluation is still seen as a control instrument used to supervise, and detect the errors from a system.

Getting used with the meanings of evaluation and monitoring is continuously developing in Public Administration, especially when it comes about projects management or public politics. There is nothing much to tell about evaluation in other Public Administration sectors.

At the half of the year 2005, the Management Authority⁶ of Public Finance Ministry, began developing a national evaluation strategy based on a technical assistance contract financed by PHARE 2003. The National Evaluation Strategy is an important instrument that could gather evaluation's tendency of development in Romania. It also represents an opportunity of developing evaluation culture which will efficiently sustain the government of the state. As a final purpose, the National Strategy of evaluation tries to be a "national functional evaluation system, where the parts of the system help each other, includes public and private sector and also civil society; to participate in public intervention management and responsibility of politics and public managers". This Evaluation Strategy was designed in November 2006 and it tries to guide on a single way the standards of evaluation that are used in Romania today. The strategy was build as a stage of building and developing an evaluation culture in Romania. In order to implement the strategy an improve the evaluation capacity of public administration in Romania (politics and decision elements), of potential representatives in evaluation, supervisors and local potential evaluation companies, academic environment and participating organizations. Considering the importance of evaluation capacity, in public administration, the activities were concentrated on the structures that manage the EU funds.

The interest for evaluation is growing but the precise request for evaluation is just at the beginning. There aren't any examples presenting evaluation (ex-ante, interim or ex-post) as being built in lack of a list of programs financed by European funds. The evaluation request depends on the existence of a legislation which provides a controlled evaluation and general acknowledged necessities and utility of implementation politics, strategic management and defined budget course.

Nowadays, the problem is that the lack of law blocks the development of evaluation system. Evaluation was used for the first time to European funds or other programs financed by other countries. Today understanding evaluation is situated at a lower level compared with public national interventions. So there is no evaluation institution in public administration except the structures that manage EU funds.

It seems to be a malfunction between supervision and evaluation functions. Those who define the monitoring systems should be trained in evaluation because managing information means building the next evaluation.

⁶ Which coordinates the evaluation and monitoring of PHARE and the Operational Programs funded from EU structural instruments

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